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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 14 January 2025**

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 14 January 2025*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Climate Change: UK Leadership

1. **Steve Witherden** (Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to demonstrate UK leadership on climate change. [902138]

**The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds):** The Foreign Secretary made clear at his Kew lecture that the climate must be at the heart of all that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office does. When we have that focus on climate adaptation and mitigation, we see economic growth globally and in our country.

**Steve Witherden:** The rising death tolls from the wildfires in Los Angeles and the damage to our communities recently caused by Storms Bert and Darragh serve as clear reminders of escalating weather extremes and the urgent need to tackle the climate emergency. Will the Minister explain how the Government are actively driving efforts to cut emissions and champion clean energy, both in the UK and across the globe?

**Anneliese Dodds:** Our thoughts are with all those hit by the dreadful crises that my hon. Friend mentions. At COP29, the UK showed leadership in setting an ambitious nationally determined contribution to cut emissions by 81% by 2035. We are championing clean energy at home and abroad, including through the launch of GB Energy and the global clean power alliance.

**Bradley Thomas** (Bromsgrove) (Con): Former MI6 chief Sir Richard Dearlove has warned against the risks of relying on China for Britain's energy infrastructure. What assessment has the Minister made of the involvement of Chinese supply chains in the Government's solar plans?

**Anneliese Dodds:** This Government are determined to have a consistent and clear-eyed approach to China and to avoid the oscillation that we saw under previous Governments; as a result, we are conducting a China audit that will look thoroughly at all our relationships with China. We will compete where we must, challenge where we need to and co-operate where that is necessary.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): The Government signed up to a \$300 billion climate finance package at COP29, with the amount increasing by \$50 billion to get a deal. Since then, Ministers have not been able to give details of what our share will be, how much British taxpayers will fund, and what will come from official development assistance and what from private enterprise and investment. Can the Minister provide any of those details, and, if not, will she commit to a timetable for disclosure of that information?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her question, but she will surely understand that the COP agreement was about the global goal. The precise share for individual countries is worked out through the normal processes. It was her Government—a Conservative Government—who committed to the £11.6 billion climate finance goal. Unlike the previous Government, however, we are determined to fit that within our responsibilities and deliver on it for the sake of our climate and our economy.

#### Strengthening NATO

2. **Richard Foord** (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): What discussions he has had with NATO allies on strengthening that alliance. [902139]

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty):** NATO is the cornerstone of UK and Euro-Atlantic security. Indeed, the first act of this Government was to publicly state our commitment to a “NATO first” defence policy. We regularly discuss NATO with our allies; NATO Foreign and Defence Ministers meet three times a year, with the most recent Foreign Ministers' meeting having been in December, which the Foreign Secretary and I both attended.

**Richard Foord:** For 75 years, NATO has stood as a bulwark against territorial acquisition, and NATO is stronger when all its members stand against that. What discussions does the Foreign Secretary plan to have with the President-elect of the United States about the status of Denmark, Greenland and Canada? Will the Foreign Secretary remind President-elect Trump that when he pronounces on how he would like to expand the United States' sphere of influence, NATO's adversaries are also watching?

**Stephen Doughty:** As the Foreign Secretary made clear last week, Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and the future of its constitutional arrangements is a matter for the people and Government of Greenland and, indeed, the Kingdom of Denmark. It would be wrong to speculate on any policy decisions that the incoming Administration of President-elect Trump may make. I delivered those messages during a meeting with the Greenlandic Foreign Minister yesterday. There are, rightly, important concerns about security in the Arctic, which is why I was proud to be one of the first British Ministers in 10 years to attend the Arctic Circle Assembly and meet partners to discuss these issues just a few months ago.

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

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): May I congratulate the Foreign Office on the inspired appointment of our new ambassador in Washington DC? Not many candidates would be able to fill the shoes of Dame Karen Pierce, who has represented UK interests so exceptionally in both New York and Washington; she is an inspirational leader and a skilled diplomat.

Lord Mandelson's appointment is unusual, however. It is not often that circumstances demand that the UK appoint someone who is not a career diplomat to be our ambassador to such a key NATO ally. To silence critics and to show respect to Parliament and its Committees, will the Foreign Office agree that we should return to the policy of the previous Labour Government, and allow Lord Mandelson the time to come before my Committee before he leaves for the United States? That will allow my colleagues to hear directly why the Prime Minister has appointed him, and to learn what his priorities are in this crucial diplomatic role.

**Stephen Doughty:** We are absolutely convinced that Lord Mandelson will do an excellent job as our representative in Washington, and it was a pleasure to meet him last week and discuss his plans as he prepares to take up his post. Obviously we have one ambassador at a time, but I am sure that we will consider any request that my right hon. Friend makes in due course in the normal way in which we consider requests from her Committee.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): The NATO alliance stands at the cornerstone of our defence and has been essential to the security of the free world. Given the importance of the Indo-Pacific security alliance, strengthening co-operation and dialogue with key allies in the region has been paramount, and our military base on Diego Garcia is a vital British-American strategic asset. However, Ministers have failed to give answers to questions about its future, or about the costs involved in the proposed treaty with Mauritius. Will the Minister give one straight answer? Will he make a commitment to the House to wait until President Trump is in office and has had time to discuss this deal with the new Administration before finalising any agreement with Mauritius—yes or no?

**Stephen Doughty:** The shadow Minister is right about the importance of security in the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, when we see North Korean troops fighting in Russia and Ukraine, when we see Iranian missiles being used and when we see military companies elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific region supplying Russia, it is crucial that we see global security as one. As you know, Mr Speaker, I have answered many questions about the matter to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. Our deal secures the future security of the base on Diego Garcia, and it has support across the US Administration and across the United States national security apparatus. We will come forward with details in due course.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Calum Miller** (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): As my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) pointed out, President-elect Trump has threatened to use force to seize the Panama canal and Greenland, and he has promised tariffs of 25% on Canada and Mexico. Whatever else we can predict about the presidency that begins next Monday, we know that it will be unpredictable. May I therefore ask the Minister what steps his Government has taken to Trump-proof UK foreign policy so that we cannot be held hostage in the security, economic or climate realm by a President who puts short-term deals ahead of long-term relationships, and what specific steps the Government have taken to accelerate an improvement in the UK's relationship with European partners since 5 November?

**Stephen Doughty:** On the hon. Gentleman's last point, he knows very well the commitments that we have made to European security through NATO—and, indeed, through our reset of relations not only with the European Union but across Europe—and the leadership that we have shown in, for example, tackling the Russian shadow fleet by working with partners across Europe, a process that we began at the European Political Community summit. The special relationship endures—it has endured, and it will continue to endure—and we look forward to working with President-elect Trump and his team on a range of issues. I have already given an answer in relation to Greenland; in relation to Panama, we respect the Torrijos–Carter treaties and recognise the important role that Panama plays in world trade.

#### **Sudan: Humanitarian Situation**

4. **Sarah Green** (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): What steps his Department is taking to support the victims of the humanitarian crisis in Sudan. [902141]

14. **Chris Ward** (Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Sudan. [902152]

**The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds):** The UK will continue to use all diplomatic avenues to press the warring parties in Sudan into a permanent ceasefire, to enable unrestricted humanitarian access and to protect civilians.

**Sarah Green:** The Liberal Democrats welcome the humanitarian support that the Government are giving to Sudan. We also recognise that greater protections are needed for women, children and ethnic minority groups. In the light of the failure of the United Nations to back safe areas, what is the UK doing to create safe zones for schools and hospitals in Sudan?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful for the hon. Lady's support for the measures the UK Government have been taking. Clearly, there are dreadful problems when it comes to civilian protection in Sudan. The UK put forward a resolution to the Security Council, with Sierra Leone, focused on the protection of civilians. It was appalling that Russia vetoed that resolution. We will continue to use every avenue available to us to promote their safety.

**Chris Ward:** I thank the Minister for her reply and for the focus she has given this important issue. The suffering, famine and displacement in Sudan are only intensifying, so will she outline the practical steps the Government are taking to protect human rights, promote peace and bring an end to this appalling conflict?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning the extreme need to act on what is the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The UK has doubled its aid to Sudan. We have sought to use the UN Security Council, as I mentioned. We ensured through the Foreign Secretary that there was a Sudan session with G7 and Arab Quint Foreign Ministers, and the UK special representative to Sudan has visited Sudan; that occurred in December for the first time since the conflict.

**David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): I welcome what the right hon. Lady said yesterday, but the delivery of aid is clearly being used as a weapon in this conflict. What steps are being taken to ensure that the aid gets through to the people most in need on the ground in Sudan?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that. I know he shares our deep concern about the impact of restrictions on aid, which we have particularly seen feeding through into the famine assessment from the IPC—integrated food security phase classification—that came out at the end of last year. There must be, above all, a permanent opening of crossings. We were, of course, pleased to see the Adre crossing open for three months, but it must be opened permanently. We also need to see cross-line availability of aid. We need to have the warring parties focused on humanitarian need, not on pursuing a war that they both appear to think they can win but as a result of which civilians are suffering appallingly.

**Frank McNally** (Coatbridge and Bellshill) (Lab): Following on from the question from the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell), I welcome the Government's ongoing support for the humanitarian effort in Sudan and the wider region, but does the Minister share my concern that aid risks not reaching those who need it most? Will she continue to put pressure on Sudan for the Adre crossing to be kept open permanently, so that vital aid can get to those who need it most? Could she update the House on what steps she is taking in that area?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for being so clear about the challenges around aid coming into Sudan and then being delivered to those who so desperately need it. We will keep pushing on the need for the Adre crossing to remain open. We will also keep pushing on the need for aid workers to be protected within Sudan and for UN staff to be able to access Sudan. Of course, we will work with those on the ground, particularly the emergency response rooms, which are delivering essential mutual aid.

### UK Economic Growth

5. **Dr Jeevun Sandher** (Loughborough) (Lab): What steps he is taking with international partners to help increase UK economic growth. [902142]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy):** The UK and India's Prime Ministers have committed to an ambitious refresh of the comprehensive strategic partnership. They announced that the UK-India trade talks will relaunch, which will deliver our joint ambition to take the UK-India relationship to even greater heights, and India is one of a handful of countries that will determine whether we meet the global warming limit of 1.5° C.

**Dr Sandher:** This is indeed an exciting year to help improve our economic growth and our trading relationship with India. We are two nations with an intertwined history and common democratic ideals, and we face the risks of a dangerous world and a warming planet. I co-chair the India all-party parliamentary group, and one of my priorities is to strengthen our economic and strategic relationship. Can the Secretary of State outline what he will do to help get a good UK-India trade deal over the line, including the exchange of green technologies to help prevent and reduce the warming of our planet?

**Mr Lammy:** It was important to get to India just a few weeks into office. I might pray in aid my great-grandmother on my mother's side, who was from Calcutta. I look forward to inviting Foreign Minister Jaishankar to Britain later in the spring. It is important that we have a strategic partnership going forward. We have relaunched the free trade agreement—we have said that it is a floor, not a ceiling on our ambition—and it was important that a delegation of Indian businessmen met the Chancellor of the Exchequer, me and the Prime Minister just a few weeks before Christmas.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): Among our greatest UK exports are our culture and our creative industries, so I am keen to hear what conversations the Foreign Secretary has had with international counterparts—not only to improve the opportunity for British artists to tour, particularly post Brexit, but to take advantage of the appetite for bilateral cultural agreements, which has been articulated by a number of our overseas counterparts.

**Mr Lammy:** The hon. Lady will be pleased that we will very shortly launch our new soft power council, specifically to look in detail at this issue. I was pleased to secure further funding for the BBC World Service in the spending review, which was very important. As we move forward with our reset, we continue to discuss, particularly with European allies, what more we can do for touring artists.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): This weekend, we had the indignity of seeing the Chancellor of the Exchequer fleeing the financial mess that she has left at home in the United Kingdom while embracing the Chinese Communist party—Labour's friends—and the Chinese Government in a desperate attempt to secure money from them. Can the Foreign Secretary explain how this new love-in with one of the biggest threats to our national security and freedom helps our national interests? What message does that send to Jimmy Lai, Hong Kong BNOs facing threats in our country, and others living in fear of

China? Is this Government's reset with China the cause of the delay in implementing the foreign influence registration scheme?

**Mr Lammy:** The right hon. Lady comes to the Dispatch Box with chutzpah and a brass neck after a period in which we had about seven different China policies from the last Government, who left a huge £22 billion black hole in the economy. I might remind her that President Trump has invited the Chinese President to his inauguration, and that trade between the US and China has grown. We can also protect our national security, just as the United States has done. That is why we will compete with China where we need to and challenge it where we must, but we must co-operate in important areas of trade, because we want to see growth in our economy. We are absolutely minded to move forward with that.

### Emily Damari

6. **Jake Richards** (Rother Valley) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to help secure the release of Emily Damari. [902143]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy):** Ensuring the safe release of all hostages, including British national Emily Damari and three others with strong UK links, is a top priority for this Government. We have continually supported hostage talks, and support the efforts of the American, Egyptian and Qatari negotiators. We are exercising every diplomatic lever to secure the hostages' immediate and unconditional release, and call on all parties to show flexibility at the negotiation table.

**Jake Richards:** I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for his answer. Last month I had the privilege of meeting Mandy, Emily's mother, to discuss her family's plight and their campaign and efforts to secure Emily's release. I know that the Foreign Secretary met Mandy yesterday in Israel; I spoke to her afterwards, and she was very grateful for that meeting. What steps are the Government taking to secure humanitarian access to the hostages before release, which Hamas are disgracefully avoiding, and what pressures are being put on Qatar and Egypt in that regard?

**Mr Lammy:** It was important to be with Mandy Damari in Israel yesterday and to speak to the Israelis, and to be in Saudi Arabia just before that, particularly to speak to my Egyptian counterpart and to press these issues. As Joe Biden has said, we may well be on the brink of a deal, and I know that the whole House will want to see that deal emerge in the coming days and to see Emily come home. My hon. Friend can be assured that humanitarian access, for which we have continued to press for the people of Gaza, is hugely important, and it is as important for the hostages. It will take some time for them to come out, and they need that humanitarian access.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): At Easter last year I had the opportunity to meet Amanda Damari in Israel and to speak to some of the families of the hostages who were kidnapped by Hamas on that terrible and unfortunately memorable day, 7 October. The families have had a yo-yo of emotions: will the hostages be freed, or will they not be freed? Now, all of a sudden,

there is a possibility. After the rollercoaster of emotion that the families have been on over the last year and a half, how can we ensure that they get the direct help that they need from our Government?

**Mr Lammy:** The hon. Gentleman is right. We want to see Emily Damari free, and all the hostages, particularly the UK-linked hostages. We know from our contact with their families—I am thinking about the moving event that we had in No. 10 on 30 September—that there will be deep psychological scars, and we must commit to doing all we can through our ongoing humanitarian effort to support those hostages in their process of recovery.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): All Members of the House will praise the courage and resilience of the hostage families and have the hostages in their thoughts right now, particularly Emily's mother Mandy and Emily herself. Reports of the progress being made on the hostage negotiations are truly welcome, including the Foreign Secretary's discussions during and after his visit to Israel. Can he give an update on what information he has received about the proof of life of those hostages? Importantly, what resources will our Government be providing to support the hostages through the release process over the period of time speculated, and to bring about a sustainable end to this awful conflict?

**Mr Lammy:** First, we do all we can to establish proof of life. The right hon. Lady will understand that this situation is fast moving, and even post any deal it can take some degree of time before the hostages come out. I would therefore not want to be pushed on that issue at the Dispatch Box, but I want to assure her that we are doing all we can to continue to make that necessary assessment. As I say, we are—I hope—on the brink of a deal. It will be the first phase of a deal that will probably last six weeks, and that is important to bear in mind. All of us in this House hope to get to a ceasefire and the necessary rebuilding of Gaza, with Israel safe and secure—that will be very important—so that the middle east can move forward in an atmosphere of peace.

### Iran

7. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of Iran's attacks on Israel on regional stability. [902144]

16. **Peter Fortune** (Bromley and Biggin Hill) (Con): What diplomatic steps he is taking to help counter potential threats to global stability by Iran. [902154]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr Hamish Falconer):** We unequivocally condemn Iran's attacks on Israel in April and October 2024. These attacks, and Iran's ongoing support for its proxies and partners, have destabilised the region and fuelled escalation. Alongside our allies and partners, we will continue to hold Iran to account for this behaviour, including through sanctions, addressing Iranian weapons proliferation, and maintaining our permanent defence presence in the region.

**Bob Blackman:** I thank the Minister for that answer. Clearly, we all hope that there will be a deal to release the hostages held illegally in Gaza. Given that Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis, the proxies of Iran, are on the brink of defeat, the risk to the region now is that Iran takes direct action. As we want to see the end of the despotic regime that brutalises the people of Iran, now is the time for sanctions and the proscription of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps once and for all. Will the Minister take the necessary action to bring that regime to its knees, so that democracy can be restored to Iran?

**Mr Falconer:** I recognise that the hon. Member has asked questions about proscribing the IRGC a number of times in this Chamber, and I can assure him that we are working urgently on measures to take the necessary action to deter the Iranian state from posing a threat to this country and the region. We will continue to update the House in due course.

**Peter Fortune:** With the re-election of President Trump in the US, we are likely to see a return to his policy of maximum pressure to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. What is the Secretary of State's view on that approach? Will the Government support our allies in the United States of America?

**Mr Falconer:** We continue to work closely with the American Administration, and we look forward to doing so with the new Administration. It is regrettably true that Iran's nuclear programme has never been more advanced, and it threatens international peace and security. We remain determined that Iran must never develop a nuclear weapon, and we remain committed to a diplomatic solution to achieve that.

### Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

8. **Danny Beales** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. [902145]

12. **Anna Dixon** (Shipley) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. [902150]

22. **Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. [902161]

**The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds):** The scale of humanitarian suffering in Gaza is catastrophic and unacceptable. The UK condemns Israel's restrictions on aid in the strongest terms. This is a man-made crisis, and Israel must act immediately to address it.

**Danny Beales:** The aid agencies I have spoken to are particularly concerned about access to medical facilities and critical shortages of medical supplies in Gaza, particularly northern Gaza. In the light of that, what steps are the Government taking to get additional medical supplies to Gaza for both Palestinians and Israeli hostages in desperate humanitarian situations?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this incredibly important issue. In December, I saw for myself in Jordan how medical aid had been blocked from entering Gaza. As I have said before, the

position that the UK Government have articulated at every possible juncture is that restrictions on lifesaving aid must end. The UK continues to provide core healthcare relief items, and has provided 76,000 wound care kits, 1.3 million items of medicine, and critical funding for UK-Med to run its field hospitals in Gaza.

**Anna Dixon:** I thank the Minister for her response, and I welcome the Foreign Secretary's efforts to secure a sustainable ceasefire and the release of hostages.

Many of my constituents have expressed concern about the recent raid of Kamal Adwan hospital, which was one of the last healthcare facilities still operating in Gaza. The hospital's director, Dr Safiya, was detained along with several of his staff during that raid. International law prohibits the detention of medical staff in conflict zones. What is the Minister doing to secure the release of these medical staff so that Gaza's civilians can continue to access essential medical care?

**Anneliese Dodds:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this critically important issue. We have raised the protection of healthcare facilities and the detention of healthcare workers directly with the Israeli Government. The Minister for the middle east, my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr Falconer), has specifically raised the detention of Dr Hussam Abu Safiya with both Israel's deputy Foreign Minister and its ambassador to the UK.

**Andy McDonald:** The ceasefire that is apparently being progressed is seemingly the same as the one drafted in May, which was deliberately frustrated by members of the Israeli Government. Sadly, since that time, hostages and those falsely imprisoned have remained captive and so many lives have been lost. No doubt the Minister can assure the public that, should the ceasefire be confirmed, every effort will be made to get aid and supplies to the Palestinians, particularly those in northern Gaza. Does she agree that this means that neither Israeli military activity nor Israeli legislation preventing the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency can be accepted?

**Anneliese Dodds:** There absolutely must be a surge of aid into Gaza; that will be critical after a ceasefire. However, impediments to aid that remain must also be removed.

The issue of UNRWA has been previously discussed in the House. The UK Government's position is that UNRWA must be able to continue to operate. It is the only organisation with the scale and depth necessary to get that lifesaving aid to people who need it.

**Iqbal Mohamed** (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): UAV Engines Ltd, based in Staffordshire, manufactures the engines powering the Hermes 450 drone, which is manufactured by Elbit Systems in the UK and used by the Israeli military in the Gaza strip. Israel regards the Hermes 450 as a critical asset, providing strike capabilities. Will the Minister confirm whether those drones, engines or any other parts for the Hermes 450 drone are still being supplied to Israel from the UK?

**Anneliese Dodds:** The UK has the most robust arms control regime in any global comparison. This Government were determined to ensure that we fulfilled our legal

responsibilities and that we assessed, fully and legally, arms exportation licences. I can confirm to the House that since 2 September there have been no extant UK export licences for items to Israel that we assess are for use in military operations in Gaza.

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Last week, Hamas fired rockets at the Erez crossing, demonstrating once again the terror group's intention to disrupt aid delivery and prolong the suffering of Gazans, as well as Israelis. What assistance have the UK Government offered to support repairing that crossing and support Israel as it gets much-needed aid into Gaza?

**Anneliese Dodds**: We remain directly in contact with Israel, with UN agencies and with other partners in the region. That is obviously at ministerial level and also with our special representative for humanitarian issues in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The issues of crossings and their openness and safety have been raised repeatedly by the special representative and by members of this Government. That also covers attacks by the terrorists Hamas on those crossings.

**Shockat Adam** (Leicester South) (Ind): While Gaza stands on the verge of absolute annihilation, the Israeli ambassador to the UK has repeatedly expressed opposition to a two-state solution, emphasising that that is not a feasible solution. Given that the UK has consistently expressed support for a two-state solution but does not yet recognise one of the states, will the Minister clarify any discussions she has had with the Israeli ambassador?

**Mr Speaker**: Order. This question is about humanitarian aid, but I am sure the Minister will be able to answer.

**Anneliese Dodds**: The UK Government's position is, indeed, that there must be a two-state solution. The new Government have been determined to do all we can towards that end. That will include advocating for that solution at every juncture, including with embassies and, as would be expected, with the Israeli embassy.

### UK Support for Israel

9. **Neil Duncan-Jordan** (Poole) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of the war in Gaza on UK support for Israel. [902147]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy)**: The UK remains committed to supporting Israel's security and wider regional stability in the face of threats from malign actors such as Iran. We are clear that Israel must act in accordance with international humanitarian law and do more to protect civilians, hospitals and those who are in desperate need of their services.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan**: Notwithstanding the hope that we all have of a ceasefire, atrocities continue to take place daily in Gaza, with the killing of children, the bombing of hospitals and the threat of banning aid at the end of the month. Will the Secretary of State explain exactly what the Israeli Government have to do to persuade the UK Government to impose sanctions, ban all arms sales and recognise the state of Palestine?

**Mr Lammy**: Since coming into office we have taken significant action: calling, of course, for a ceasefire—we have been calling for a ceasefire since December 2023; suspending relevant arms sales, as has been set out by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Development; and increasing the amount of aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We are also in steadfast support of UNRWA.

Israel remains an important ally. We have an important trading relationship, worth £6.1 billion last year and involving 38,000 British jobs. I am sorry; any discussion of sanctions is just not correct.

**Mr James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): I invite the Foreign Secretary to welcome the appointment of Nawaf Salam and to comment on its implications for our relationship with Lebanon and Israel and for Iran's influence in the region. What does he intend to do to ensure that that positive step improves our relationship with Israel, Lebanon and the countries in the eastern Mediterranean?

**Mr Lammy**: I am very grateful for this opportunity to speak about Lebanon. The developments in Lebanon over the past few days could transform the region. The appointment of a new President and a new Prime Minister could provide Lebanon with the opportunity to see Hezbollah's capability diminished, which the whole international community should grab hold of. As the right hon. Member knows from his time in office, the UK contribution to the Lebanese armed forces is important and one that the Lebanese treasure. We intend to continue with that and to go further over the coming months, which I know he will welcome.

### British Council

10. **Monica Harding** (Esher and Walton) (LD): What assessment he has made of the British Council's financial sustainability. [902148]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr Hamish Falconer)**: May I pay tribute to the hon. Member for her overseas work as the British Council's former director of communications? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I understand that she was posted in London, Paris, Tokyo and Shanghai. I am jealous, as my assignments in my overseas postings were rather different.

The British Council's board of trustees is responsible for the organisation's financial sustainability. As an FCDO arm's length body, the British Council received £162.5 million of grant in aid funding in 2024-25. My noble Friend, Baroness Chapman, oversees this as the Minister responsible. This contribution supports the British Council's role as a soft power asset, promoting UK arts and culture, education, and the English language.

**Monica Harding**: Mr Speaker, may I declare another interest as the officer of the British Council all-party parliamentary group?

The British Council delivers more than £1 billion-worth of global impact for the UK every year. During the pandemic, it was forced to close 18 country operations, none of which has since reopened. The then Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab gave it an emergency loan, but set it out on commercial terms. The interest on this loan



is costing the British Council £14 million a year. Will the Minister help the British Council keep delivering on the Government's growth, security and soft power objectives and consider reviewing the terms of the council's loan, extending the date for beginning repayments, reducing the commercial rate of interest, or redesignating the loan—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Nobody else will be able to get in. I call the Minister.

**Mr Falconer:** Ministers are aware of the issues in relation to the £200 million. As the hon. Member said, the loan was made on commercial terms in order to be compliant with the UK subsidy control regime. On 6 January, my ministerial colleagues the Foreign Secretary and Baroness Chapman met the chief executive officer of the British Council to discuss these issues.

**Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): As we have already heard, the British Council is vital to the UK's soft power across the world. At such an important time for the promotion of our values of democracy, freedom and human rights, reports that the British Council may have to close 30 to 40 operations is deeply worrying. What steps is the Minister taking to secure the future of the British Council's existing programmes?

**Mr Falconer:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his long-held commitment on these issues. Soft power is an issue of the most vital importance, particularly in this contested world. I am very pleased to confirm, as the Foreign Secretary already has, that we are establishing a soft power council in the coming days. That is an important initiative and the British Council will be an important part of that work. In relation to country offices, the British Council retains a significant physical presence in more than 100 countries, which is welcome, and has a growing presence online, which is to be encouraged.

### Syria: Religious Minorities

11. **David Smith** (North Northumberland) (Lab): What diplomatic steps his Department is taking to support the rights of religious minorities in Syria. [902149]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr Hamish Falconer):** I welcome the appointment of my hon. Friend as the new UK special envoy for freedom of religion or belief.

As part of our intensive diplomatic engagement with international partners, and indeed with the interim Syrian authorities, we have consistently advocated for an inclusive political transition and underlined the importance of protecting the rights of religious and ethnic minorities.

**David Smith:** I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming me and for his commitment and that of the Department to work with the nascent Syrian Government as they seek to protect and respect religious minorities. However, I am sure that he is aware that over Christmas there were attacks by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham fighters on the Christian-majority town of Maaloula, and some reports of attacks on Alawite communities. What more can he and his Department do to work with the Syrian

Government as they seek to build a society in which all religious communities can take part without fear of religious persecution?

**Mr Falconer:** As the House would expect, we follow reports of such incidents in Syria very closely. I was discussing some of those incidents with members of Syrian civil society just last night, and the Foreign Secretary has raised those questions directly with the interim Foreign Minister of the Syrian authorities. We will continue to call for all parties in Syria, in this moment of transition, to do the utmost to respect the rights of all religious minorities across the country.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Minorities can be protected only if there is stable and representative government in Syria. This morning I met some members of the Syrian Democratic Council who are concerned that the call for dialogue is not inclusive and that minorities are not being protected. What steps can the Government take to ensure that that does not happen and that there is inclusive dialogue? Will the Government, for example, link the lifting of sanctions against Syria to the actions to protect minorities and to the inclusion of the Syrian Democratic Council in future constitutional arrangements?

**Mr Falconer:** It is vital that the new Syria includes representation of all its people and that all Syrians can see themselves represented in the Government that will follow. We are supporting an inclusive political process that must respect the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, and we will continue in our efforts.

### Illegal Migration: Diplomatic Steps

13. **Peter Swallow** (Bracknell) (Lab): What diplomatic steps he is taking with international partners to help tackle illegal migration to the UK. [902151]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy):** As I made clear in my Locarno speech on 9 January, tackling irregular migration is an FCDO priority. We regularly engage with counterparts in priority countries to strengthen collaboration on tackling organised crime and to secure migrant returns.

**Peter Swallow:** The proposed sanctions on people smugglers are a world first, designed to deter and disrupt those vile criminals and the supply chain that enables them. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is an important step in smashing the gangs?

**Mr Lammy:** The sanctions are the first of their kind, and we hope that other allies will follow us in going after the enablers of the gangs and with the ability to issue travel bans, freeze assets and do all we can to disrupt this illegal trade. But I emphasise that alongside the sanctions are the new joint unit in the Department; the huge amount of work we have done on returns, which are important and which are up by 23% across the country; and the work we do upstream with the official development assistance funding of £84 million announced as we came into government back in July.

### US Declaration of Independence: 250th Anniversary

15. **Robin Swann** (South Antrim) (UUP): Whether he plans to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the US Declaration of Independence. [902153]

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty)**: I first would like to offer my deep condolences to all those affected by the dreadful wildfires we have seen in California and, indeed, in relation to the terror attacks we saw in Las Vegas and New Orleans, where tragically we also lost a British national. I know the thoughts of the whole House are with the United States at this difficult time.

The 250th anniversary of US independence will be a significant moment to recognise the work of generations of Americans and Britons over a quarter of a millennium to build the special relationship. We have come a long way since 1776, and I am excited by the ambitious US plans to mark the occasion, and I look forward to celebrating our partnership and our special relationship in 2026.

**Robin Swann**: I join the Minister in his opening comments. The 250th anniversary of the declaration of independence presents a unique opportunity to promote cultural and historical links between Northern Ireland and the United States, because at least five signatories of the declaration have direct Ulster links. The declaration itself was printed by an Ulster Scot—John Dunlap from Strabane. The great seal of the United States was designed by Charles Thomson from Upperlands, and 17 of the US Presidents can claim Ulster Scots roots. However, the Government's introduction of an electronic travel authorisation scheme will have a devastating impact on tourism—

**Mr Speaker**: Order. The anniversary will have passed if we don't get to the end—come on.

**Stephen Doughty**: We learn new things every day. I am delighted to hear about the heritage of the hon. Gentleman's part of the world in relation to the United States. My own family dates back to the late 1700s in Pennsylvania—we are not sure which side they fought on. Later, my grandfather came over during the second world war to fight alongside us against Nazi tyranny in Europe. Those special relationships are part of all our communities and families, and we absolutely want to celebrate them across all our countries.

### Topical Questions

T1. [902163] **Alex Baker** (Aldershot) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy)**: We are strengthening our work abroad on the priorities of the British people to deliver the Government's plan for change. We are the first country in the world to develop a sanctions regime specifically targeting illegal migration. Our reforms will strengthen the Foreign Office role in attracting investment and securing new business deals. Our tough diplomacy will keep up support for Ukraine and bring stability to the middle east.

**Alex Baker**: I welcome the progress made by COP29 in Baku, and the Government's leadership on climate change. Nepal is at the sharp end of dealing with climate change—late last year, there were 200 deaths from floods in Kathmandu. What are the Government doing to support that nation, which has been a partner and a friend to the UK over many years?

**Mr Lammy**: My hon. Friend will be pleased that we announced a £38.5 million resilience, adaptation and inclusion programme so that Nepal could deal with disaster risk. That follows £58.5 million for climate-smart development over an eight-year programme. Our relationship with Nepal, particularly on the climate issue, is essential and very important.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): Can the Foreign Secretary explain why he is surrendering the Chagos Islands and front-loading payments to the Government of Mauritius to lease back a base at Diego Garcia at a cost of £9 billion to UK taxpayers? If that is such a good deal, why is he so secretive about it?

**Mr Lammy**: I know that the shadow Foreign Secretary is new to the job, but I remind her that her Government did 10 rounds of negotiations on this issue and we picked it up, and that the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon believe that it is a good deal, as do the Indian Government.

**Priti Patel**: Following the Foreign Secretary's meetings in Saudi Arabia and with the new Foreign Minister of Syria over the weekend, what conditions did he stipulate for the removal of sanctions in Syria, and in what kind of timeframe?

**Mr Lammy**: The right hon. Lady raises an important issue. We will judge the new Syrian Government by their actions, not their words. We are, alongside allies, reviewing sanctions at the moment. I will not comment in detail on that, but we are clear that we want to see an inclusive Government who prosper. We have been pleased with what we have seen so far, but as has already been mentioned, some of what we have seen on the ground has not been good. We will judge them by their actions, not their words, and we will not go faster than she would expect us to.

T4. [902166] **David Taylor** (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): To follow up on the previous question, I am grateful to the Minister for coming to the event that I hosted for the Syrian diaspora yesterday. He will know that they are very keen to support their homeland to rebuild. Will Ministers look at ways to change the sanctions to ensure that ordinary citizens can send back remittances to help rebuild crumbling public services?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr Hamish Falconer)**: I thank my hon. Friend for the question and for his long-standing work on Syria issues. I was very glad to join him and so many inspiring members of Syrian civil society who are keen to make a contribution. We will do what we can to enable the new Syria to be a success and to enable Syrian civil society here and across the world to play their full role in that.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Calum Miller** (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): There is strong evidence that Russia has sought to influence the outcome of elections in Georgia, Moldova and Romania, and it may now be doing so in Germany. Is the Foreign Secretary confident that the current measures to track Russian money and misinformation in the UK is sufficient to protect the UK from similar interference, and does he think that the role of Russian money in funding UK political parties should be investigated to ensure that our elections remain free and fair?

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty):** The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the important work of the defending democracy taskforce, which works across Government here in the United Kingdom. We closely monitor developments in other countries; we have stood alongside our European partners, including Moldova specifically, in response to these efforts at interference; and of course, we recently appointed Margaret Hodge as our illicit finance and kleptocracy champion, to tackle many of the issues the hon. Gentleman has raised in relation to money.

T7. [902169] **Chris Ward** (Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven) (Lab): It is now over a year since Imran Khan was imprisoned in Pakistan. Since then, there have been reports of widespread intimidation and human rights abuses. Can the Minister set out what steps the UK Government are taking to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Pakistan?

**Mr Falconer:** The UK Government consistently urge Pakistani authorities to act in line with their international obligations and respect fundamental freedoms and human rights. I raised these issues during my visit to Pakistan in November and in my statement to the House on 28 November. We issued a further statement on 23 December about the role of military courts. We have made it clear that the UK supports individuals' rights to freedom of assembly and expression, and we will continue to do so.

T2. [902164] **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Why are the Government acting with such dispatch to secure the agreement with Mauritius? What is the rush?

**Stephen Doughty:** As I have said in the House on many occasions, there is no rush. [*Interruption.*] No, it is a fact that negotiations on this issue were going on for two years under the previous Government, with 10 rounds of failed negotiations. We have secured a deal that is in all of our interests and, crucially, secures our base and our national security interests and those of our allies on Diego Garcia.

T9. [902171] **Kate Osamor** (Edmonton and Winchmore Hill) (Lab/Co-op): Violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is escalating, with both the March 23 group and Government forces claiming recent advances. The toll on civilians is devastating, with rising deaths, displacement, rape and gender-based violence. Can the Minister outline how the Government are supporting the Angolan-led Luanda process towards a ceasefire?

**The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds):** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the deeply concerning ongoing conflict in eastern DRC and its devastating consequences. Our humanitarian programme, which amounts to £114 million, is delivering lifesaving emergency assistance, and I can reassure her that Lord Collins has met with the leaders of DRC and Rwanda to urge them to engage in good faith in the Luanda process, to bring an end to the horrific fighting.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Father of the House.

T3. [902165] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Leaving aside whether it is wise to spend £9 billion on giving away what is already yours, given that the Trump Administration is now less than a week away, would it not be wise to wait another week, pause these negotiations, have a quiet word with the incoming American Secretary of State, and then work out what is in our interests and those of our closest ally?

**Stephen Doughty:** I simply refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answers we have given previously on this issue. There is strong support from across the US national security apparatus—from the State Department, from the White House and from the Pentagon. We are convinced that this is a deal that has protections in it to protect our national security and that of our allies, most importantly the United States.

T10. [902172] **Mr Paul Foster** (South Ribble) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests regarding my recent trip to Kosovo. While I was in Kosovo, I met the President and the Prime Minister, who were seriously concerned about incursions across their northern border, where Kosovo Force troops are based between Kosovo and Serbia. Can Ministers please provide a progress update as to the bilateral security agreement between Kosovo and the United Kingdom? That peace was hard-won and must be retained.

**Stephen Doughty:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right about our historical role and responsibilities in relation to Kosovo. KFOR makes a vital contribution to maintaining a safe and secure environment in Kosovo, and of course UK troops play a key part in that. We engage very closely with our partners in Kosovo and across the region, and continue to urge Serbia and Kosovo to engage constructively in the EU-facilitated dialogue. In recent months, I have spoken to both Prime Minister Kurti and Foreign Minister Đurić of Serbia.

T5. [902167] **Mr Paul Kohler** (Wimbledon) (LD): Wimbledon has one of the largest Korean populations in the UK, and there is widespread concern in the community about the ongoing situation in South Korea. Can the Foreign Secretary tell the House what communications, if any, the Government have had with acting President Choi or suspended President Yoon concerning the current situation?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Catherine West):** The UK Government have been in touch with the South Koreans, our great friends, and we continue to support the arrangements there, any democratic moves towards stability and the ongoing relationship with the UK.

**Mary Glendon** (Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend) (Lab): The Israeli Government have stated that Israel's presence in the Golan heights buffer zone is defensive, limited and temporary. Given that the Israeli Cabinet has recently approved a financial package to increase the number of illegal settlements in the Golan heights, what assessment has the Secretary of State made of the veracity of Israel's statement?

**Mr Lammy:** My hon. Friend will be pleased that I raised this issue directly with the Israeli Foreign Minister yesterday. He wanted to emphasise that this is a temporary measure in Israel's national interests, and I emphasised that the Syrian Foreign Minister had made it clear to me that the Syrians stand by the 1974 commitment and do not want to seek any escalation with their Israeli neighbour.

T8. [902170] **Lincoln Jopp** (Spelthorne) (Con): Tower Hamlets planning officers have rejected China's application to build a super-embassy there, but rather than put this through the appeals process that anyone else would have to go through, the Foreign Secretary has got the Deputy Prime Minister to call in that application. My question to the Foreign Secretary is: why the special treatment? Does he not realise how dodgy it is going to look if she does finally decide for China?

**Mr Lammy:** I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that all due process has been followed in the normal way. This is the same as any planning application, and the implication of what he has just said in relation to the Deputy Prime Minister is quite unsavoury.

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): Will the Foreign Secretary update us on the representations that he and the Prime Minister have made to the President of Egypt to secure the release of Alaa Abd el-Fattah? His mother Laila, who is with us in the Gallery today, has gone beyond 100 days on hunger strike, and we are desperate to secure the release of Alaa.

**Mr Lammy:** I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising this issue. The Prime Minister wrote to President Sisi on 26 December and 8 January. The National Security Adviser, Jonathan Powell, was in Egypt on 2 January, and I met the Egyptian Foreign Minister in Saudi Arabia on Sunday. This remains our No. 1 issue. We have raised it on every single occasion, and we continue to press for clemency, for understanding and for Alaa's release.

**John Cooper** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): The official readout from "Operation kowtow", the Chancellor's mission to Beijing, says that she

"urged China to cease its support for Russia's defence industrial base, which is enabling Russia to maintain its illegal war against Ukraine."

Did the Chancellor elicit any such assurances, and if not, what does it mean for the Foreign Secretary's supposed reset of relations with the people of the Great Hall?

**Mr Lammy:** Can I just remind the hon. Gentleman that it was our last Foreign Secretary who had a pint with President Xi? The Chancellor of the Exchequer, as she is able to outline, was able to raise all the issues—Jimmy

Lai, the security law in Hong Kong, Xinjiang and a whole range of others—but we are only able to do that by engagement.

**Melanie Ward** (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): Friends in Gaza and across the middle east, together with many of us here, are all hoping and praying that a ceasefire will happen this time. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Palestinians of Gaza must be able to move freely to return to their homes, or what is left of them, regardless of whether they are currently in Gaza or have fled elsewhere? In the event of a ceasefire, will the UK convene an international meeting on Gaza's reconstruction?

**Mr Lammy:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for continuing to press these issues. It was very important to be in Israel yesterday to talk about what may come when we get that ceasefire, and about the role that the UK of course wants to play both in ensuring Israel's security and in working with other partners to ensure reconstruction.

**Lisa Smart** (Hazel Grove) (LD): The rights of women in Afghanistan have been under systematic assault since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, and women have been all but entirely excluded from public life. They are barred from attending school and university, and in many areas they cannot leave their homes without a male guardian present. What pressure are the UK Government putting on the Taliban to ensure that women and girls can go back to school?

**Anneliese Dodds:** I agree with the hon. Lady. We are deeply concerned by the appalling erosion of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, and we are seeking to use every avenue to exert pressure. I remind the House that on 9 January I announced that the UK had formally joined the list of countries pledging political support to the initiative to refer Afghanistan to the International Court of Justice for violations of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Will Ministers update the House on the implementation of the advisory opinion from the ICJ on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, particularly in relation to the consequences for the UK and other nation states?

**Mr Falconer:** We continue to consider the advisory opinion of the ICJ carefully. It is a far-reaching opinion that took months in the production, and we hope to be able to report back soon.

**Siân Berry** (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): Following up on the case of Alaa Abd el-Fattah in Egypt, will the Secretary of State say when he expects a substantial response to his engagement with the Egyptian Government? Will he confirm that he will not travel to Egypt unless he is confident that he can return with Alaa?

**Mr Lammy:** Our relationship with Egypt is multifaceted. Today, this House has discussed the hope of a hostage deal, and the hon. Lady will understand the importance that the Egyptians play in that. As I said, I raised this issue on Sunday. I raised it on 20 December. I have pressed for Alaa's release, and we will continue to do all

we can, including the Prime Minister and the National Security Adviser. In the end, this is in the hands of the Egyptians.

**Damien Egan** (Bristol North East) (Lab): Turkey has increasingly been threatening interventions beyond Syria. It has given shelter to Hamas and has announced a new programme to develop long-range weapons. As a fellow NATO ally, how will the Government work with Ankara to secure peace and stability in the middle east?

**Mr Lammy:** I met my opposite number in Saudi Arabia at the weekend to discuss the issues in north-east Syria. He of course raised his long-standing concerns about Kurdish groups in the north-east, and I made it clear, along with many allies, that we do not want to see further escalation in Syria at this time. We continue to be in dialogue with a very close NATO ally.

**Sir Oliver Dowden** (Hertsmere) (Con): The Minister keeps telling the House that negotiations with Mauritius have been going on for two years. Will he explain to the House why he is so reluctant to extend those negotiations by just one week until the Trump Administration take office? They may take a very different view of the negotiations from that of the Biden Administration.

**Stephen Doughty:** I simply refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answers I have given repeatedly. This deal is in the interests of the United Kingdom and in the interests of the United States, and it has been supported by all parts of the United States Administration. There is no rush. There are ongoing discussions, but we are not going to give a running commentary.

**Douglas McAllister** (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): My constituent Jagtar Singh Johal has been in arbitrary detention in India for more than seven years. The Secretary of State and his ministerial team have been extremely generous with their time and assistance to help resolve the situation, but can I seek the Minister's assurance that those efforts are ongoing?

**Catherine West:** Ministers have engaged frankly with counterparts in India on Mr Johal's case, pushing for faster progress towards a resolution, including the call for an investigation into allegations of torture by the authorities.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): The Government are right to continue the all-party approach to the next International Development Association replenishment of the World Bank, which is extremely good value for taxpayer money. Will the Foreign Secretary press the Treasury to match what the former Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt), did in adding £2.5 billion to the 0.5% official development assistance budget, to help defray some of the costs of first-year asylum seekers, which that budget bears? Otherwise, we will be spending more development money in UK postal districts than in Africa.

**Anneliese Dodds:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. He understands deeply that under Conservative Governments, we saw those so-called in-donor refugee costs spiralling out of control. The system was not being brought under any kind of coherent plan by previous Governments. Now there is a

plan, which is being delivered by the Home Secretary. We are determined to ensure that those costs are brought down.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Ind): The Foreign Secretary has rightly imposed widespread sanctions on Russia for its war crimes. Earlier, he responded on the subject of sanctions on Israel by referring to the fact that talk of war crimes is incorrect because of the value of trade and Israel's historic status as an ally. Surely a war crime is a war crime, whoever commits it. All lives are equal and international law is international law. I invite the Foreign Secretary to explain to the House the difference of approach between war crimes committed by Russia and war crimes committed by Israel.

**Mr Lammy:** We are on the brink, we hope, of a ceasefire deal. It was important to be in Israel yesterday, and I remind the hon. Gentleman that this is one of the toughest regions in the world. I remind him of the malign effect of Iran, just next door. Hezbollah have been diminished, but they are still there. Hamas have been diminished, but they are still there. I have to say that it is not right to comment on sanctions and proscription, but we are talking about an ally.

**Stephen Gethins** (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): I welcome the Minister's earlier comment that the future of Greenland is a matter for the people of Greenland, but will he commit in the way that France and Germany have to defending Greenland's territorial integrity against any hostile action?

**Stephen Doughty:** I met the Foreign Minister of Greenland yesterday, which was the second time I have met her in the past four months. We discussed a range of issues, including security in the Arctic, our partnership, our trade partnership and our close engagement on a number of matters, including climate change, science and other areas. Our partnership with Greenland is strong, as is our partnership with Denmark. I refer the hon. Member to the comments I made on Greenland's future, which is a matter for the people of Greenland and the people of the Kingdom of Denmark.

**Brian Leishman** (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): We have millions shoehorned into a confined prison, hundreds of communities destroyed, thousands of people indiscriminately killed and lifesaving humanitarian aid being blocked. Will the Foreign Secretary show consistency, judge Israel on its actions and at last define what Netanyahu's apartheid regime is doing to Palestinians as a genocide?

**Mr Falconer:** We have set out our position on the designation of genocide, so I will not enter into that discussion again, but I will respond to my hon. Friend on the questions of aid access, on which a ministerial colleague has spoken already and on which we have been consistent. We are clear that not enough aid is getting into Gaza, and we have been clear with the Israeli Government on our difference on the conduct of hostilities and of aid access.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Do the Government deny that incoming President Trump is deeply hostile to the proposed Chagos Islands giveaway?

**Stephen Doughty:** The right hon. Gentleman will understand that we have support across the United States Administration, including from the Pentagon, the State Department, the agencies and the White House. We are confident that as the details of the deal are provided in the proper way—one Administration at a

time, as he well knows—the new Administration will recognise that this important deal protects our security and that of the United States, as well as the unimpeded operation of the base on Diego Garcia, which has been our primary objective throughout this process.

## Drones: High-security Prisons

12.44 pm

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con) (*Urgent question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if she will make a statement on the national security risk of drones being used to deliver weapons to high-security prisons.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Sir Nicholas Dakin)**: This is not a new issue. Effective prison security is fundamental to the rehabilitative nature of prisons and ensuring public confidence in the criminal justice system. The availability of illicit items in our jails, including drugs and mobile phones, undermines prison officers' ability to do their jobs. Drone sightings around prisons in England and Wales are a matter of great concern and pose a major threat to prison security.

The Government inherited a prison system in crisis, with violence and drug use on the rise. We are working hard to deter, detect and disrupt the use of drones. It is not possible to talk in detail of the tactics we use to disrupt drones, given the obvious security implications. What I can say is that His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service invests in targeted countermeasures such as improvements to windows, netting and grilles to stop drones from successfully delivering cargo such as drugs and weapons. In January 2024, restricted fly zones were introduced around all closed prisons and young offender institutions, supporting police and prison staff to disrupt illegal drone use.

Ultimately, it is crucial that we tackle demand. Almost half of people entering prisons have a drug problem, so we must get them into the right treatment to tackle the drug misuse that is so often a driver of their reoffending. Contraband supply and the illicit economy drive violence, self-harm and instability, and prevent offenders from engaging in rehabilitative activity. We are working to crack down on the levels of violence and drugs in our prisons.

The illicit economy is unfortunately highly profitable, with prices for drugs and other commodities between 10 and 100 times their street values—an A4 sheet of paper laced with drugs can be worth £1,000—so we must tackle the organised crime gangs behind it. That is why we have invested in a dedicated serious and organised crime unit who will work with law enforcement agencies to disrupt these sophisticated criminal networks. We will continue to take a multifaceted approach to drones and the disruption that they cause to our prison system.

**Robert Jenrick**: Given that this is a question of national security, I find it astonishing that the Lord Chancellor cannot be bothered to turn up to the House today. Yesterday—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker**: Order. We do not need any more of that.

**Robert Jenrick**: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Yesterday, the chief inspector of prisons warned that the police and prisons service have “ceded the airspace” above two high-security prisons to organised crime groups. The result is that organised crime gangs can deliver drugs, phones and weapons such as zombie knives to inmates with impunity due to the absence of basic security measures such as functional CCTV, protective

netting and window repairs. Across two visits in September and October, he described a damning picture of thriving illicit economies that jeopardise the safety of dedicated prison staff.

In HMP Manchester, almost four in 10 prisoners have tested positive in mandatory drug tests, and in HMP Long Lartin the figure was nearly three in 10. Those two prisons hold some of the most dangerous men in our country, including murderers and terrorists. If organised crime gangs can deliver phones and drugs to inmates' cells, they could be delivering serious weapons and explosives as well.

The chief inspector said that the potential for escapes or hostage taking is of enormous concern. This could not be more serious. The situation has become, in his words,

“a threat to national security.”

I do not pretend that these problems are entirely new, but they have deteriorated and they need urgent action. Will the Minister provide the timeframes for fixing the most basic security measures? What visits has the Lord Chancellor made to HMP Manchester and HMP Long Lartin? If she has not visited, when does she intend to go? Little else could be more pressing. What discussions has she held with the prison governors? Will the Minister assure the House that the Government have confidence in the senior management to restore order? Does he agree with the chief inspector that the failure to grip the situation is a serious indictment of the Department?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin**: Who had 14 years to grip this situation? At least this Government are taking action—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker**: Order.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin**: This Government are taking action in the first six months. The right hon. Member will know that drone sightings around prisons increased by over 770% between 2019 and 2023—on his Government's watch. Much like everything in our prisons, his Government have left it to us to fix the broken system and clean up their mess. It is a bit rich for him to come here and lecture us when he had 14 years to put this right.

We are installing new CCTV systems, netting and other countermeasures to combat drones. We have clamped down on the contraband that fuels violence behind bars. We are tackling drones through a cross-Government approach, as well as learning from our international counterparts to support our efforts. We are working with our Five Eyes partners—they face the same issues across their prison estates, because this is not a UK problem but a global problem—along with the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence. We have 99 X-ray body scanners in 96 prisons, providing full coverage of the closed adult male estate, to prevent the internal smuggling of illicit contraband. We are taking action while the Opposition just spout.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the Chair of the Justice Committee.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): The Minister will no doubt be pleased that the Justice Committee has just announced an inquiry into drugs in prisons, with an emphasis on the use of drones by

[*Andy Slaughter*]

organised crime gangs to supply inmates. What makes it easy for drones to access prisons is the appalling state of prison maintenance. There is a £1.8 billion backlog, which did not accrue in the past six months. The shadow Secretary of State's surprise is, in itself, surprising. What is the timetable for repairing the problems in prisons and getting to grips with that maintenance backlog?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** My hon. Friend is completely right that the prison maintenance programme that we inherited was in a state. That is why the Chancellor announced in the Budget a £500 million boost to the prison maintenance budget over the next couple of years. That is important. He is right also to say that we need to grip this, which is why the Prisons Minister in the other place has visited Manchester and is regularly updated on the situation there.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): The word that was missing from the shadow Justice Secretary's question just now was "sorry". A National Audit Office report said of the then Conservative Treasury's investment in prison maintenance and security that

"capital budget allocations for prisons have been well below the level needed."

Who was a Treasury Minister at that time? None other than the shadow Justice Secretary. Today's report is the latest chapter in a catalogue of Tory prison failures that scuppered their mission to reduce reoffending, and therefore let down victims of crime. Will the Minister tell us about a new approach to better empower governors with the investment and the autonomy needed to properly invest in prison maintenance and security? What investment will he make in prison officer recruitment through programmes such as Unlocked Graduates, which are critical to help drive security in our prisons?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** The hon. Member is right about the failures missing in the shadow Minister's question. He is also right to ask what the Government are doing to support prison officers and prison governors. We are investing in that, and we will announce a new programme for training and developing new governors very shortly.

**Mr Alex Barros-Curtis** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement. The Conservatives are doing another faux outrage, as they were the ones who ceded the airspace after 14 years of colossal failure in our justice system. What lessons can we learn from that failure so that we tackle the problem of drugs in prisons, which are a big driver of drone drops?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** The lesson is that we need to work with prison governors and the police and invest in actions to deal with the problem. That is exactly what we are doing. We are working with everybody in the system to sort this mess out.

**Nick Timothy** (West Suffolk) (Con): Apart from the serious security concerns that this activity raises, it shows that prisons bring resource pressures for local police forces. In West Suffolk, where Highpoint prison

is due to grow significantly in the years ahead, the police have asked me to ask the Minister to ensure they receive additional funding to reflect that pressure. Will he do so?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** The hon. Member is right that it is important that local police forces work strongly with HM Prison and Probation Service on this issue. That is what is happening. He will know that funding, both locally and nationally, is dealt with in an appropriate way.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): The Prison Officers' Association has been saying for the past five years that the threat of drones destabilises our prisons and poses a massive security risk. Let me draw the Minister's attention to the anti-drone system at HMP Guernsey, which very effectively prevents that threat. Can we expect this new system to be implemented in all prisons in England and Wales?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** Anything that works will be built upon—that is part of it. Drone technology has been accelerated through the Ukraine war. We know that we need to work very hard to keep ahead of the felons on this.

**Sir Gavin Williamson** (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): We all appreciate the destructive impact of drugs in our prisons. In Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge, we have the largest cluster of prisons in the United Kingdom, with HMP Featherstone, HMP Oakwood and Brinsford young offender institution. Prison officers do an amazing job trying to tackle this issue, but what specific measures can the Minister bring forward to support their work, to try to ensure that prisoners ultimately get on to the path of rehabilitation and kick the habit of drugs?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** The right hon. Member is right that prison officers do an outstanding job. I want to take the opportunity to commend the work of prison officers up and down this country. Eighty prisons now have incentivised substance-free living units, providing a supportive environment for prisoners who commit to living drug-free, with regular drug tests and incentives. That project appears to be working.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): There has been a long-standing issue at Wandsworth prison in my constituency, which has multiple drone drops every single week. Given the lack of CCTV, no netting and high staff vacancies, little can be done to combat them. Following the announcement of a £100 million investment into the prison, will the Minister please ensure that all these issues are addressed and ameliorated?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to work hard to address these issues, but if there were a simple solution, the previous Administration would have waved that magic wand and we would not be sitting here today. It is important that the ongoing work of prison governors, supported by HMPPS across the country and by Ministers, gets to the bottom of this and sorts things out, which is what we are trying to do.



**Jess Brown-Fuller** (Chichester) (LD): LiveLink Aerospace in my constituency is a surveillance company that has created a technology that is being used on Royal Navy ships, in airports and on private yachts. This technology could be crucial to maintaining the no-fly zones above prisons, which were introduced in January last year. Will the Minister explore this technology? Will he come to my constituency to visit LiveLink Aerospace and see what the technology can do?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** It is important that we take advantage of what intelligence is out there. If the hon. Lady writes to me, I will be happy to follow that up appropriately with her and the business involved.

**Olivia Bailey** (Reading West and Mid Berkshire) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the Conservative party left our prisons in crisis, with drug and drone use rife? Will he outline the urgent steps that his Government are taking to ensure that such colossal failure can never happen again?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We inherited a prison estate that was 99.7% full. The police and the courts were in danger of not being able to lock people up. That was an abrogation of duty by the Conservative party. We have rolled up our sleeves and tackled that, and we will tackle this problem as well.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I thank the Minister for a very positive recent meeting on an unrelated subject. Is the main problem here the detection of the incoming drones, or the ability to impede the deliveries once they have been detected?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the positive meeting I had recently with him, officials and the local business. The answer to his question is that both those things are issues.

**Kevin McKenna** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Lab): On visiting the three prisons in the Sheppey prison cluster in my constituency, it is clear to see how the prison estate has been degraded over the past 14 years. I have talked to prison officers, who are my constituents, as well as working in the constituency, about the problems they face day in, day out. It takes more than a few signs saying “no drones” to stop those drones. What is the Minister doing to listen to prison officers and the Prison Officers Association, and to support them in tackling this? Those officers face threats and pressure from organised crime. Will he meet me to discuss this further?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend; if he could drop me a note to remind me, I will do that. This week, the Prisons Minister is meeting officials from the Prison Officers Association. Whenever I visit prisons, as I do regularly, I meet the Prison Officers Association representative in that prison. They are key partners in tackling the problems that we have inherited from the previous Government.

**Bradley Thomas** (Bromsgrove) (Con): High-security prisons ensure that our national security is not compromised, because they house some of the most dangerous threats to our society. In government, the Conservatives introduced legislation to make it an automatic

offence to fly drones within 400 metres of any closed prison. What assurances can the Minister give this House that those who commit such offences will feel the full force of the law?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** That important action taken by the previous Government was, quite correctly, supported by Labour in opposition. When anybody is found guilty of flying a detected drone, the appropriate prosecution will follow.

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West and Islwyn) (Lab): The Welsh Affairs Committee recently visited Parc Prison in Wales, where we saw the types of contraband being smuggled into prisons by drones. One of the biggest problems reported to us was multiple drones coming in at the same time; it is difficult for the security team to then bring them down, even though they are using CCTV. What is the Minister doing to outlaw the use of those drones, to keep our prisoners safe and secure?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** The security and safety of prisoners and prison officers is very important. The Prisons Minister and the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), sitting to my right, recently visited Parc Prison, and are well aware of the issues. They are working with the prison authorities to address them.

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): Two months ago in the House, I raised concerns that HMP Garth had been likened to an airport because of the number of drones illegally flying drugs into the prison. In response, the Lord Chancellor told me that the Prisons Minister was meeting the governor and thinking

“about how to deal with those problems”.—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2024; Vol. 756, c. 164.]

What precise action has the Department taken since then, and what action will the Minister take today to deal with the problems at HMP Manchester?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** Actions are being taken and things are being done. I have mentioned the issues around windows, and netting and bars, but frankly this is a security issue. We are up against organised crime. We will not talk publicly about the measures that we are considering, because that would not be the best way of tackling the issue.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I recognise that this issue is very much related to drugs. Having previously worked for a homeless charity, I have seen the huge amount of damage that drugs can cause to people’s lives, and to their families. What are the Government doing about the wider issue of drugs supply, both in and out of prisons?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** As I have already said, it is very important that we tackle drug dependency in prisons. The fact that we now have a little bit more space in prisons allows more work to go on there to tackle drug dependency. We know that education and employment also help to reduce reoffending, which is why we have committed to improving prisoners’ access to not only drug support programmes, but purposeful activity and employment.

**Lewis Cocking** (Broxbourne) (Con): The Government have said time and again that they want to smash the criminal gangs that illegally smuggle illegal migrants into the UK, yet the Government cannot even smash the gangs that smuggle drugs and phones into our prisons. How can my residents trust the Government to smash these gangs?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** The residents of Broxbourne will be well aware that for 14 years, the Government that the hon. Gentleman supported failed to tackle this problem. This Government are rolling up our sleeves and getting on with it.

**Jake Richards** (Rother Valley) (Lab): This is a long-standing problem, and the previous Government did not do anywhere near enough to deal with it. What they did do, when former Prime Minister Liz Truss was Lord Chancellor, was arrange for more dogs to bark at drones around prisons, which they assured us would work. Has the Ministry of Justice done an assessment on how effective that policy was?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** I think everybody agrees that that policy was barking.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his answers today, and for his clear commitment to making changes that will make a difference. In Northern Ireland prisons, contraband has been a difficult issue to get on top of. Given the news today that drones are being so successfully used in the UK, there is obvious cause for concern that their use may become more prevalent. How will the Minister ensure that the steps taken apply equally across this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and that any additional funding that is required will be allocated?

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:** Any lessons learned need to be applied across the United Kingdom, and that will happen. We need to work with our Five Eyes partners to ensure that the very best action is taken. Northern Ireland needs to get the best of that as well.

## UK-China Economic and Financial Dialogue

1.6 pm

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):** Growth is the No. 1 mission of this Labour Government. To grow the economy, we need to help Great British businesses to export around the world, including to China, the second biggest economy in the world and our fourth-largest trading partner. Not engaging is simply not an option. That is why I led a delegation, including the Governor of the Bank of England, the chief executive of the Financial Conduct Authority and representatives of some of Britain's largest financial service firms, including HSBC, Standard Chartered and Schroders, to the 2025 UK-China economic and financial dialogue—the first of its kind since 2019.

This dialogue has delivered a set of tangible benefits to ensure that British firms have greater access to the Chinese market, while safeguarding our national security—the first duty of any Government. In China, I met outstanding British companies, such as Brompton, Jaguar Land Rover and AstraZeneca, that will benefit from the steps that we have agreed. We have worked to lift market access barriers across a range of goods and services, particularly in the agrifood sector. On financial services, we have successfully secured new licences and quota allocations for UK firms to improve operating access in China. We agreed to co-operate further, including by renewing our shared commitment to the UK-China stock connect scheme, first launched in 2019, by deepening our co-operation on wealth management through a UK-China wealth connect scheme, and by progressing initiatives on pensions and sustainable finance, delivering significant benefits for UK firms and the City of London. I am pleased that China agreed to issue its first ever overseas sovereign green bond in London in 2025, underlining the UK's position as a global capital for high-quality sustainable finance.

The UK is a global leader in financial services. There are significant opportunities to expand our presence in new markets, and the tangible outcomes we have delivered this week will help to deliver that. These steps are part of a wider programme to make substantive progress on improving arrangements for UK exporters and investors, as reflected in new agreements on vaccine approvals, fertiliser, whisky labelling, legal services, automotives and accountancy, which have set us on course for this dialogue to unlock £1 billion of value for the UK economy.

These outcomes, agreed with my counterpart Vice-Premier He Lifeng, represent pragmatic co-operation in action, and support secure and resilient economic growth, because security and economic growth go hand in hand. That means finding the right way to build a stable and balanced relationship with China that is in our national interest—one that recognises the importance of co-operation in addressing the global issues that we face, of competing where our interests differ, and of challenging robustly whenever that is required. In Beijing and Shanghai, I was clear that while we must co-operate on areas of mutual interest, we will confidently challenge on areas where we disagree. I expressed our country's real economic and trade concerns to the Chinese, including about trade imbalances and economic security, and

I raised concerns about Russia's illegal war in Ukraine, human rights, and restrictions on rights and freedoms in Hong Kong, including the case of Jimmy Lai and the completely unjustified sanctions against British parliamentarians.

A key outcome of this dialogue is that we have secured China's commitment to improving existing channels, so that we can openly discuss sensitive issues and the ways in which they impact our economy, because if we do not engage with China, we cannot raise our real concerns. This dialogue is just one part of our engagement with trading partners across the world. Since becoming Chancellor, I have been to New York, Washington, Toronto and Brussels to build our global economic relationships, while my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has travelled to the Gulf to boost trade and investment, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is engaging with partners all over the world to deliver growth that benefits people across the United Kingdom.

We must continue to go further, faster, in driving economic growth to make working people better off. That is why the Prime Minister launched our artificial intelligence opportunities action plan yesterday. It throws the full weight of Government behind AI in the UK to revolutionise our public services and make our economy more productive. It is why next week I will talk to business leaders, investors and entrepreneurs at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos to make the case that the UK is one of the best places in the world in which to invest. In the coming weeks, I will set out further details of our plans to kick-start growth in the economy after 14 years of failure from the Conservative party.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer.

1:11 pm

**Mel Stride** (Central Devon) (Con): It is good to see the Chancellor in her place, and I thank her for advance sight of her statement. I know that she has been away, so let me update her on the mess that she left behind. The pound has hit a 14-month low; Government borrowing costs are at a 27-year high; growth has been killed stone dead; inflation is rising, impacting millions; interest rates are staying higher for longer; and business confidence has fallen through the floor. The Labour party talked down the economy and crippled businesses with colossal taxes, breaking all their promises. This is a crisis made in Downing Street.

It should hardly surprise the Chancellor that international markets are uneasy. The UK's long-term borrowing costs have risen to their highest in almost 30 years. But while the Government were losing control of the economy, where was the Chancellor? Her trip to China had not even begun when my urgent question was taken in the House last week. She was still in the country, but she sent the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, rather than facing up to her failures. May I ask her why she chose not to respond herself?

The Chancellor, of course, ducked the difficult questions by jetting off to Beijing. I believe that in Labour circles they are calling it the Peking duck, but whatever was on the menu in China, was it really worth the unedifying sight of an increasingly desperate politician scampering halfway around the world with a begging bowl? The

Chancellor's deal pales in comparison to Labour's black hole, which opened up in the public finances while the right hon. Lady was absent from her station.

Let me give the House a sense of scale. The deal that the Chancellor has announced amounts to £120 million a year. The rise in our borrowing costs, due to her disastrous Budget, has added about £12 billion to our annual spending on debt interest alone: literally 100 times what she says she has brought back from Beijing. That is money that cannot now be spent on the public's priorities. That £12 billion is enough to pay for 300,000 nurses or to cover Labour's pernicious winter fuel payments cut for eight and a half years—and, of course, even before this latest market reaction, the Budget meant spending tens of billions more on servicing our debt. According to the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast, two thirds of the money raised from the Chancellor's jobs tax will be swallowed up by additional debt interest. Forget those billions going towards better public services; they are going on paying the price of Labour's mismanagement.

We on this side of the House know how this sorry story goes. We have seen it all before: socialist Governments who think that they can tax and spend their way to prosperity; Labour Governments who simply do not understand that if you tax the living daylight out of business, you will get stagnation. They do not understand because there is barely a shred of business experience on the Government Front Bench. May I ask the right hon. Lady which of her promises she will break if the OBR judges in March that she is now in breach of her own fiscal rules? Will she cancel promised spending, will she ramp up borrowing, or will she raise taxes yet again?

This whole sorry tale is nothing short of a Shakespearean tragedy being played out before our eyes. This is the Hamlet of our time. Labour promised the electorate much, while pouring the poison into their ear. And the end—you can feel the end; the Chancellor flailing, estranged, it seems, from those closest to her; those about her falling; the drums beating ever closer. To go, or not to go, that is now a question. The Prime Minister will be damned if he does, but he will surely be damned if he does not. The British people deserve better.

**Rachel Reeves:** The shadow Chancellor is simply not serious. I was on the Opposition side of the House for 14 years, and I think that after a statement one usually asks some questions.

We heard a great deal from the right hon. Gentleman about what he would not do, but we heard absolutely nothing about what he would do. Now we can see what happens when the Leader of the Opposition tells the shadow Cabinet that it should not have any policies. As far as I can tell, the Conservative party's economic strategy is to say that the UK should not engage with the second largest economy in the world, or indeed with our nearest neighbours and our biggest trading partners in the European Union. The right hon. Gentleman's economic strategy is to support higher spending but none of the right decisions that are required to deliver sound public finances, and his economic strategy is to ignore the mistakes of the past with no apology to the British people for his part in Liz Truss's mini-Budget that crashed the economy. I appreciate that, having said that, I may now receive a "cease and desist" letter from her later.

[Rachel Reeves]

One question that the shadow Chancellor did ask was: why did I go to China? I went to secure tangible benefits for British businesses trading overseas. The right hon. Gentleman said that it was not worth it; let him say that to the representatives of HSBC, Standard Chartered, Prudential, Schroders and the London Stock Exchange who attended those meetings with me last week, all of whom have spoken of the difference that it will make.

I have been under no illusion about the scale of challenges that we face, after 14 years of stagnant economic growth, higher debt and economic uncertainty, and we have seen global economic uncertainty play out in the last week, but leadership is not about ducking these challenges; it is about rising to them. The economic headwinds we face are a reminder that we should—indeed, we must—go further and faster in our plan to kick-start economic growth, which plunged under the last Government, by bringing stability to the public finances after years of instability under the Conservative party, unlocking investment that plummeted under the previous Government and pushing ahead with essential reforms to our economy and public services. That is my message to the House today, because if we get it right, the prize on offer to us—to the British people—is immense: the opportunity to make working people better off by making Britain better off. That is the mandate this Government have, and that is what we will deliver.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Treasury Committee.

**Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to growth in this country and to encouraging investment in the UK. Listening to the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride), we would think the country was going to hell in a handcart. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is no time for panic, that it is perfectly possible to manage any pressures on the Budget through astute management of public spending, and that we are a very long way from the approach taken during the years of austerity under the Conservative party?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for that question. I set out this Government's fiscal rules at the Budget in October: we will pay for day-to-day spending through tax receipts, and we will get debt down as a share of the economy. We remain committed to those fiscal rules and will meet them at all times.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): I thank the Chancellor for advance sight of her statement.

Let us be blunt: the Budget has not worked. The Chancellor says that the Government's No. 1 mission is growth, but to date there are no signs that the Government are going to deliver it. The national insurance contributions rise is self-defeating. It undermines growth—it does not unleash it—and it piles pressure on to struggling small businesses and high streets. Nor does it raise anything like the sums of money for the NHS that the Government initially suggested it would. Now we have this much-lauded visit to China, which the Government themselves say is only worth £600 million to the UK over the next five

years. That is equivalent to just five and a half hours of NHS spending a year—27.5 hours over the five-year period. All growth is welcome, but this really is small beer.

What are we to make of the Chancellor's pledge to improve existing channels with China? It is nothing short of warm words and mixed messages. The Chancellor should not have gone to China unless there was a commitment that Jimmy Lai was going to be released.

Does the Chancellor now accept that the national insurance increase will damage growth? Does she accept that there were and still are much fairer ways to raise the necessary revenue without holding back our economy and our high streets? The international market jitters we have seen in the last few days are largely caused by the threat of tariffs by the new Trump Administration, so will the Chancellor guard against the risks of a Trump presidency by rebuilding our trading relationship with our European neighbours?

After the economic vandalism of the previous Conservative Government and their mini-Budget, our NHS and care services are still on their knees. Does the Chancellor accept that wealth and health are two sides of the same coin and that scaling back any investment in the NHS will be not only devastating for local communities but damaging for economic growth?

**Rachel Reeves:** I am slightly confused by the hon. Lady's response. The Liberal Democrats opposed every decision we made to get the public finances under control at the Budget, and now they say that we need to spend more on public services. Well, I am afraid they cannot have it both ways. The only way there is more money for our public services is by raising it, as we did in the Budget—decisions that the Liberal Democrats apparently oppose.

The hon. Lady says that £600 million is not worth it. That is £600 million of tangible benefits for British businesses trading overseas. I would have thought she would welcome enhanced trade and investment as a way to create more good jobs paying decent wages in St Albans and, indeed, in all our constituencies.

The hon. Lady says that we should not go to China because we need to raise difficult issues. I am not sure how she thinks we are going to raise difficult issues unless we engage with the second biggest economy in the world. Because I went to China, I was able to raise issues around human rights, forced labour, Hong Kong and Jimmy Lai and the sanctioning of parliamentarians. We cannot raise those issues unless we are in the room. I was in the room and therefore able to do just that.

Labour is the party that put £20 billion into the national health service at the Budget in October. We were able to do that because of the difficult decisions we took, including on taxation. The hon. Lady seems to want the additional money for public services but without finding any way to pay for them. That is the way the Conservative party got into its troubles. I am afraid the Liberal Democrats are going down exactly the same path.

**Rachel Blake** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): May I thank the Chancellor for raising the case of my constituent, Jimmy Lai? I know it will mean a lot to him and his family. Does she agree that it is because of the profound differences that it is vital we maintain this strategic engagement?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank my hon. Friend for what she has just said. On behalf of the whole House, I want to send our best wishes to the family of Jimmy Lai at this difficult time. I had the opportunity to raise this as well as other issues during my time in China, and it is incredibly important that at every opportunity we have, we raise some of the difficult issues and challenge the Chinese authorities in a way that is appropriate and consistent with our British values.

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): The economic and financial dialogue was stayed because of the brutal imposition of the national security law in Hong Kong. When the Chancellor and the Government go back to engage and reopen that dialogue, they do so on the back of things getting worse, not better. The reality I put to her is that while she was away, Shein refused point blank at a Select Committee hearing to answer the question of whether it has slave labour in its supply chain, but the Government want it to list here in London. We have solar arrays being imported by the Government into the UK that demonstrably involve slave labour. Can the Chancellor be clear with the House about the Government's position on slave labour? Can she explain whether this Government will allow any products or services, or allow companies to align themselves here or import goods here, that contain any slave labour, no matter how important that import is?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that question; I know how seriously he takes this issue, like so many other Members on both sides of the House. Listing of companies in the UK is a decision for the Financial Conduct Authority, but any company listing on the London stock exchange has to live up to the responsibilities set out by the United Nations and the OECD on forced labour.

This Government are committed to working with international partners and businesses to ensure that global supply chains are free from human and labour rights abuses. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, under section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, commercial businesses that operate in the UK and have a turnover of more than £36 million are required to report annually on the steps they have taken, and rightly so, because modern slavery is abhorrent, and this Government continue to take steps to deal with it.

**Dr Jeevun Sandher** (Loughborough) (Lab): First, may I remind Conservative Members that UK bond yields are rising for the same reason that German and French bond yields are—because they are tracking the US rate? They never were very good at numbers.

The Chancellor has set out her economic philosophy that our prosperity is built upon secure foundations in a more uncertain world. Will she set out how she is building that economic security here, particularly with reference to having domestic energy, rather than being dependent on foreign fossil fuel dictators?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that economic growth has to be built on strong foundations, which is the approach of this Government. Our mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower is consistent with that. If we can ween ourselves off

fossil fuels and the oil of dictators, we will be more secure in our economy, because we will not have to import so much from overseas.

**Dame Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): It is good to see the Chancellor back from China and to hear her reiterate that growth is her No. 1 mission, because we have not had any growth since her Budget. Given that accepting responsibility is the first step in solving a problem, will she accept that last October's Budget has caused business confidence and growth prospects in this country's economy to plunge?

**Rachel Reeves:** I thought for a moment that the hon. Lady was going to apologise for Liz Truss's mini-Budget. Maybe she will do so on another occasion.

**Yuan Yang** (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for raising the case of Jimmy Lai. I hope that the Government will in future press the case of pensions owed to British national overseas constituents in Earley and Woodley, and across the UK, who have moved here from Hong Kong.

I was surprised to hear the shadow Chancellor advocate knee-jerk responses to inter-day movements in market prices. I would argue that such short-termism led to the Conservative party having five Chancellors in only four years. Will the Chancellor reassure us that she will not be misled by short-termism, and that she will instead keep her focus on our Government's long-term ambition to raise living standards and growth?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There have been movements in international markets in the past week or so, and they have been global in nature. In the UK, we must do what we can, which is why I have reiterated today my commitment to the fiscal rules that I set out in the Budget in October. I reiterate that growth is the No. 1 mission of this Government: growth built on stability, which will come through securing the public finances; through investment, including through the national wealth fund and GB Energy; and through reform—of our planning system to make it easier to build in Britain, getting people back to work, and of our pension system. This Government are cracking on after 14 years of failure from the Conservative party.

**Esther McVey** (Tatton) (Con): Did the Communist party of China tell the Chancellor that she was doing a good job or a bad job of running the UK economy when she was there?

**Rachel Reeves:** I was not seeking assurance from any foreign Government on the performance of this Government. What I was seeking—I achieved this in China—were tangible outputs for British businesses trading overseas, helping to create more good jobs that pay decent wages here in Britain. The Conservative party absolutely failed to do that in 14 years.

**Tim Roca** (Macclesfield) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for her statement. I particularly welcome the fact that she raised the issues of Jimmy Lai and human rights in Beijing, which is really important. After 14 years of the Conservative party's inconsistency on China, does she agree that we need a cross-Whitehall strategy and a pragmatic approach?

**Rachel Reeves:** What is really important is that we take decisions in Britain's national interest. Taking decisions in the national interest means engaging with our trading partners all around the world, which is why, since being appointed as Chancellor, I have been to Brussels to reset our relations with the European Union, as well as to Washington and New York to welcome investment from overseas. I have secured £600 million-worth of benefits for UK businesses doing business in China.

**Stephen Flynn** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer do what the Prime Minister refused to do yesterday and rule out future spending cuts?

**Rachel Reeves:** I am not going to write five years' worth of Budgets in the first six months of a Labour Government, but I am absolutely committed to meeting the fiscal rules that I set out in the Budget in October. We know what happens when Governments lose control of the public finances: they crash the economy and end up on the Opposition Benches.

**John Grady** (Glasgow East) (Lab): The Chancellor may be able to learn a bit about emergency spending cuts from the Scottish Government in Holyrood, who have had three years of emergency spending cuts. Does the Chancellor agree that it is essential to engage with large economies like China so that we can export our brilliant financial services sector and whisky from Scotland? In the real world, we have to trade with large economies like China.

**Rachel Reeves:** Many of the benefits that we secured last week were for the financial services sector, and both Edinburgh and Glasgow are important hubs of financial services in the UK. Businesses such as ABRDN and Standard Chartered, which were on the delegation with me, have welcomed the tangible benefits, which will result in more jobs and more economic prosperity in Scotland and across the United Kingdom.

**Martin Vickers** (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): It has been reported that the Chancellor was going to meet the owners of British Steel in China. Many of my constituents work at the Scunthorpe steelworks. While I appreciate that Ministers may not have reached a final decision on the steelworks, is she able to give reassurance to my constituents that she has had constructive engagement?

**Rachel Reeves:** My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has met Mr Li, from Jingye, on a number of occasions. Talks are ongoing, but I am not able to provide an update on that today.

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): The Chancellor has only my admiration and support for the tough decisions that she is taking to fix the fundamentals. While Conservative Members were carping about the Chancellor's whereabouts this week, she was having serious discussions with the world's second largest economy and securing access for UK firms. Is it not clear that only Labour Members are serious about growth?

**Rachel Reeves:** I will always stand up for Britain's national and economic interest, which is why I am helping some of our best businesses to export around

the world. That is what I did in China at the weekend, and it is what I will continue to do. I will always stand up for our economic interest.

**Sir Gavin Williamson** (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): Has the Chancellor of the Exchequer spoken to the Governor of the Bank of England about what action needs to be taken to bring about stability in our bond markets?

**Rachel Reeves:** I regularly speak to the Governor of the Bank of England; indeed, he was with me on the delegation to China this weekend. We work closely together to ensure that the British economy remains competitive in global markets.

**Katie White** (Leeds North West) (Lab): I am quite surprised at the audaciousness of those on the Opposition Benches. The Conservatives oversaw a rise in debt levels over the last 14 years, and it is a shame that they did not turn their minds to the issue earlier. Does the Chancellor agree that serious discussions, such as the one with China, can deliver not just on our economic aims, but on our wider climate and international objectives?

**Rachel Reeves:** Unless we engage and work with our partners around the world, we will miss out on the opportunities that other countries secure for their businesses and economies. If we miss out on those investment and trade opportunities, we can be sure that other countries will take advantage of them. That is why I was in China, and it is why I will work with counterparts around the world to secure good outcomes for British businesses and jobs here in the United Kingdom.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Chancellor raised the issue of human rights abuses in China, but did she get the opportunity to raise with her interlocutors the extrajudicial work of the United Front Work Department, particularly in relation to UK institutions, especially universities?

**Rachel Reeves:** I raised a number of issues around human rights abuses, labour and, indeed, rights and freedoms in Hong Kong, including the case of Jimmy Lai. I raised that with all the Ministers I met in China, and I will always stand up for our values and interests.

**Kanishka Narayan** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab): Unlike the bickering in the Conservative party, we are cutting deals in the national interest and putting Britain at the frontier—£600 million just over the weekend, and an AI opportunities plan just this week. Does the Chancellor agree that we are the party of action and the Conservatives are the party of rhetoric?

**Rachel Reeves:** We on the Government Benches are not going to apologise for getting a good deal for British businesses and the people working for them. I am determined to leave no stone unturned in ensuring that British businesses have the rights and freedoms to export and trade around the world, helping to create good jobs here in Britain.

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): UK exports to China currently represent less than 10% of the UK's total exports, whereas our exports to the EU represent over 40%, demonstrating the greater opportunities that trading with the EU makes available to our small and

medium enterprises. Will the Chancellor commit to talking four times as much to our European partners about our trading opportunities than she has to China?

**Rachel Reeves:** This is not either/or; we cannot write off one country and say that we are going to put all our eggs in a different basket. China is our fourth biggest trading partner and we cannot miss out on opportunities in a country that is growing quickly, with an expanding middle class, where there are huge export opportunities. As the hon. Lady knows, I was in Brussels in December to reset our relations—the first British Chancellor to go to a Eurogroup meeting since we left the European Union. I am leaving no stone unturned in exploiting export opportunities for British businesses.

**Callum Anderson** (Buckingham and Bletchley) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for her statement. Can she set out in more detail how the Government intend to help reinvigorate the UK-China stock connect, so that UK companies and investors can access Chinese capital markets and vice versa?

**Rachel Reeves:** The stock connect is an initiative first set up by the former Conservative Chancellor Philip Hammond to improve links between the Shanghai and London stock exchanges and to help Chinese businesses to access capital on UK financial markets. That is good for financial services firms operating in London, and the enhancement of that stock connect scheme at the weekend offers new opportunities for British businesses in financial services in the UK.

**Dr Luke Evans** (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): As the Chancellor flew east, the pound plummeted south and Government debt rocketed north. Why? The markets do not believe her plan for growth; that is the fundamental issue. To pick up the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson), what is she going to say to the markets to make them believe she really does understand how to deliver growth in the UK?

**Rachel Reeves:** There has been global volatility in markets. It is not reasonable to suggest that bond yields in the United States, Germany and France have risen because of decisions made by this Government. I think the hon. Member should just get real.

**Brian Leishman** (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for her statement. In regard to raising money for public services, an annual wealth tax on the multimillionaire and billionaire class would certainly achieve that. However, that is a conversation for another day—on to China. My right hon. Friend and I have had discussions regarding the closure of the Grangemouth refinery, in which PetroChina—part of the Chinese state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation—is heavily involved. If the refinery closes, thousands of jobs will be lost. This is not just a constituency issue for me. It will impact all of Scotland, as our fuel and national security will be severely weakened. Did the Chancellor speak about the issue with her Chinese counterparts, and if not, will she do so?

**Rachel Reeves:** We are working closely with the Scottish Government to ensure that there is a bright future for

the people of Grangemouth, because deindustrialisation should not be the future for communities, including in Scotland.

**Richard Tice** (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): The data in September and October shows that the economy is falling. It is going down and the currency markets and bond markets are selling off and expressing their clear concern that there is no growth and that the economy continues to fall. If the Chancellor is so confident, will she confirm to the House when the economy will start growing again?

**Rachel Reeves:** Growth is the No. 1 mission of this Labour Government, but the truth is that it is not possible to turn things around quickly after 14 years of lacklustre growth and declining living standards under the Conservatives. We are leaving no stone unturned, which is why last week in China we secured £600 million-worth of tangible benefits for the UK economy, helping great British businesses exporting overseas.

**Nesil Caliskan** (Barking) (Lab): Does the Chancellor agree that developing our economic and trading relationships with other nations is one of many important levers; and that, alongside that approach, public investment, planning reforms and an industrial strategy—whose absence under the Conservative Government was problematic—will be returned under this Government so that we can see economic growth?

**Rachel Reeves:** The best way to grow an economy is to boost investment in an economy. The truth is that, under the Conservatives, we were the only G7 economy where investment stood at less than 20% of GDP. That is the inheritance that our party was bequeathed by the Conservatives, but we are beginning to turn that around through the creation of a national wealth fund to leverage in private sector investment, through planning reform to get Britain building again, and through pensions reform to unlock £80 billion of investment to help small and start-up businesses to grow. We are turning things around after 14 years of failure from the Conservative party.

**Paul Holmes** (Hamble Valley) (Con): While the Chancellor was in China securing her measly £600 million, borrowing rates reached the highest they have been since 2008. In 2024 she said that her Budget would be “a Budget with real ambition, a Budget to fix the foundations... a Budget to rebuild Britain.”

How is that going, given that her mess has caused borrowing to be the highest it has been since 2008, making real working people in this country suffer?

**Rachel Reeves:** I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman follows global financial markets, but borrowing costs have increased for countries around the world. What we saw under Liz Truss’s mini-Budget was unique to the United Kingdom, because it was only UK markets that were affected by the decisions of the Conservatives.

**Chris McDonald** (Stockton North) (Lab): It is great to see our Chancellor of the Exchequer working with international business and winning investment for the UK. Does she agree that while the Conservatives were happy to sell out our heavy industry to China, leading to the end of steelmaking in Teesside after 150 years,

[Chris McDonald]

our industrial strategy is delivering investment in steel, chemicals and life sciences in Stockton North, in Teesside and across the UK?

**Rachel Reeves:** The national wealth fund created by this Government will get investment into industries such as carbon capture and storage, green hydrogen, ports and, indeed, steel. We were really pleased at the end of last year to be able to announce investment in carbon capture and storage in Merseyside and Teesside, securing billions of pounds of investment into those economies and securing many thousands of jobs.

**Luke Murphy** (Basingstoke) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for her statement. I think it is worth reminding the House that under the previous Government business investment fell to 28th out of 31 OECD countries, which was lower than Latvia, Slovenia and Hungary. Could the Chancellor set out how our industrial strategy will overcome that terrible legacy on business investment left by the Conservatives?

**Rachel Reeves:** One of the reasons for such poor investment—the lowest of all the G7 economies—is that our planning system makes it so hard to get anything done in this country. That is why the planning and infrastructure Bill, which is being brought forward by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, will turn that around, making it easier to invest in transport, in digital, in housing and in so much more. That is the way to get our economy growing after 14 years of failure.

**Carla Lockhart** (Upper Bann) (DUP): I thank the Chancellor for her statement. She goes to China, New York, Washington, Toronto and Brussels to build economic relationships, yet she will not take the time to speak with the Ulster Farmers Union, the NFU, the Farmers Union of Wales or NFU Scotland to hear at first hand about the devastating impact that her death tax will have on family farms and small businesses. When will she realise that no matter what deals she does around the world—and I welcome them—Rome is burning around her? Agriculture is the backbone of our economy, so will she commit to meet me as a representative of the thousands of farmers whose farms are going to be decimated by her death tax?

**Rachel Reeves:** I have had the opportunity on a couple of occasions to meet the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and I am sure that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Streatham and Croydon North (Steve Reed), would be happy to meet colleagues from Northern Ireland. The truth is that we inherited a £22 billion black hole in the public finances from the Conservatives, and in order to stabilise our public finances we had to make difficult decisions on taxes. At the moment we hear from the Opposition that they do not like the increases in taxes but they want increases in public spending. Well, they cannot have it both ways.

**Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Could she elaborate further on how this visit and the discussions she has

started are not only consistent with the Government's approach to China, but a vital part of it—co-operate where we can, compete where we need to, and challenge where we must?

**Rachel Reeves:** This is the first economic and financial dialogue between our two countries since 2019. Since then, other countries around the world have continued to engage with China, securing tangible benefits for their economies. I do not want UK businesses and the people working in our country to miss out, which is why this weekend we secured £600 million-worth of tangible benefits for businesses that export to China, thereby helping to create more good jobs paying decent wages in our country.

**Nick Timothy** (West Suffolk) (Con): I am slightly worried that investors will be watching this statement and wondering what planet the Chancellor is on. She just said that she is investing in transport infrastructure, but she is actually cutting transport capital budgets. She has previously said that she wants only one Budget a year, and the March statement is billed only as a fiscal forecast. Can she rule out any new tax rises or departmental spending cuts in the March statement, or will the fiscal forecast become an emergency Budget?

**Rachel Reeves:** We have committed to having just one Budget a year to provide businesses with the certainty they need to invest, so we will have an update from the Office for Budget Responsibility in March. I also give the commitment that, as I have already said, the fiscal rules mean we will balance day-to-day spending with tax receipts, and we will get debt down as a share of GDP within the forecast period. We will continue at all times to meet those fiscal rules.

**Tony Vaughan** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): I congratulate the Chancellor on unlocking £1 billion of value for the UK economy that would not have been unlocked if she had not gone to China. However, does she agree that the Government's much-needed decision to thaw UK-China relations is now reaping dividends while also allowing us to press China on difficult issues, including human rights and labour standards?

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. We managed to secure tangible benefits for the UK economy and British exporters. At the same time, we were able to raise difficult issues that we would not have been able to raise if we were not engaged. That is the benefit of engagement: we get the economic gains and we can raise those tricky issues.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): It is beyond parody that His Majesty's Chancellor would throw herself at the mercy of the Chinese Government and come back with £600 million in revenue over five years. Is she aware that £600 million in revenue is less than one ninetieth of HSBC's annual profit? This is what she is holding up as a major achievement of the Treasury's trade mission. My right hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) very reasonably asked what the Chancellor will do when, not if, her fiscal rules are breached. Will she increase borrowing, raise taxes or cut spending, not over five years but this year?



**Rachel Reeves:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman is an expert in HSBC, but I would rather take the word of the chairman of HSBC, who welcomed the tangible investments and, indeed, led the financial forum that we held in China last week. I have been really clear that we will meet the fiscal rules that I set out in the Budget, and we will do that at all times. That is the commitment I made, and it is the commitment I continue to make.

**Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): Will the Chancellor confirm that, for her, growth must always go hand in hand with economic security? That is a lesson that the previous Conservative Government refused to learn when they left 85% of us dependent on expensive foreign gas to heat our homes this winter.

**Rachel Reeves:** This Government's clean energy mission will mean that we are less reliant on foreign dictators for our basic energy needs. That is why we are investing in carbon capture and storage and floating offshore wind, and it is why we are getting rid of the previous Government's absurd ban on onshore wind.

**Harriet Cross** (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): The Chancellor referred in her statement to safeguarding national security, which I welcome, but this must include energy security. Yet her changes to the energy profits levy, removing investment allowances and not permitting new licences at a time when we are still reliant on oil and gas, not only undermines our energy security but dwarfs the £600 million that she has brought back from China with the £12 billion of tax revenues that will be lost from the sector. Why, rather than supporting our energy security, is the Chancellor turning her back on the sector, turning her back on these tax revenues and risking selling our energy security to China?

**Rachel Reeves:** If the hon. Lady has a brief look at the documents from the Office for Budget Responsibility, she will see that the changes to the energy profits levy—taking the tax rate up from 75% to 78%, the same rate as in Norway—raises money; it does not lose money.

**Linsey Farnsworth** (Amber Valley) (Lab): I commend the Chancellor for her visit to advocate for our country's best interests, but does she agree that Chinese companies must not provide any support to Putin's illegal war in Ukraine?

**Rachel Reeves:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I raised such issues with my counterparts in China at the weekend. It is really important that, whenever we engage with foreign Governments, we also raise issues consistent with our values, including Chinese companies supplying the Russian Government with materials used in Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

**Jim Allister** (North Antrim) (TUV): Did the Chancellor raise any concerns, or indeed does she have any concerns, about the Confucius Institute, the Chinese Government-backed operation we see across the United Kingdom? And what answer did she get with respect to Jimmy Lai?

**Rachel Reeves:** When our Prime Minister met President Xi Jinping in Rio last year, they agreed that one of the points of re-engagement is that we were able to make clear our concerns on a range of issues in a private way. I am not going to go into the details of that conversation,

but I raised these issues with all the Chinese officials I met at the weekend. *[Interruption.]* The problem is that Conservative Members, for all their chuntering, did not raise these issues because they did not even engage.

**Ben Coleman** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Lab): My constituents, many of whom work in financial services, will have been amazed, just as I was, when the shadow Chancellor, in a fit of pique, demanded that the Chancellor should come home from China to talk to him in this House, rather than staying to promote growth, increase access to the world's second largest market and win new licences and quota allocations for financial services businesses. As anybody who has taken the trouble to listen carefully to the Chancellor would recognise, there is more on the way. What does she think the City, and the banks that accompanied her, would have preferred in the long-term interests of this country: stay in China to win for this country, or come home to satisfy the shadow Chancellor's fit of pique?

**Rachel Reeves:** We just have to look at what the businesses have already said about the deal we managed to secure last week. There are tangible benefits for British businesses exporting to China, helping to create more good jobs paying decent wages here in Britain. It has been welcomed by businesses. It is a shame that the Conservative party no longer stands up for British businesses.

**Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): We have an embargo on Russian oil and gas. China continues to import it, and apparently Russia will be China's No. 1 supplier this year. Did the Chancellor raise this with her counterparts on her trip to China, and what assessment has she made so that her deal does not inadvertently support the Russian war effort?

**Rachel Reeves:** As I have already said in the House today, I raised the issue of Chinese companies supplying the Russian Government. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman will know that last week, alongside the United States, we increased sanctions on Russian oil and gas to make it harder for Putin to continue to conduct his illegal war.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Chancellor outline how the visit is an example of ongoing dialogue with the international community, which will benefit businesses and residents in my constituency of Harlow? Also, while we are quoting Shakespeare, does she agree that there is something rotten in the state of the Conservative party—or perhaps that the Conservative party is in a rotten state?

**Rachel Reeves:** I am glad that my hon. Friend has used the 50 minutes of the statement to come up with such a good line. He is right that many people working in Harlow work in the financial services sector and will very much welcome the enhanced licences and quotas, which, incidentally, many other countries and their banks already have because their Governments have engaged with China. Those are opportunities that we have missed out on in Britain for far too long because of the six years during which we failed to be involved in an economic and financial dialogue, while other Governments cracked on and made sure they supported and stood up for their national interest.

**Shockat Adam** (Leicester South) (Ind): Notwithstanding the importance of China as a trading partner, will the Chancellor please explain what steps the Government are taking to address the issues of forced labour links with Uyghur workers in supply chains at fast fashion companies such as Shein? Will the Minister provide data on the extent of forced labour in UK supply chains, especially in the garment sector? Will she also outline any actions to strengthen due diligence requirements for companies sourcing from areas with known human rights abuses, such as Xinjiang?

**Rachel Reeves:** As I have already set out, one of the issues I was able to raise with my counterparts in China was forced labour, particularly in Xinjiang. As I said in answer to the question from the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), I have also been really clear that any company seeking to list in London has to meet stringent requirements, as set out by the United Nations and the OECD, on labour supply and the treatment of workers.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** For the final question, I call Jim Shannon.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): While I welcome the UK-China economic and financial dialogue, as the Chancellor will know, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, I have repeatedly highlighted in this House human rights abuses in China, with regard to Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists and Christians in Hong Kong and China. How will the Government and the Chancellor make sure that safeguards for British money and goods are put in place to ensure that economic engagements do not directly support those violations? Human rights concerns, forced labour, denial of religious freedom and ongoing suppression in Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong and Taiwan must be remembered at all costs and in all deals with China.

**Rachel Reeves:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that thoughtful question. It is important that when we engage with China, we co-operate where we can, we compete where necessary, but we challenge whenever our values do not align. Like the hon. Gentleman, I care deeply about issues of religious freedom and forced labour, but that is the whole point of engaging. We have to engage in the world as it is, not in the world as we would like it to be. It is through those engagements that we are able to raise even some of the most difficult issues and be very clear about the values of our great country.

## Community Energy (Review)

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

2.3 pm

**Joe Morris** (Hexham) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to conduct a review of the contribution of community energy to the Government's Clean Power 2030 mission.

The clean power mission and climate policy more generally are what brought me into politics. Ensuring that we have a world that is economically, ecologically and environmentally viable for future generations is one of the reasons that I am privileged to stand in this House today and that many people across the Hexham constituency put their faith in me.

I thank local climate groups, such as the Hexham Climate Café, the North Tyne climate action group and Sustainable Haltwhistle for their engagement and feedback on climate issues. I have always committed to working with local charities and organisations throughout my constituency as we strive to protect our climate and our planet. I also want to pay tribute to the Co-operative party for constantly raising the issue on a national level.

The country is on a vital mission to achieve net zero and to combat the immediate and very real threat of climate change. It is a mission that we can and must achieve. The British people deserve lower costs and secure power, with good jobs and a Government that protect them from the long-term threats posed by climate change. I am therefore glad the Government have committed to a clean power mission by 2030 that will achieve energy security, protect bill payers, create good jobs and help to protect future generations from the cost of climate breakdown.

To ensure that this country is on the right path to becoming a clean energy superpower, it is essential that we unlock the full extent of renewable energy and conduct a necessary review of the contribution of community energy to the 2030 clean power mission. For decades, energy has been produced and, crucially, owned far away from this country. Many constituents pay their energy bills to a company based 600 miles and an ocean away. We know our energy system is broken, but for too long it has been too distant to fix. The Labour Government will do things differently.

Great British Energy, owned by the British people, will invest in clean energy and ensure that our communities reap the benefits, not just through cheaper bills that families can afford, but through new jobs for our young people, bringing growth that will revitalise local economies. The local power plan, to be developed by Great British Energy, has the potential to facilitate that necessary drive towards community energy projects, ensuring funding is available to support local projects that could be transformational.

Community energy offers a crucial opportunity of agency and empowerment within local communities to develop practical and long-term energy solutions. It will not only deliver key elements that are essential for reaching our net zero targets, but encourage local generation at household and community level, reducing the need for electricity to be imported into communities. It is necessary for individual houses to change their energy usage to make our net zero targets achievable.

There are opportunities for community-owned power throughout the country. Indeed, we know what can happen when communities as a whole come together. We see the mutual support and care that constituents hold for each other. When a community has been left behind time and again, as is the case with many in the north-east, we know how to pull together. Community energy and engagement are essential for achieving the net zero transition. Individual households throughout the country can engage. Through both centralised generation and storage, houses can be powered locally, reducing demand for imports from the distribution network and cutting energy bills.

As a leader in offshore wind power and research, the north-east is already a frontrunner in energy production, supporting more than 5 GW of offshore production, with a further 72 GW of potential production. My region can display leadership not only in production, but through infrastructure, and we can supply more than 130 GW of offshore power through the north-east local supply chain across all four of our nations. Supporting the green energy transition can start in the north-east. Not only is the region strongly placed to deliver offshore wind in the North sea, but we are in a strong position to install and maintain the growing pipeline of heat network projects that would support the supply chain in the north-east and foster highly skilled jobs that are vital to the region and necessary in ensuring that young people in the north-east can remain there and secure high-paying work.

It is essential that the resources the country has at its disposal are properly recognised. Through community engagement and energy, effective solutions can be tailored specifically to regions and localities. Community-owned energy projects are, however, not new. They already exist and thrive across the country, thanks to the innovation and drive of individuals. In that regard, I want to acknowledge and highlight the phenomenal work of Humshaugh Net Zero, its founder Herbie Newell, and David Still. I thank them for their support and their commitment to delivering net zero emissions by 2030. One of my first meetings as Hexham's MP was in the room above the Crown Inn in Humshaugh to talk about net zero, which I highly recommend to the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks) if he comes up to visit.

Humshaugh Net Zero has already installed a number of low-carbon technologies, including solar, heat pumps, battery storage, electric vehicles and biomass. Its efforts to launch, this year, one of the first community-based solar farms in the north-east captures my constituents' community spirit and drive. Its aim is to successfully deliver half of the parish's electricity demand. I believe that the work of Humshaugh Net Zero would be of valuable interest to a review of community energy, informing how to unlock community energy at scale and how to support the development of other projects throughout the region and the country. It provides a strong example of community engagement and a model for how that can be achieved.

Launching a review will assist the Secretary of State to understand how best to support the thriving community energy schemes that already exist, as well as to set up

new projects that benefit new communities. A review could consider how to expand the availability of funding for local projects and examine how best to support community energy projects, specifically those in rural areas, to facilitate strong working relations with landlords and ensure that planning processes receive local support and consultation.

Supply companies could be mandated to ensure that economic power is contractually negotiated on appropriate terms. A review could also identify how best to successfully expand and transform smaller projects into large-scale projects that respect local communities and interests. Smaller community projects face far higher financial challenges. A possible guarantee scheme could make considerable headway to successfully minimise the risk.

Through conducting a review, solutions can be considered to tackle the two major challenges for community energy projects: first, ensuring that funding is available on competitive terms; and, secondly, ensuring that there is support for electricity to be sold to the community to maximise project revenue. Launching this vital review into community energy will support our mission to achieve net zero emissions by 2030.

I am proud that throughout the Hexham constituency, local residents are already engaging in efforts to reduce their emissions and committing to green energy to achieve that 2030 mission. In Prudhoe, the Friends of Eastwoods Park and the Miners Lamp Cafe have introduced solar panels and battery storage. This has received vital funding from Northern Powergrid, and the drive of local residents has made sure that the building can still be heated, meals can be cooked and ingredients can be preserved through the local green energy supply. The Stocksfield community association has, similarly, transformed the local community centre into a crisis centre. By achieving a self-sufficient energy source, the community centre can operate as a support service for local residents during emergencies. Not only is this a valuable asset to the local community, but it offers a cost-effective solution. As Prudhoe, Humshaugh and Stocksfield represent, community energy provides more than just energy; it fosters community collaboration and cohesion.

It is clear that we need to take community power seriously. Community energy is integral to our clean power mission. It is integral to ensuring that cheap and affordable power is accessible to local residents across the country, and it is essential for ensuring that this country utilises the valuable resources at our disposal. Conducting a review of the contribution of community energy to the 2030 clean power mission is vital for identifying challenges, threats and necessary solutions. I look forward to a future where my home and the homes of my constituents can be powered by green energy built and generated in the north-east.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Joe Morris, Emma Foody, Mark Ferguson, Ms Polly Billington, Maya Ellis, James Naish, Torcuil Crichton and Dr Simon Opher present the Bill.

Joe Morris accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 July, and to be printed ( Bill 159 ).*

## Renters' Rights Bill

*Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee*

### New Clause 13

#### PROHIBITION OF RENT IN ADVANCE AFTER LEASE ENTERED INTO (EXCEPT INITIAL RENT)

"In the 1988 Act, after section 4A (inserted by section 1 of this Act) insert—

#### **4B Assured tenancy: prohibition of rent in advance (except initial rent)**

(1) Terms of an assured tenancy which provide for when rent is due are of no effect so far as they provide for rent to be due in advance.

(2) But subsection (1) does not apply—

- (a) to an excepted tenancy, or
- (b) to terms of any other assured tenancy so far as they provide for initial rent to be due during the permitted pre-tenancy period.

(3) Where terms of an assured tenancy providing for when the rent for a rent period is due are of no effect by virtue of this section, the tenancy has effect as if it provided for the rent for that rent period to be due on the substitute rent day for that rent period.

(4) In a case where the terms of the tenancy (after taking account of section 4A) are such that—

- (a) one or more of the periods of the tenancy will be compliant rent periods, and
- (b) the compliant rent periods have a regular pattern, the regular rent day which falls during a rent period is the "substitute rent day" for the rent period.

(5) In any other case, the first day of a rent period is the "substitute rent day" for the rent period.

(6) The compliant rent periods of a tenancy "have a regular pattern" if those periods meet the following two conditions—

- (a) all of the compliant rent periods will be the same length (and, for this purpose, all periods of one month are the same length);
- (b) the rent for all of the compliant periods will be due—
  - (i) on the same day during each of the periods (such as the same day of the week in a weekly period or the same date in the month in a monthly period), or
  - (ii) on the same description of day during each of the periods (such as the last day, or first weekday, of a period);

and that day, or day of that description, is the "regular rent day".

(7) The condition in subsection (6)(a) is met even if the first period of the tenancy is of a different length from all the other compliant periods; and, in such a case, the condition in subsection (6)(b) is met even if the rent for the first period of the tenancy is due on a different day, or description of day, from all the other compliant periods.

(8) For provision enabling a holding deposit to be used to pay initial rent due during the permitted pre-tenancy period, see Schedule 2 to the Tenant Fees Act 2019.

(9) The Secretary of State may, by regulations, amend this section for the purpose of making provision about the descriptions of rent due in advance to which subsection (1) does not apply.

(10) Regulations under subsection (9)—

- (a) may make different provision for different purposes;
- (b) are to be made by statutory instrument.

(11) A statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (9) may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(12) In this paragraph—

"compliant rent period": a rent period is a compliant rent period if the rent for the period is due during the period — and, in determining this, the effect of this section on when rent is due must be disregarded;

"due in advance", in relation to rent, means due before the rent period for which it is payable;

"excepted tenancy" means—

(a) an assured tenancy of social housing (within the meaning of Part 2 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008) if the landlord is a private registered provider of social housing;

(b) an assured tenancy granted pursuant to Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (homelessness);

"initial rent" means rent that is payable for—

(a) the first rent period, or

(b) any later rent period which ends during the initial 28 day period;

and here "initial 28 day period" means the period of 28 days beginning with the first day of the first rent period;

"permitted pre-tenancy period" means the period that—

(a) begins when the tenancy is entered into, and

(b) ends with the day before the first day of the tenancy;

"regular rent day" has the meaning given in subsection (6)(b);

"rent period" means a period for which rent is payable under the assured tenancy;

"substitute rent day" means the day determined in accordance with subsection (4) or (5)." — (*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This modifies the terms of an assured tenancy to disapply terms which provide for rent to be due in advance, unless it is rent for the first rent period, or a subsequent rent period ending within the first 28 days of the tenancy, and is due between the tenancy being entered into and the term of the tenancy beginning.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

2.13 pm

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook):** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government new clause 14—*Prohibition of rent in advance before lease entered into.*

Government new clause 15—*Guarantor not liable for rent payable after tenant's death.*

Government new clause 16—*Limitation on obligation to pay removal expenses.*

New clause 1—*Limit on rent to be requested in advance of tenancy—*

"In the 1988 Act, after section 14ZB (inserted by section 8 of this Act) insert—

#### **"14ZBA Maximum rent to be paid in advance**

No rent may be requested or received in advance of any period of the tenancy which exceeds the rent for two months of the tenancy."

*This new clause would prohibit landlords from requesting or accepting more than two month's rent in advance.*

New clause 2—*Impact of Act on provision of short-term lets—*

"The Secretary of State must, within two years of the passing of this Act, publish a review of the impact of sections 1 to 3 on the number of landlords offering properties on short-term lets rather than in the private rented sector."

**New clause 3—Limit on rent in advance of tenancy—**

“In Schedule 1 to the Tenant Fees Act 2019, after paragraph (1) insert—

“(1A) But if the amount of rent payable in advance of any period of the tenancy exceeds the equivalent of one month’s rent, the amount of the excess is a prohibited payment.””

*This new clause would make it unlawful for a landlord to demand or accept more than one month’s rent in advance in respect of a tenancy or licence of residential accommodation.*

**New clause 4—Signature of lease for student accommodation—**

“Where a tenant meets the student test set out in paragraph 10 of Schedule 1, the relevant tenancy agreement may not be signed before 1 March in the year in which the tenancy is intended to take effect.”

*This new clause would prevent student leases being signed before March in the year in which they are intended to commence.*

**New clause 5—Review of tenancy deposit schemes and requirements—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act, conduct a review of tenancy deposit schemes and tenancy deposit requirements.

(2) The review must include, but not be limited to—

- (a) consideration of options for tenancy “passporting”; and
- (b) measures to improve trust in the deposit dispute process.

(3) As part of the review the Secretary of State must consult with such parties as they see fit, which must include representatives of tenants’ and landlords’ interests.”

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State, within 12 months of the Act passing, to review and consult on tenancy deposit schemes and requirements.*

**New clause 6—Duties of local authorities: care leavers—**

“(1) Where it is requested of a local housing authority by, or on behalf of—

- (a) a relevant child as defined by section 23A of the Children Act 1989, or
- (b) a former relevant child as defined by section 23C of the Children Act 1989,

the local housing authority shall provide assistance to the individual making the request, or the individual on whose behalf the request is made, in paying or guaranteeing any deposit required to agree a tenancy.

(2) The assistance to be provided under subsection (1) may include, but not be limited to, the payment of a deposit on behalf of an individual listed in subsection (1), or acting as a guarantor for any deposit paid by or on behalf of an individual listed in subsection (1).”

*This new clause would place a duty on local authorities to help care leavers pay or guarantee any required deposit to enable them to agree a tenancy in the private rented sector.*

**New clause 7—Rules for proposed rent levels—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must establish a body to be known as the Independent Living Rent Body.

(2) The “proposed rent” referred to in section 55(2) must be calculated with reference to rules set by the Independent Living Rent Body.

(3) In setting rules to be applied to the calculation of a proposed rent under section 55(2) the Independent Living Rent Body will have regard to property type, size and condition, location, local incomes, and such other criteria as it sees fit.”

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to establish an independent body that would set rules to be used when calculating the proposed rent payable in relation to an advertised tenancy.*

**New clause 8—Mediated rent pauses (housing conditions)—**

“(1) This section applies where—

- (a) there is a tenancy to which section 9A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 applies;
- (b) it appears to the tenant that the landlord has breached the covenant implied by that section; and
- (c) it appears to the tenant that the landlord has failed to carry out works necessary to remedy any such breaches within the timeframes set out in regulations made by the Secretary of State under section 10A(3) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

(2) A tenant is entitled to make arrangements to pay rent to an independent individual, rather than to the relevant landlord.

(3) The independent individual shall not pass any rent paid under subsection (2) to the landlord until there has been a determination or agreement between the landlord and tenant as to the landlord’s liability for any breach of the covenant implied by section 9A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.

(4) Where a determination or agreement under subsection (3) sets a time by which works are to be completed, the independent individual will –

- (a) release any rent paid under subsection (2) to the landlord if the works are completed by that time;
- (b) release any rent paid under subsection (2) back to the tenant if the works have not been completed by that time.

(5) In this section an “independent individual” means the independent individual responsible for investigating complaints made against members of a landlord redress scheme under section 62.”

**New clause 9—Home adaptations—**

“(1) The Housing Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 16 insert—

**“16A Home adaptations**

(1) It is an implied term of every assured tenancy to which this section applies that a landlord shall give permission for adaptations where a local council has carried out a Home Assessment and recommends adaptations which constitute reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010. Tenants have the right to appeal a landlord’s refusal to adapt a property.

(2) This section applies to every assured tenancy other than a tenancy of social housing, within the meaning of Part 2 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008.””

*This new clause would ensure that landlords give permission for home adaptations for people who have disabilities where a Home Assessment has been carried out.*

**New clause 10—Guarantor to have no further liability following death of tenant—**

“(1) Subject to subsection (3), a guarantee agreement relating to a relevant tenancy ceases to have effect upon the death of a relevant tenant.

(2) Upon the death of a relevant tenant the guarantor in respect of a relevant tenancy shall incur no further liability in relation to matters arising under the tenancy.

(3) Nothing in this section shall affect the liability of a guarantor in relation to matters which arose before the date of the death of the relevant tenant.

(4) In assessing any liability under subsection (3), account shall be taken of any tenancy deposit paid in respect of the tenancy.

(5) Where there is more than one relevant tenant, this section shall apply only upon the death of both or all of the tenants.

(6) In this section—

“guarantor” is a person who enters into a guarantee agreement in relation to a relevant tenancy;

“guarantee agreement” is a contractual promise (whether incorporated in or separate from the tenancy agreement) to indemnify or compensate a relevant person in respect of an obligation under the tenancy if the tenant fails to perform or comply with the obligation;

“relevant tenancy” has the same meaning as in section 41, and “relevant tenant” is to be interpreted accordingly; and

“tenancy deposit” has the same meaning as in section 212(8) of the Housing Act 2004.”

**New clause 11—Restrictions on the requirement for tenants to provide a guarantor—**

“(1) A relevant person must not, in any of the circumstances set out in subsection (3), require a person, as a condition of the grant of a relevant tenancy, to provide a guarantor in relation to the observance or performance of the tenant’s obligations under the tenancy.

(2) For the purposes of this Act, requiring a person to provide a guarantor includes accepting an offer by that person to provide a guarantor.

(3) The circumstances are –

(a) that the person has paid a tenancy deposit or has been assisted under a deposit scheme;

(b) that the person is required to pay rent in advance equivalent to one month’s rent or more;

(c) that on a reasonable assessment of their means the person’s income (including state benefits received and any other lawful source of income) is sufficient to enable them to pay the full rent due under the tenancy;

(d) that arrangements will be made for housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit to be paid directly in respect of rent to the relevant person;

(e) that the relevant person has entered into a contract of insurance under which they are insured against non-payment of rent; or

(f) such other circumstances as may be prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State.

(4) In any other case where a relevant person lawfully requires a person, as a condition of the grant of a relevant tenancy, to provide a guarantor, the sum for which the guarantor may become liable under the relevant guarantee shall not exceed a sum equal to six months’ rent.

(5) In any case where a relevant person requires a tenant, as a condition of the grant of a relevant joint tenancy, to provide a guarantor, the sum claimed under the guarantee shall not exceed such proportion of the loss as is attributable to the act or default of the individual tenant on whose behalf the guarantee was given and, if such proportion cannot be proved, shall not exceed the sum obtained by dividing the total loss by the number of tenants.

(6) In this section—

a “guarantor” is a person who enters into a guarantee in relation to a relevant tenancy;

a “guarantee” is a contractual promise to be responsible for the performance of an obligation owed by the tenant to a relevant person under the tenancy if the tenant fails to perform the obligation;

a “deposit scheme” includes a scheme whereby a sum payable by way of deposit or a bond or guarantee is provided by a local authority, registered charity or voluntary organisation for the purpose of providing security to a landlord for the performance of a tenant’s obligations under a tenancy;

“tenancy deposit” has the same meaning as in section 212(8) of the Housing Act 2004.”

*This new clause would restrict the circumstances in which a landlord can request a guarantor.*

**New clause 17—Use of licence conditions to improve housing conditions—**

“In section 90 of the Housing Act 2004, for subsection (1) substitute—

“(1) A licence may include such conditions as the local housing authority consider appropriate for regulating all or any of the following—

(a) the management, use and occupation of the house concerned, and

(b) its condition and contents.”

*This new clause would enable local authorities operating selective licensing schemes to use licence conditions to improve housing conditions.*

**New clause 18—Increases to duration of discretionary licensing schemes—**

“(1) The Housing Act 2004 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 60(2), omit “five” and insert “ten”.

(3) In section 84(2), omit “five” and insert “ten”.”

*This new clause would increase the maximum duration of additional HMO licensing schemes and selective licensing schemes from five to ten years.*

**New clause 19—Assessment of operation of possession process—**

“(1) The Lord Chancellor must prepare an assessment of the operation of the process by which—

(a) on applications made by landlords, the county court is able to make orders for the possession of dwellings in England that are let under assured and regulated tenancies, and

(b) such orders are enforced.

(2) The Lord Chancellor must publish the assessment at such time, and in such manner, as the Lord Chancellor thinks appropriate.

(3) In this section—

“assured tenancy” means an assured tenancy within the meaning of the 1988 Act;

“dwelling” means a building or part of a building which is occupied or intended to be occupied as a separate dwelling;

“regulated tenancy” means a regulated tenancy within the meaning of the Rent Act 1977.”

**New clause 20—Review of the impact of the Act on the housing market—**

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish an annual report outlining the impact of the provisions of this Act on the housing market in the UK.

(2) A report under this section must include the impact of this Act on—

(a) the availability of homes in the private rental sector;

(b) rents charged under tenancies;

(c) house prices; and

(d) requests for social housing.

(3) A report under this section must be laid before Parliament.”

**New clause 21—Appropriate insurance products to be available to landlords—**

“The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, consult with representatives of the insurance sector to ensure that—

(1) sufficient and appropriate insurance products will be available for landlords wishing to let a property to a tenant who—

(a) is in receipt of benefits; or

(b) will be keeping a pet in the property during their tenancy; and

(2) such insurance products will not disadvantage landlords wishing to let a property to a such tenant or dissuade them from doing so.”

**New clause 22—Requirement on landlords to pay for alternative accommodation—**

“In section 9A of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (fitness for human habitation of dwellings in England), after subsection(1) insert—

(1A) Where a dwelling—

(a) is found to be at any point in a tenancy; or

(b) becomes during the period of the tenancy unfit for human habitation, the landlord must pay any costs incurred by the tenant in obtaining alternative accommodation.

(1B) A landlord must hold appropriate insurance for the purposes of paying any costs under subsection (1A).

(1C) For the purposes of this section—

“costs” include—

(a) moving costs;

(b) deposits;

(c) rent, up to the amount of the rent for the original property;

“fitness for human habitation” is to be understood with reference to section 10 of this Act, but excludes any conditions caused by any damage or neglect on the part of the tenant.”

**New clause 23—Permission for home adaptations—**

“(1) The Housing Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 16 insert—

**“16A Home adaptations**

(1) It is an implied term of every assured tenancy that a landlord shall give permission for adaptations where a local council has carried out a Home Assessment and recommends adaptations which constitute reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.

(2) A tenant may appeal a landlord’s refusal to give permission for such adaptations.”

*This new clause would ensure that landlords of private and social tenancies provide permission for home adaptations for people who have disabilities where a Home Assessment has been carried out.*

**New clause 24—Discrimination relating to requirement for home adaptations—**

“A relevant person must not, in relation to a dwelling that is to be let on an agreement which may give rise to a relevant tenancy—

(a) on the basis that a person does or may require home adaptations, prevent the person from—

(i) enquiring whether the dwelling is available for let,

(ii) accessing information about the dwelling,

(iii) viewing the dwelling in order to consider whether to seek to rent it, or

(iv) entering into a tenancy of the dwelling, or

(b) apply a provision, criterion or practice in order to make people requiring home adaptations less likely to enter into a tenancy of the dwelling than people who do not require home adaptations.”

**Amendment 57, in clause 1, page 1, line 13, at end insert—**

“unless the tenant meets the student test where the tenancy is entered into.

(1A) For the purposes of this section, a tenant who meets the student test when a tenancy is entered into has the same meaning as in Ground 4A.”

**Amendment 58, page 1, line 13, at end insert—**

“unless the landlord and the tenant mutually agree to have a fixed term during which period the landlord agrees to suspend the ability to seek possession under Ground 1 (Occupation by landlord or family), Ground 1A (Sale of dwelling-house) or Ground 6 (Redevelopment) of Schedule 2.

(1A) During a fixed term tenancy agreed under subsection (1) the landlord shall not be entitled to increase the rent as provided for by section 13.”

**Amendment 60, page 1, line 13, at end insert**

“unless the landlord acts as landlord for fewer than five properties.”

**Government amendments 12 to 17.**

**Amendment 1, in clause 7, page 9, line 6, leave out from “determination” to end of line 11 and insert—**

“(4AA) Where the rent for a particular period of the tenancy is to be greater than the rent for the previous period by virtue of a notice, determination or agreement mentioned in subsection (4A), the rent may not be greater than the rent for the previous period increased by the Bank of England Base Rate.

(4AB) Any provision relating to an assured tenancy to which this section applies is of no effect so far as it provides—

(a) that the rent for a particular period of the tenancy must or may be greater than the rent for the previous period otherwise than by virtue of a notice, determination or agreement mentioned in subsection (4A), or

(b) that the rent for a particular period of the tenancy, where greater than the rent for the previous period by virtue of a notice, determination or agreement mentioned in subsection (4A), must or may be greater than the rent for the previous period increased by the Bank of England Base Rate.”

*This amendment would cap in-tenancy rent increases to the Bank of England base rate.*

**Amendment 9, page 9, line 6, leave out from “determination” to the end of line 11 and insert—**

“(4AA) Where the rent for a particular period of the tenancy is to be greater than the rent for the previous period by virtue of a notice, determination or agreement mentioned in subsection (4A), the rent may not be greater than whichever is the lesser of—

(a) the rent for the previous period plus an increase equal to the rent multiplied by CPI; or

(b) the rent for the previous period plus an increase equal to the rent multiplied by the percentage increase in median national earnings.

(4AB) Any provision relating to an assured tenancy to which this section applies is of no effect so far as it provides—

(a) that the rent for a particular period of the tenancy must or may be greater than the rent for the previous period otherwise than by virtue of a notice, determination or agreement mentioned in subsection (4A), or

(b) that the rent for a particular period of the tenancy, where greater than the rent for the previous period by virtue of a notice, determination or agreement mentioned in subsection (4A), must or may be greater than the lesser of—

(i) the rent for the previous period plus an increase equal to the rent multiplied by CPI; or

(ii) the rent for the previous period plus an increase equal to the rent multiplied by the percentage increase in median national earnings.

(4AC) In this section—

“CPI” means the Consumer Prices Index 12-month rate published by the Office for National Statistics for 1 April preceding the date the notice is served.

“the percentage increase in median national earnings” means that calculated by the UK Statistics Authority over a three-year period ending on the date on which the notice was served.”

*This amendment would introduce limits on the increases which could be made to rents by landlords. The limits would be calculated by reference to increases in CPI or median national earnings.*

Amendment 5, in clause 8, page 11, line 16, at end insert—

- “(aa) after “subject to” insert “section 13(4AA) and”;
- (ab) omit from “concerned” to the end of the subsection and insert “should be let”;

*This amendment would amend the Housing Act 1988 so that when determining rents tribunals must take into account the limits on rent increases introduced by Amendment 9 and need not consider existing market rates.*

Amendment 6, page 11, line 17, leave out subsections (b), (c) and (d).

*This amendment is consequential on Amendment 5.*

Amendment 55, page 11, line 27, at end insert—

- “(4A) In subsection (2), after paragraph (b) insert—
  - “(ba) any change in the value of the dwelling-house resulting from improvement works to the property facilitated by any means-tested energy efficiency grant scheme”.

*This amendment would ensure that improvements to a property facilitated by means-tested energy efficiency grant schemes can be disregarded by a tribunal determining a new rent for the property, and can therefore not be used as grounds for increasing rent levels.*

Government amendment 27.

Amendment 61, in clause 11, page 16, line 26, at end insert—

- “(4) The Secretary of State must consult with representatives of the insurance sector before this section comes into effect to ensure that appropriate insurance products are available for tenants whose landlords have required insurance as a condition for consenting to the keeping of a pet.”

Government amendments 28 and 29.

Amendment 2, in clause 19, page 32, line 16, at end insert—

- “(aa) where it is given by a tenant in relation to a premises in which they are the first tenants since its construction, not less than twenty-four months before the date on which the notice is to take effect;”.

*This amendment would allow an assured short-term tenancy for the first two years after a premises is constructed.*

Government amendments 30 and 34 to 39.

Amendment 7, in clause 75, page 101, line 6, at end insert—

- “(2A) Information or documents to be provided under regulations under subsection (2) must include—
  - (a) in respect of a landlord entry—
    - (i) the address and contact details of the landlord;
    - (ii) the address and contact details of the managing agent;
    - (iii) details of each rented property owned by the landlord;
    - (iv) details of any enforcement action that any local authority has taken against the landlord;
    - (v) details of any enforcement action that any local authority has taken against the managing agent;
    - (vi) details of any banning orders or rent repayment orders that have been made against the landlord;
    - (vii) details of any reports that the landlord has failed to carry out works necessary to remedy any breaches of any applicable housing regulations within the timeframes set out by regulations made by the Secretary of State under section 10A(3) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985.
  - (b) in respect of a dwelling entry—

- (i) the address and contact details of the landlord;
- (ii) the address and contact details of the managing agent;
- (iii) details of any notices given to the previous tenant under section 8 of the Housing Act 1988, including the grounds relied upon;
- (iv) details of the rent that was payable at the commencement of the existing tenancy or, where there is no existing tenancy, the most recent tenancy;
- (v) details of any increases in the rent imposed during the existing tenancy and the previous tenancy;
- (vi) details of energy performance certificates required by regulation 6(5) of the Energy Performance of Buildings (England and Wales) Regulations 2012;
- (vii) details of gas safety certificates required by regulation 36 of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998;
- (viii) details of electrical safety reports required by the Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2010;
- (ix) details of checks required under regulation 4(1)(b) of the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015; and
- (x) details of any features of the dwelling relevant to people with disabilities.”

*This amendment would introduce specific requirements for landlord and dwelling entries on the Private Rented Sector Database.*

Government amendments 40 and 41.

Amendment 11, in clause 96, page 114, line 22, at end insert—

- “(1A) In section 40 (introduction and key definitions), in subsection (1) after “has” insert—
  - “breached a requirement imposed by sections 62(1) or 80(3) of the Renters' Rights Act 2025 or”.

*This amendment would enable a tribunal to make a rent repayment order where a landlord has failed to join a landlord redress scheme or have active entries in the private rented sector database.*

Amendment 3, in clause 98, page 117, line 33, after “(homelessness),” insert—

“or that is provided by the Ministry of Defence for use as service family accommodation,”.

*This amendment would extend the Decent Homes Standard to Ministry of Defence service family accommodation.*

Amendment 8, page 117, line 33, leave out from “(homelessness)” to the end of line 3 on page 118.

*This amendment would make the Decent Homes Standard apply to all homeless temporary accommodation provided under the Housing Act 1996 by adapting the definition of “residential premises” in the Housing Act 2004 to remove a requirement for such temporary accommodation to meet certain Government regulations.*

Government amendments 42 to 52.

Amendment 56, in clause 142, page 151, line 9, leave out from “subject to” to the end of line 27 and insert—

“the publication of an assessment under section [Assessment of operation of possession process].”

Amendment 10, in schedule 1, page 160, line 13, leave out subsection (a).

*This amendment would extend the special provisions for purpose-built student housing to HMO student properties.*

Government amendments 18 to 22.

Amendment 59, page 168, line 25, at end insert—



“20A After Ground 6 insert—

“Ground 6ZA

The landlord or superior landlord who is seeking possession intends to undertake such works as are necessary to ensure that the property meets the standards set out by regulations under

section 2A of the Housing Act 2004

and the intended work cannot reasonably be carried out without the tenant giving up possession of the dwelling-house because—

- (a) the tenant is not willing to agree to such a variation of the terms of the tenancy as would give such access and other facilities as would permit the intended work to be carried out, or
- (b) the nature of the intended work is such that no such variation is practicable, or
- (c) the tenant is not willing to accept an assured tenancy of such part only of the dwelling-house (in this sub-paragraph referred to as “the reduced part”) as would leave in the possession of his landlord so much of the dwelling-house as would be reasonable to enable the intended work to be carried out and, where appropriate, as would give such access and other facilities over the reduced part as would permit the intended work to be carried out, or
- (d) the nature of the intended work is such that such a tenancy is not practicable.”

Government amendments 23 to 26, 31 to 33, 53 and 54.

**Matthew Pennycook:** It is a pleasure to bring this important Bill back to the House this afternoon. Let me begin by thanking hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber for their engagement with it over recent months. In particular, I thank the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), and other members of the Committee for the diligent and thoughtful line-by-line scrutiny of the Bill that they undertook over the course of many sittings late last year.

This Labour Government promised to succeed where their predecessor had failed, by quickly and decisively acting to transform the experience of private renting in England. Today, we make further tangible progress towards delivering on that commitment. Our Renters' Rights Bill will modernise the regulation of our country's insecure and unjust private rented sector, levelling decisively the playing field between landlord and tenant. It will empower renters by providing them with greater security, rights and protections so that they can stay in their homes for longer, build lives in their communities and avoid the risk of homelessness.

It will ensure that we can drive up the quality of privately rented housing so that renters have access to good-quality and safe homes as a matter of course. It will also allow us to crack down on the minority of unscrupulous landlords who exploit, mistreat or discriminate against renters. The Bill will also provide tangible benefits for responsible landlords who provide high-quality homes and a good service to their tenants. Not only will its provisions see the reputation of the sector as a whole improve, as we clamp down on those landlords whose behaviour currently tarnishes it, but the Bill will also ensure that good landlords enjoy simpler regulation and clear and expanded possession grounds, so that they can regain their properties quickly when necessary.

Although we have eschewed the previous Government's habit of shoehorning swathes of new clauses into legislation following Second Reading, we needed to make a modest number of improvements to the Bill in Committee. Many of the amendments in question were minor and technical or consequential in nature, but I shall briefly explain to the House some of the more substantive changes.

To increase fairness for tenants being evicted because their landlord is at fault, we chose to make an amendment connected to ground 6A. As hon. Members will be aware this mandatory ground allows landlords to remove their tenants when eviction is necessary for them to comply not only with enforcement action, but as a result of separate changes that we made to the Bill with planning enforcement action as well. The amendment allows the court to require landlords to pay compensation to the tenant when they are forced to vacate their homes under such circumstances.

To provide greater flexibility for social landlords in meeting the demands of local housing markets, we widened ground 1B for rent-to-buy tenancies, ensuring that registered providers can take possession in all necessary circumstances. We also exempted assured tenancies from the 90-day rule, which protects housing supply in London and benefits permanent residents by preventing the conversion of family homes into short-term lets. Should a tenant give notice early in their tenancy, meaning that they leave before 90 consecutive nights have passed, these changes mean that the landlord will not automatically be found to have inadvertently provided temporary sleeping accommodation.

Lastly, we made changes to ensure that the introduction of a decent homes standard in the private rented sector works as intended.

**Helen Maguire** (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): Last week, I asked the Government to ensure that all service family accommodation meets the minimum standards of social housing, as set out in the decent homes standard. The Minister for Veterans confirmed that this is already done, so will the Government support amending the Renters' Rights Bill officially to extend the decent homes standard to Ministry of Defence service family accommodation?

**Matthew Pennycook:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question and I agree with the objective that she has in mind, but, as we discussed fairly extensively in Committee, we do not think that the Renters' Rights Bill and the way that the decent homes standard will apply to assured tenancies in this sector is right for MOD accommodation. The MOD is undertaking its own review, and I shall touch on that issue later in the debate.

As I was saying, the changes around the decent homes standard will guarantee that the appropriate person can always be subject to enforcement action and they close a potential gap that may have been exploited by clarifying the types of accommodation that will be required to meet the standard.

Today, we are proposing a small number of further improvements, most of which are again minor and technical in nature. As I have made clear repeatedly, the Government have long recognised that demands for extortionate amounts of rent in advance put undue financial strain on tenants and can exclude certain

[Matthew Pennycook]

groups from renting altogether. I am sure that many of us in the Chamber will have heard powerful stories from our constituents about the impact of such demands. The typical story is all too familiar. Tenants find and view a property which, as advertised, matches their budget only to find that, on application, they are suddenly asked to pay several months' rent up front to secure it. Tenants in such circumstances often confront an almost impossible choice: do they find a way to make a large rent-in-advance payment, thereby stretching their finances to breaking point, or do they walk away and risk homelessness if they are unable to find an alternative?

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for the work he has been doing. He highlighted the issue of tenants being asked to pay up front. In my constituency and many other London constituencies, that up-front cost amounts in some cases to a deposit to purchase a home. Does he agree that we need to look into that issue and into estate agents effectively getting tenants to bid against each other for private rented accommodation?

**Matthew Pennycook:** My hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee is absolutely right and, as I will detail, that is precisely why the Government are moving to prohibit that practice. As she will know, the Government have already moved to ban bidding wars through the Bill, where desperate tenants are often pitted against each other so that a landlord can extract the highest possible rental payment. Demands for large rent-in-advance payments—in many parts of the country, they can be six, nine or even 12 months' rent in advance—can have a similar effect, with tenants encouraged to offer ever larger sums up front to outdo the competition and secure a home that may or may not be of a good standard, or risk being locked out of renting altogether.

As I stated previously, the interaction of the new rent periods in clause 1, which cannot be longer than a month, and the existing provisions of the Tenant Fees Act 2019 related to prohibited payments, arguably provide a measure of protection against requests for large amounts of advance rent. As I made clear in Committee, however, there is a strong case for putting the matter beyond doubt, and that is what we intend to do.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): As the Minister will know, before coming to this place I worked for a homelessness charity in Harlow called Streets2Homes. Part of our role was to support homeless people—both rough sleepers and the hidden homeless—to get into rented accommodation, and often we provided deposits for that. Does he agree that the legislation will help charities like Streets2Homes provide more support to more people in need?

**Matthew Pennycook:** It absolutely will. I will detail some of the other changes that we are making to ensure that the Bill achieves our objectives.

Having listened to the concerns raised by numerous stakeholders, the views expressed on Second Reading and in Committee, and the representatives made to me by individual hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Darlington (Lola McEvoy), for Sheffield

Central (Abtisam Mohamed) and for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel), we have tabled new clauses 13 and 14.

New clause 14 would limit the amount of rent that a landlord can require to a maximum of one month. It would prevent unscrupulous landlords from using rent in advance to either set tenants against each other in de facto bidding wars or to exclude all together certain types of renters who are otherwise perfectly able to afford the monthly rent on a property. It does so by amending schedule 1 to the Tenant Fees Act 2019 so that any payment of rent made before a tenancy agreement is signed will be a prohibited payment. If a landlord or letting agent invites, encourages or accepts such a payment, they could face local authority enforcement action and a fine of up to £5,000.

New clause 13 would amend the Housing Act 1988 to ensure that tenants continue to be protected from unreasonable requests for rent to be paid early once a tenancy has commenced. Landlords will no longer be able to include any terms in the tenancy agreement that have the effect of requiring rent to be paid prior to the rent due date. Tenants will retain the flexibility to make payments of rent in advance within a tenancy agreement should they wish to do so.

The effect of the new clauses will be that tenants can be certain that the financial outlay to secure a tenancy will not exceed the cost of a tenancy deposit and the first month's rent, and that they will not be required to pay their rent earlier than agreed. The new clauses will thereby reduce the barriers that stop tenants moving from substandard or insecure housing, and I commend them to the House.

Hon. Members with large student populations in their constituencies will know that the dynamics of the general student rental market in many parts of the country see students compelled to make important decisions about accommodation long before they have formed stable friendship groups, or have had time to properly judge a property's condition or location, and to consequently pay substantial deposits at a point in time when they are already coping with significant additional costs. This arms race, in which students are pressured ever earlier in the year to enter into contracts for the subsequent academic year, clearly is not benefiting them, and it is arguable whether it benefits the student landlords engaged in it.

The Government have therefore tabled amendments 18 and 53, which will prevent the use of possession ground 4A in instances where a student tenancy was agreed more than six months in advance of the date of occupation, thereby helping to reduce the prevalence of the practice. I want to be clear that the amendment will not lead to an outright ban on contracts being agreed more than six months in advance. Instead, making the use of ground 4A conditional on not doing so will act as a strong disincentive against landlords who wish to use it to pressure students into early sign-ups, as many do now. I thank all those who have advocated for this change, including the former Member for Sheffield Central, Paul Blomfield, during his time in Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and Headingley, and organisations such as Unipol.

Having taken up the cause of a family in her constituency who were forced by a letting agent to continue to pay as guarantors for a property that had been rented by their

son before he tragically took his own life, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) has been campaigning for many years to protect bereaved families by prohibiting the practice. I pay tribute to her for her tireless efforts to secure a change in this area. She was unable to persuade the previous Government to make the necessary changes to the Renters (Reform) Bill, but this Government are determined to act to end the abhorrent practice where guarantors are held liable for unpaid rent owed solely as a result of the death of a tenant who is a family member.

We have tabled new clause 15, which will limit the liability of a guarantor of a tenancy agreement for rent in circumstances where a tenant has died. I should make it clear that if in a joint tenancy the guarantor is not a family member, their liability for rent will be maintained. We consider that fair because we do not think it is reasonable to remove the guarantor's liability and therefore expose a landlord to additional financial risk where the guarantor is not related to the deceased. Our new clause strikes the right balance: guarantors will be protected from being held liable for rent when they are grieving; landlords will be able to reclaim costs owed prior to a tenant's death; and guarantor's liability for other costs incurred under the tenancy will not be affected.

I turn to amendments 40 and 41, which will amend existing powers to charge fees for the private rented sector database. The amendments will expand the definition of relevant costs that can be considered when calculating such fees and would enable fee revenue to include PRS enforcement costs incurred by local housing authorities. Hon. Members should be assured that database fees will be calculated and agreed at a later date, with further details set out in secondary legislation and developed on the basis that fees must be reasonable and proportionate. The amendments do not alter that position. In setting the fees, a range of factors will be considered, including the costs incurred by landlords. However, we need to ensure that when calculating fees, we can take into account all relevant costs, and the amendments will ensure that that is the case.

Enabling fee revenue to include PRS enforcement costs is also important. For the reforms to have the impact we all want, effective enforcement will be crucial, and that point was debated at length in Committee. As we have touched on frequently throughout our consideration of the Bill, local housing authority capacity and resourcing is a real problem. The amendments provide an additional lever to help ensure that every local housing authority has the tools and resources it needs to carry out its enforcement role, so that good tenants and landlords benefit from a well-regulated and enforced PRS.

Amendments 35 to 39 will expand the scope of what can be covered by the compulsory fee that private landlords will be required to pay to fund the new PRS landlord ombudsman. They will ensure that the fee can cover the set-up costs of the ombudsman and activities specified in the regulations beyond those strictly necessary for mandatory aspects of landlord redress. That will allow the ombudsman to set up the core redress service and to provide additional member benefits, such as landlord-initiated mediation or voluntary member redress, without the costs having to be borne by the taxpayer.

I turn to amendments 42 to 52. Rent repayment orders are an important and effective tenant-led enforcement tool. They deter landlords from non-compliance and empower tenants to take action against unscrupulous landlords. The Bill will significantly strengthen rent repayment orders, including their extension to superior landlords in rent-to-rent arrangements. But we intend to go further and ensure that those sorts of arrangements cannot be used to evade responsibility and escape enforcement action. We are also making it clear that tenants and local authorities can seek a rent repayment order against any landlord in the chain, regardless of who they paid the rent to.

Amendments 24 and 26 will limit the circumstances in which landlords can use ground 7 to obtain possession from a person who has inherited a tenancy following the death of a tenant. They will provide greater security for bereaved tenants by preventing them from losing their home, and I acknowledge the role that Marie Curie has played in advocating for change in respect of the matter. Landlords will still be able to use ground 7 if the original tenant had inherited it by will or intestacy, or if the inheriting individual did not live in the property before the tenant passed away. Landlords will also be able to use ground 7 for specialist tenancies, such as supported and temporary accommodation. That is in recognition of the critical role such tenancies play in supplying housing to those with specialist needs.

Private registered providers are currently restricted from using the possession ground for redevelopment—ground 6—apart from where they have a superior landlord who wants to redevelop the property. Other possession grounds, such as the suitable alternative accommodation ground—ground 9—can be used to move tenants, but only if clear conditions are met. Although we expect PRPs to work closely with tenants to facilitate moves to enable redevelopment work, the Government accept that in limited cases it is increasingly hard to meet those conditions, preventing PRPs from progressing with crucial redevelopment work. I thank the National Housing Federation for raising concerns about that matter with me.

2.30 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): I welcome what the Minister just said. Is he aware that a lot of landlords are using unreasonable arguments to terminate tenancies or raise rents ahead of this legislation coming into force, and is there anything he or his Department can do to protect tenants during this stressful period for them?

**Matthew Pennycook:** There is a lot of bad practice out there. That is the very reason why the Government have acted so quickly to introduce these reforms, and we are confident that once they are in place, they will provide tenants with the protection that they deserve. In the interim, I am afraid that there will continue to be bad practice of the kind that the Bill will stamp out.

For the reasons that I have just alluded to, we have tabled amendments 19 and 22 to give private registered providers an alternative route for obtaining possession for redevelopment and for decant accommodation. Where the landlord seeks possession on ground 6 or ground 6ZA because they intend to carry out redevelopment work or want to move a tenant on from decant accommodation, they will need to provide alternative accommodation

[Matthew Pennycook]

that meets specific requirements. That includes the accommodation being affordable, in a suitable location and not overcrowded. The accommodation must also be let as an assured tenancy or equivalent, unless it is being let for a temporary period pending the tenant being moved to an assured tenancy or equivalent. To use ground 6ZA, landlords must give tenants prior notice to ensure that they are fully aware that the accommodation is provided for temporary decant use. If the landlord does not do that, they are liable for a fine of up to £7,000.

Where landlords wish to accommodate tenants temporarily in properties that are earmarked for redevelopment, social landlords must give prior notice, and set out in a written statement the intention to redevelop the accommodation and the timeframe for redevelopment. Under those circumstances, alternative accommodation will not need to be provided. Social landlords will also be required to pay removal expenses for social tenants when using ground 6 and ground 6ZA. We do not expect that the need to use those grounds will arise often in practice through the engagement of PRPs with tenants, but where needed, the amendments will ensure that significant redevelopment work is not unduly delayed.

Government amendments 12, 13, 17, 20, 21, 23, 28 to 30 and 54 are related and consequential provisions to reflect the new ability for landlords to gain possession for redevelopment and for decant accommodation. We think that this group of amendments gets the balance right, enabling PRPs to progress redevelopment and use temporary decant accommodation during redevelopment works, while ensuring that tenants are provided with appropriate alternative accommodation and removal expenses.

Let me turn finally to amendment 34. Clause 30 ensures that long leases can continue to function by excluding leases over seven years from the assured regime. Those leases are typically used in purchases of leasehold and shared-ownership properties. I am grateful to stakeholders for raising concerns about the possibility of some unscrupulous landlords using clause 30 to circumnavigate the new assured regime by issuing leases of over seven years with a break or early-termination clause that is operable in the first few years. Tenants must not be cheated out of the protections of the assured tenancy regime. The amendment will therefore exclude all leases over 21 years from the assured regime. That will act as a much stronger deterrent to landlords who seek to avoid the assured tenancy regime. The amendment also excludes existing leases of between seven and 21 years, to ensure that they can continue to operate as currently intended. It also ensures that regulated home purchase plans can continue to enable consumers to purchase properties using the principles of Islamic finance by adding them to the list of excluded tenancies in schedule 1 to the Housing Act 1988.

The amendments that the Government have tabled for consideration today are a series of targeted changes designed to ensure that the Bill works as intended, and I commend them all to the House. I thank hon. Members for their efforts to improve the Bill, and for the scrutiny and challenge that the Bill has received so far. I look forward to listening to the remainder of the debate.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** I call the shadow Minister.

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): May I echo the Minister's comments, and extend my thanks to him and his team, the other Members who served on the Committee, and the many witnesses who came in to share their views? It is clear that a lot of the discussion has been on the real-world impact that the legislation will have, rather than on political points, and in that spirit, I will set out my responses, and the rationale behind a number of the amendments that we have tabled, which will be the subject of debate and votes this afternoon.

Clearly, legislation is about striking the right balance. This afternoon, we will recognise—as we have done in our contributions to debate on this issue—the impact that the Bill will have on tenants, landlords and the stakeholders whom our amendments seek to protect. I highlight in particular the impact on students; on financially vulnerable tenants, such as those with low credit scores; on tenants who have pets; on small landlords, who are themselves vulnerable to financial shocks; and of course on other groups, such as agricultural workers and those with work-related accommodation, including NHS workers, military families and school staff, all of whom were mentioned in Committee and will, I am sure, be covered again later. All our amendments have sought to address practical issues, such as ensuring that when work is required on a property and a tenant is reluctant to allow the landlord in to carry out that work for whatever reason, there is sufficient freedom and flexibility in the legislation to ensure that the work can take place.

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): The shadow Minister talks about situations in which tenants must leave a property. A constituent of mine had a terrible ordeal. She moved into a new rental property, but after three months it became uninhabitable, and she spent a further 11 weeks going in and out of eight Airbnbs. She was left thousands of pounds out of pocket because the landlord's insurance covered his loss of rent but did not cover the accommodation costs that she incurred as a tenant. Will the shadow Minister support my new clause 22, which would require landlords to hold appropriate insurance for the purposes of paying any costs related to alternative accommodation in such situations?

**David Simmonds:** There are a number of ways to address that issue. The Minister has talked compensation, and we have tabled amendments on insurance, but clearly there needs to be an effective dispute resolution mechanism in place, so that such situations can be resolved when they arise. We were focused in particular on ensuring that there is sufficient flexibility when, for example, work must be carried out to improve energy efficiency or to address health and safety concerns such as mould, and a tenant needs to leave because the work will render the property uninhabitable.

Although there have been substantial areas of agreement on the Bill, much of which takes forward work that started under the previous Government in their Renters (Reform) Bill, we have concerns that it creates significant new problems for the availability and affordability of accommodation in the private rented sector. That sector,

we must not forget, enjoys the highest tenant satisfaction of any private tenure: 82% of private renters say that they are satisfied with their accommodation.

The backdrop is challenging, and has become a lot more so recently. The Chancellor's Budget has set inflation rising, and borrowing costs are soaring. Markets are responding to the chaos in No. 11, and that is causing a great deal of uncertainty for tenants and landlords alike. Her decisions are stoking inflation, and that is pushing up rent and housing costs of all kinds. The black hole in local government funding, which was unveiled just before Christmas, means that councils facing the twin existential threats of wholesale reorganisation and growing funding shortfalls lack certainty from the Government about the funding to deliver this enormous increase in workload.

**Florence Eshalomi:** I know that the shadow Minister cares passionately about this area, especially in the light of his local government experience. Given that financial pressures on local authorities are added to by the need to provide temporary accommodation to families facing eviction, does he agree that we should have abolished section 21 no-fault evictions sooner?

**David Simmonds:** I say gently to the hon. Lady that had Labour-run Lambeth council not recently rushed to put 200 of its own people on the streets using section 21, because it is concerned about the impact that the Bill will have on its housing situation, that would have more credibility. It is clear that this is a difficult situation in all parts of the country. There is a significant shortfall in emergency accommodation in London in particular, and a rising cost attached to it there, just as other areas of the country have a surplus of accommodation. That is all part of a complex picture. We need to make sure that everything works efficiently and effectively together, and it is absolutely right that we set out our concerns about whether the Bill goes far enough in all areas towards addressing those issues—and about whether, in some cases, it goes too far.

I touched on the impact of the black hole in local government funding. Another area that is driving significant pressure is the Government's approach to asylum. They are granting refugee status faster, so people are being pushed out of the doors of Home Office asylum dispersal accommodation and on to local housing waiting lists. I am sure that many hon. Members in this Chamber will have been lobbied by their local authority about the impact of that additional pressure—those additional people, who under our laws are perfectly entitled to that housing—on supply in their area. All those things have a huge collective impact on the pool of available housing.

Of course, as we have seen in the news, the declining confidence abroad in our economy is reducing the number of overseas students. That makes it more important than ever to support thriving student accommodation through tenancies that address students' needs properly—especially the needs of students who are older, have families, or are studying for higher degrees and have a fixed commitment to a location. All those requirements need to be addressed effectively in this legislation.

Does the Bill in its new form rise to those challenges? It is clear that it fails to ensure that landlords can recover their property quickly when they need to. That reduces their incentive to rent it out, especially for small landlords. If the hon. Member for Hampstead and

Highgate (Tulip Siddiq) needs to recover some of her property portfolio to return it to another owner, will she have the assurance under this Bill that due process is available to her? The Bill fails to ensure a flexibility and freedom of contract that allows tenants and landlords to agree a deal that suits them both. Students wanting to book accommodation for a guaranteed period of two years—or shorter or longer—and those moving to a new location for a fixed-term work contract require opportunities and flexibility that are taken away by this legislation.

The Bill takes away landlords' opportunity to make allowances for financially riskier tenants, such as those with a poor credit record, through rent in advance or other safeguarding arrangements that give the landlord confidence that they will not lose out. That locks financially vulnerable people out of the rental market. The Bill also puts enormous obligations on local councils—one of the biggest additional sets of burdens and expectations in generations—and there is no real clarity yet on how it will be resourced, at a time when all the wider uncertainties that I have described add up to a great deal of additional cost. The Bill also fails to provide the necessary assurance that tenants who have pets and need to access insurance as part of their tenancy conditions will be able to find affordable insurance. That is dealt with in our new clause 21. More concerning still, the Bill is a missed opportunity to provide this House with a proper impact assessment, or the assurance of a future review that would give us really good evidence on which to base our decisions. Our new clause 20 would address that shortcoming, and the House will have the opportunity to vote for it shortly.

Let me give an example of where there is significant uncertainty. In some of the political knockabout, the Government have sought to blame their predecessor for court delays, while claiming that there are no delays worthy of regard in the passage of this Bill, which loads more regulation on to the sector. Both of those things cannot be true simultaneously, so let us properly assess the impact of the Bill before we legislate. There is a lot of good will—for example, on the point about tenants with pets being able to access the accommodation that they need. We do not want to find ourselves returning to this issue in the House because the legislation failed to achieve what we had hoped.

Clearly, it is the role of this Chamber to scrutinise and question, and it is the role of the Opposition to oppose when we cannot see that the legislation before us will result in an improvement in the lot of the people of this country. A pattern is emerging. The Government came after the farmers. They came after the pubs. They came after the small businesses. They came after the private schools. They came after our local councillors. Now this Bill, in its new form, comes after our tenants and our landlords. It is very clear from the number of Government amendments, which the Minister referred to, that the points we made in Committee about the many shortcomings of the Bill that need to be addressed were not lost on the Government.

I return to the point that even a Labour council—a bastion such as Lambeth, led by the Labour chair of London Councils—is rushing to use section 21 to evict its own tenants in advance of this Bill because of the impact it will have. A Labour council and a Labour Government are putting their own people out of their homes.

2.45 pm

I know that the Minister is no Corbynista—we have certainly learnt that in the debate; in fact, I even discovered that he has named his dog after Clement Attlee, who I assume is a great political hero—but Government new clauses 13 and 14 will make this Bill so much worse for prospective tenants. Many of us will have had constituents come to our surgeries who are turning their life around. They have got a job, an income and some savings, but they do not have a good credit record, and they face being locked out of the housing market because the necessary flexibilities and measures that would address that credit score concern are effectively prohibited. Foreign workers coming to the UK, needing to access accommodation and provide sufficient guarantees; foreign students; people who are retired and looking to downsize to a rental property; and people who, for family reasons, cannot access a guarantor will all find themselves significantly disadvantaged by Government new clauses 13 and 14, which increase the risk to landlords by taking away mitigations and take away people's freedom to reach a contract and an agreement that suits them.

I know that Labour Members are very keen on asking Conservative Members for apologies, so I am going to conclude with one.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): Apologise!

**David Simmonds:** I promise the hon. Member that that is exactly what I am going to do. I am going to make an apology to all those in the private rented sector. *[Interruption.]* The Minister says from a sedentary position that I have only four hours. I am afraid that I will not be able to go through all the private tenants individually, but the apology will be fulsome. I say to those in the private rented sector, 82% of whom are very satisfied with their accommodation, that I am sorry that they will be faced with the mess that this Bill will create, whether they are seeking to rent their first home or need to move to a new one.

**Chris Vince:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**David Simmonds:** I will not give way, because I am concluding. We on the Conservative Benches give those people the undertaking that while they may have to endure that situation until the next election, we will put it right, for the benefit of landlords and tenants alike.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Gideon Amos** (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): I thank the Minister for his constructive work with the Liberal Democrats and other parties in Committee.

For a generation cut off from the dream of home ownership who find that, after half a century of flogging off social houses and council houses—over 1.5 million have been lost since 1980—there are now basically none left, it is vital that we restore hope to millions who aspire to a decent home. As such, the Liberal Democrats support the key principle of this Bill, which is to bring an end to no-fault evictions. After the continual stop-start of the previous Government, giving tenants the security they deserve is long overdue. It is time to end once and for all the fear that any complaint from any tenant could be met with an instant eviction notice at any moment.

Of course, landlords do not generally act in such a cavalier fashion; most are good landlords, and we value them and what they bring to the market. As such, to sustain a healthy private rented sector, we have tabled amendment 10, which would extend to off-street student rental landlords the same possession laws that apply to purpose-built student accommodation. Given that fully 31% of properties on the Accommodation for Students website are one or two-bedroom properties rather than houses in multiple occupancy, as Unipol and the Higher Education Policy Institute have pointed out, that is a big chunk of the market, and one that needs to be addressed.

The need for more homes is why we have tabled amendment 2, which would particularly incentivise more build-to-rent accommodation. In Taunton and Wellington, our Lib Dem council has supported the delivery of tens of thousands of new homes; our population increased by 10% up to 2021. Our manifesto called for 150,000 social homes per year—I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests regarding my experience as a social landlord. We clearly set out the borrowing of £6 billion per year that would make that happen, unlike the Labour and Conservative manifestos, which included no numbers whatsoever for social housing.

We need a lot of that build-to-rent accommodation also to be rent to own, so renters can accrue ownership of their own home. It is time to give a whole generation of young people who have been excluded that elusive first step on the housing ladder. Amendment 2 would therefore give a developer of build-to-rent housing the security of a fixed term of 24 months for the first tenancy. Since that was tabled, I have heard from the British Property Federation and others, and they have suggested that an initial fixed term of six months would enable them to secure the investment they need to build more and to get building. That would not undermine the general principle of moving to periodic tenancies, as build to rent is only 0.1% of the housing stock. We will not press amendment 2, but I genuinely urge the Government to take up the idea, run with it and generate more investment in new homes.

Let me turn to the interests of tenants, which have been so overlooked for so long. My constituent and friend Mike Godleman, who was disabled, died while recovering from major surgery and under the threat of a no-fault eviction notice, for no reason he could possibly work out. In part in his memory, our new clause 23 would ensure that landlords of both private and social tenancies must give permission for home adaptations when a home assessment has been carried out. If rental bidding is to be outlawed, as the Minister said, it must not be replaced by bidding up rent in advance, so our new clause 1 would limit rent in advance to two months' rent. In that respect, I welcome Government new clause 13.

In-tenancy rent increases also need to be limited to protect tenants from exorbitant increases. The most sensible way to do this is set out in our amendment 1, which would peg increases to the Bank of England base rate. Property is a financial and investment asset, and landlords' costs are more directly influenced by mortgage rates rather than by the general inflation and the cost of living. New clause 22, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), would require landlords to pay for alternative accommodation when dwellings are unfit for human habitation.

Turning to the amendments proposed by other hon. Members, we support the proposed new clause 10 in the name of the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), which will prevent the guarantor from being liable on the death of a tenant, and we recognise that the Government have tabled new clause 15 to limit that liability, rather than end it altogether. We also support amendment 7 on the content that must be submitted for inclusion in the database. The database could be a very powerful instrument for tenants if it provides information, as I spoke about at some length in Committee. We also support new clause 6, which would give care leavers support through funding for a deposit when they move out of care. Both those amendments are in the name of the hon. Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker).

One of the biggest concerns to landlords, tenants and local communities in Taunton and Wellington, as it is in Cornwall, the lakes and other places, is that there is no control over the number of homes being turned into holiday lets and Airbnbs. This has prompted a significant increase to about 3,000 holiday homes in Somerset—a 33% increase in short-term rentals in the south-west since 2019. Visitors of course bring welcome investment, but in some areas second homes are pricing locals out of local markets.

**Mr Lee Dillon (Newbury) (LD):** My hon. Friend is talking about second homes, which can particularly affect rural communities. Schedule 1 provides mandatory grounds to recover possession in order to house an agricultural worker, but does he agree that the definition of “agricultural worker” is limited and does not reflect rural workers—for example, those who work in the horse training industry in the village of Lambourn in my constituency, where local housing is key to that industry given the nature and the hours of the work of stable staff?

**Gideon Amos:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That definition needs to cover the breadth of agricultural workers, and I am sure the Minister has heard his point.

Liberal Democrats have long argued for a licensing system and tougher planning controls for second homes, with a new use class to cover second homes and short-term lets. Both this and previous Governments have said that they would create a new use class, so I urge the Minister to say in today’s debate whether that will really happen. Without controls, there is a serious risk of second homes proliferating if landlords do not wish to be part of a more regulated private rented sector following the enactment of this Bill. Our new clause 2 would therefore require the Government to assess properly the growth in short-term lets, and I urge the Minister to do so. In fact, I am not sure why anyone would oppose that amendment.

Finally, our amendment 3 would apply the Bill’s proposed decent homes standard to military service family accommodation. I am grateful to the Minister for taking the time to write to me on this, but the argument that a standard would not be suitable for service family accommodation does not stand up, because clause 98 allows the Secretary of State to establish whatever version of the decent homes standard they feel is appropriate. I do not think anyone across the House would understand why that should be different

for service families. We will no doubt hear the Ministry of Defence say that 90% or more of service family accommodation already meets the decent homes standard so it is all okay, but in that case, why not make that claim evident by subjecting that accommodation to the decent homes standard in the Bill?

To say that the recently published “Service Accommodation” report from the Defence Committee, under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), says something different from the official reports would be a massive understatement. The Select Committee reported evidence from one service family, who said:

“It is impossible to challenge the ‘Decent Homes Standard’ without paying for a survey yourself. It is widely accepted that each house has not been checked but either guessed or it is assumed that the standard of one house is the same as all in one area.”

I therefore ask how sure we can be of the self-declared statistics from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, or were they from Annington homes? As another witness before the Select Committee said:

“It is disingenuous for DIO to present glossy brochures about being ‘decent homes plus’ when they are anything but”

and

“it is clear that the DIO’s property frequently does not meet the standards.”

Crucially, the witness added:

“Moreover, there is no local authority”—

or anyone else—

“to hold them to account as would be the case for private and other local landlords.”

That is exactly what amendment 3 would provide.

In the Kerslake report, commissioned before the election by the now Secretary of State for Defence—a former Housing Minister—reports of damp, mould and, in other service accommodation, rat infestations abound. If all the witnesses and all these reports are wrong and the official figures are right, showing that over 90% of properties meet the decent homes standard, there is nothing for the MOD to fear in subjecting service accommodation to that assessment, just as social and private landlords will have to do under the Bill. The hard work of my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) got even the previous Government to come round to the idea, and the then Minister, the former Member for Redcar, said in this Chamber on 24 April last year that the Government:

“intend to ensure that service accommodation meets the decent homes standard”.—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2024; Vol. 748, c. 1029.]

Service families such as those of 40 Commando Royal Marines, part of our Taunton and Wellington family community, make massive sacrifices for our country, and sometimes make the ultimate sacrifice. They deserve decent homes, and the MOD should be required to meet the standard, just as the Government are requiring that of other landlords. I am grateful to see support for amendment 3 from across the House. We will be voting for it this evening to support our service families, and I urge Members across the House to vote for it, too.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** I call the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee.

**Florence Eshalomi:** I start by paying tribute to Members from across the House who have tabled an amendment at this stage, and to the Minister, who has engaged constructively with Members between Second Reading and Report.

As we debate this Bill today, it is important to remember why it is so badly needed: the dire situation that many tenants across all our constituencies are facing through no fault of their own. We have to ask ourselves how we got to a position where tenants have the threat of eviction held over their head for no good reason. How did we get to a position where tenants can be given only a couple of months to raise thousands of pounds for rent in advance, on top of moving costs and the deposit? How did we get to a position where the average rent went up by 9.1% last year? For far too long tenants have been the innocent victims of an unjust power balance in the rental market. As a result, many of them have been unable to keep a roof over their heads and, sadly, have fallen into homelessness. This cannot continue any longer. We need a fairer deal for renters.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Has the hon. Member noticed, as I have, an increase in the number of threatened evictions at the present time, as well as no-fault evictions, excessive rent rises and harassment by landlords of private sector tenants? Does she believe that there is any immediate and urgent protection that we can give those tenants?

3 pm

**Florence Eshalomi:** As a fellow London MP, the right hon. Member will see what I see in my inbox, with many tenants facing that threat on an almost daily basis. They are the same tenants who come to our advice surgeries and are turned away from overstretched council departments, and who cannot apply to social housing waiting lists because those lists are already full. It is important that we get guarantees and protections for those tenants as outlined in the Bill, and hopefully help my constituents and his, and people up and down the country.

This situation cannot be allowed to continue. I am proud that the Bill will be strengthened by some of the welcome amendments that Members have tabled. I extend my support to new clause 3, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel), on limiting rent payable in advance. That is a big issue in my constituency of Vauxhall and Camberwell Green, and I have spoken to many tenants who are being asked to stump up six to 12 months' rent in advance. That leaves many people priced out of the rental market, ending in a race to the bottom where landlords can charge more and more for less in return.

How can someone finally find a place that they want to call home, only to be told that they need to pay out thousands upon thousands of pounds up front? In some cases, because of the rents charged in my constituency, and many others, the money that people are asked to stump up in advance would amount to a deposit if they took it to purchase a home in another part of the country. We are talking in excess of £30,000 if someone is asked to stump up, with an average rent of £2,500 per calendar month in my constituency. The result is that those who do not have significant savings or family wealth end up needing to borrow money just to have

somewhere to live. That cycle of exploitation is pushing thousands of people into debt, impacting them for the rest of their lives.

Research from StepChange shows that one in six private renters are relying on credit to make ends meet. Something must change, because the system is broken. We must lower immediate financial pressures on tenants and make private renting fairer for everyone. That is why I welcome the amendments tabled by the Secretary of State, and I urge the House to support measures that will reduce up-front costs for all renters.

My constituency is home to thousands of university students from great universities across London. Students often have the most insecure housing, because landlords know that they can charge a new group higher rents every year. I therefore welcome measures that restrict the time that a landlord can agree a new tenancy, prior to the end of the current tenancy in student housing. Many of us will remember the time when we went to university and looked for accommodation. We signed up to live with friends or someone we knew—perhaps by Christmas we had all fallen out, and there was that frantic search when someone left the property and we had to find a new flatmate. Many social media posts are put on SpareRoom.com or Facebook, and university students need time to bed into their new accommodation. The new clause will help to give students that breathing space, and avoid the problems they face as a result of early sign-up accommodation.

New clause 10 addresses a vital issue, and I pay tribute to my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), for tabling it and for her tireless campaigning. The death of a loved one is a difficult and challenging time for anybody, and the one thing people need is the time and space to grieve. Under current rules, guarantors can end up facing a huge bill for the remainder of their loved one's rent. None of us would want to be placed in that situation. It is right that the Government have acted to prevent guarantors from being faced with that unacceptable scenario, and I urge the House to support the new clause.

I also wish briefly to touch on some other amendments, which I hope the Government will consider during the Bill's passage in the other place. Although the Bill introduces a rent tribunal for unfair rent rises, there is concern from groups such as the Renters Reform Coalition that measures in the Bill do not go far enough to prevent landlords from evicting a tenant under the guise of a large rent increase. I am particularly concerned that market rent may not be an appropriate benchmark when market data is poor. Renters at the bottom end of the market could end up being told that an unaffordable rent rise is acceptable under this system. We need guarantees that the use of a tribunal will resolve that, and that it is available and accessible to tenants.

In Scotland, only a handful of rent increase cases a year go through the tribunal system to the rent officer, and it would severely undermine the Bill if tenants who were being exploited did not take up the option available to them. I would be grateful if the Minister could explain how the Government will encourage the take-up of such a provision, and whether he will support the alternative measures and safeguards in the Bill, such as amendment 9, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker).



Finally, a number of amendments have touched on the vital issue of home adaptations in the private rental sector. It is not fair that disabled tenants end up with reduced access to their own homes. The Government are rightly looking at making it easier for disabled people to thrive in the workplace, but what is the point of someone thriving if they do not even have an adequate home or housing?

We cannot expect someone to go out and work and contribute to the economy if they have not had a good night's sleep. Can any of us imagine being unable to have a shower in our own flat because the landlord refuses to make the necessary adaptations, or trying to cook in a kitchen when we cannot even reach the worktops? None of us would want to live in such conditions, yet that is the reality for many disabled people in the private rented sector in 2025 in the UK. People face such issues on a daily basis, with more challenges and blockages when trying to get private landlords to address them.

I urge the Government to ensure that disabled people do not face a private rented sector that is far too often completely inaccessible to them. I look forward to the Government responding to the report by my Committee's predecessor on disabled people in the housing sector. The House must continue to look at how we fight for a rental sector that works for everyone, regardless of their background.

**Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): I was privileged to serve on the Bill Committee, and it is good to see many fellow members of the Committee in the House this afternoon. Before I start, I wish to pay tribute to the many excellent landlords across our country. The Bill has been designed to tackle the worst offenders, but it is worth putting on the record that thousands upon thousands of landlords do a good job of providing long-term accommodation for many people in the private rented sector. On Second Reading and in Committee we spoke about the unintended consequences that exist in the Bill, some of which still remain—that was alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds).

**Rebecca Paul** (Reigate) (Con): My hon. Friend raises an important point about unintended consequences. Does she agree that it is important we consider our key workers, such as NHS staff and police, who rely on accommodation tied to their employment? With the abolition of assured shorthold tenancies, it is important to ensure that provisions are there to support such tenancies, so that they can continue and we can retain and attract much-needed police officers and NHS staff.

**Rebecca Smith:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and that is a perfect example of one of the unintended consequences that I do not believe have been put in deliberately but are something that we might see as a result of the Bill. Other issues include accidental landlords—those who did not intend to be landlords and are not large portfolio holders—and small landlords, and we have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner about the challenge they face regarding economic drivers and the risk of the market shrinking. We talked a lot about that on Second Reading, but ultimately landlords are leaving the market, and if there are fewer homes for people to rent, we are in a worse situation.

I support new clause 20, which stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner. I believe a review of the Bill's impact on the housing market after a year is important to ensure that we make it even better than it already is, and to address those unintended consequences. We can all agree that is important, given the challenges we have already heard about regarding the long housing waiting lists and the homelessness rife across our country. It is also important to listen to landlords.

In particular, I draw attention to some of the reasons why new clause 20 is so important. Plymouth Access to Housing, known as PATH, is a key player in tackling homelessness in my constituency, and it works especially with those who are harder to place into accommodation. It has rightly said that it supports the Bill in principle—as we have heard, the Opposition support large parts of it too—but in a buoyant private rental market. It is concerned that it is not buoyant, so there is already a challenge. That is why a review would be important. PATH also says that it has received funding in the past to support landlords to stay in the private rented sector. What plans does the Minister have, perhaps outside of this Bill, to ensure that such organisations, in which some Members present today have worked, might be able to mitigate the impact of some of those future challenges?

The South West Landlords Association, which I have mentioned, would benefit from new clause 20, because it would allow for an assessment of a provision that essentially amounts to a doubling of the amount of rent arrears that can be accrued and of the notice required for possession before a landlord can get somebody out of their property. Landlords are particularly concerned about that, for the financial reasons we have already set out. If they have to wait for three months of arrears and then another month's notice before they can remove someone from their property when they have not been paying rent, that has a massive impact on small landlords, and on those accidental landlords in particular—that is nearly half a year of income they would lose. Ultimately, it is the luck of the draw. We do not know in advance how good tenants will be. If someone has an excellent tenant, it is not a problem, but with a bad tenant it is not so good.

**Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Does she agree that, fundamentally, the only way to secure the rights of tenants is to ensure the buoyant rental market that she is talking about, where landlords want to enter and invest in it? They are then competing for tenants in the market, which is the biggest and most powerful force of all. That will drive decent behaviour towards tenants, and without that, landlords cannot gain and retain tenants.

**Rebecca Smith:** I appreciate the point that my right hon. Friend makes. I agree that the market is important, but I also appreciate that there are some whom the market has failed. We have to find a situation where those who are not looked after by their landlords can receive support, but, as I have already said, my concern is that the Bill goes too far in the opposite direction.

**Graham Stuart:** With the freedom of being on the Back Benches, I can say that the last Conservative Government got this wrong. When they stopped landlords

[Graham Stuart]

being able to offset the interest payments on the mortgage for that commercial asset against their income, it was one step among many that reduced the number of landlords coming into the market. Each step along the way, instead of seeking to strengthen the market, successive Governments—Conservative then, and the process is bound to be completed by Labour now—moved against landlords to make it a less and less investable asset. Ultimately, those who lose out most are tenants.

**Rebecca Smith:** I agree with my right hon. Friend that ultimately tenants are at risk of losing out if there are no properties left in the market. That leads me on to my next point and one of the other reasons why an assessment would be useful in the light of new clause 20. We heard in Committee that rural landlords are particularly concerned. According to the Country Land and Business Association, 44% of landlords are planning to sell in the next two years, and only 21% are planning to build new properties. When 90% of those planning to leave cite reforms to the private rented sector as a reason, we need an opportunity to reflect and to see the impact assessment.

Having set out some of my reasons for supporting new clause 20, I will turn briefly to new clause 15, which has been mentioned many times already. I appreciate why it has been tabled in the tragic circumstances that have been laid out. In the light of some conversations we had in Committee, I am interested to see who is in scope to be considered family for the purposes of that guarantor system. The new clause lists

“child...grandchild...parent...grandparent...sibling...niece or nephew...aunt or uncle...or, a cousin”.

That is a wide but—I think we would all agree—highly realistic view of what family is. However, in schedule 1 to the Bill, a landlord can only evict an existing tenant to house a parent, grandparent, sibling, child or grandchild.

I raised this matter with the Minister in Committee, and I know that he thinks tenants' rights would be inhibited if we extended the definition of family, but I find it puzzling that a wide extended family is justified in new clause 15, but not in the determination of who lives in a property under schedule 1. Often, those family members may be vulnerable themselves and need somewhere to live. It is a niche point, but for the Government to say that someone cannot house their niece or nephew—or, in the light of new clause 15, their aunt, uncle or cousin—feels like an overreach of the state. We are slightly testing ownership rights and restricting trust and freedom in society as a result.

3.15 pm

Briefly, I am not a big fan of amendment 7. It lists some excessive details for what has to be provided in the landlords register, in particular the landlord's name and address. We all know how worried we are about our names and addresses being in the public domain, and expecting landlords, who are ultimately business people, to do the same is one step too far. We also need to look at when a conviction for being a bad landlord is spent. If a landlord is reformed at some point, we have to give them the opportunity to show that and ultimately provide homes as a result.

Finally, I support new clause 6, tabled by the hon. Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker), on looked-after children. This issue came up in last week's debate on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, and I spoke to it then. We need to do more to ensure that as corporate parents, which ultimately every single local authority is, we act like parents and that wider family. If a young person needs a deposit or a rent guarantee to enable them to get into the private rented sector when other options for housing are not available, we should look at that. I am not sure whether that measure will be voted on today, but in principle the hon. Lady has my support, and I hope we will be able to work together on that.

**Michael Wheeler** (Worsley and Eccles) (Lab): I was pleased to serve on the Public Bill Committee for this legislation, which is a concrete example of the positive difference that this Labour Government are making to people's lives. I fundamentally believe that everyone should have somewhere they can call home and that they should feel secure in that home. The Bill will deliver massive improvements for the millions of tenants in the private rented sector, who for too long have been forced to pay over the odds for housing that is often inadequate and insecure. It finally addresses the clear imbalance of power between landlords and tenants by levelling the playing field through the delivery of a once-in-a-generation boost to tenants' rights, moving away from expensive, precarious, poor-quality accommodation and ending a status quo that has left tenants under the constant threat of losing their home.

On the Bill Committee, we heard evidence of landlords demanding multiple months of rent up front at the start of a tenancy. That highly exclusionary practice shuts lower income renters out of the market by requiring them to hand over thousands of pounds on top of their deposit at the start of a tenancy. The spread of this practice would have a devastating impact on the choices available to many tenants, so I warmly welcome new clauses 13 and 14 in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), which address the issue.

Turning to section 21 evictions, one of the absolute privileges of being an MP is going to visit local schools to answer questions from pupils. Those questions can be about anything, but they normally relate to the interests and experiences of the children, such as, “What can you do about the traffic?”, “How can you make my park and playground better?”, and even—this is a real one—“I really like trees. Do you like trees?” On a recent visit to St Andrew's primary school in Eccles, I was given a poignant reminder of why we are here and why this Bill is so important. One of the pupils asked me, “What are you doing to stop people being kicked out of their homes for no reason?” It was a shocking question to hear from someone so young, and it serves as an appalling illustration of how wide the fear of no-fault evictions is. No child should even know what a section 21 eviction is, and no child should live in fear of losing their home. We cannot allow these evictions to continue. For me, that is the most critical part of the Bill. It is beyond time to end the spectre of homelessness that hangs over these tenants and end section 21 evictions, giving people a steady, strong, secure foundation to build their lives around.

Unfortunately, no-fault evictions are just one of the many challenges facing tenants. Action to tackle unaffordable rents is badly needed, which is why the measures in the Bill to end rental bidding wars and stop the use of unreasonable rent increases designed to drive out tenants are so important. Never-ending rent increases are bad for tenants and bad for the economy, absorbing money that could be spent more productively elsewhere.

I welcome the measures in the Bill to drive up standards across the sector, such as the application of the decent homes standard and the establishment of a private rented sector database. All of those reforms are entirely necessary in a market where, year after year, tenants are expected to pay more for less.

It is hard to overstate the impact that housing has on people's lives or the detrimental effects caused by the sector's current flaws. The Bill's reforms decisively rebalance a broken sector, ending the scandal of no-fault evictions and encouraging the market to provide affordable, high-quality accommodation with security of tenure. The Bill represents real and meaningful action, which we all should welcome.

**Mr Will Forster** (Woking) (LD): Many of us are described as either a dog person or a cat person. I have had my dog for over five years now, and as a result I definitely feel like a dog person. Joking aside, it is quite clear that we as a country are in love with our pets; so many of us are defined by them. The laws that govern us should reflect how we live and how we choose to live, but our lack of respect for people's ability to bring a pet into their home is shocking. That is why I am pleased with the Bill.

Sadly, there are gaps for pet owners in the rental market in particular, which not only creates an uneven playing field for people choosing new homes but fills animal shelters with much-loved pets that should be in their stable homes. Many pets are in animal shelters because of landlords' unfair rules introduced over the years. According to research conducted by Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, only 8% of private landlords list their properties as pet-friendly. I do not just want to talk about statistics, as the numbers have real-life consequences for families and animals.

In my constituency of Woking, a woman along with her family were evicted after 16 years of a tenancy because the landlord decided to sell the property. The council tried to find alternative housing for the family but repeatedly came up against obstacles, including a no pets policy, which would have forced her and her family to give up their three cats, including one that her autistic son is emotionally bonded to—his emotional support pet. A letter from the GP stated how important the cat was to her child's wellbeing, but it did not help. The cat reduced her son's anxiety levels and helped him with his day-to-day functioning—it had a huge impact. Housing officers noted that they could have considered the family for a place in some new flats that the council had built, but the housing provider did not accept pets.

Sadly, that case, which is not unique, perfectly illustrates the emotional toll that the rules can have on families, particularly those with additional needs. Pet ownership might seem like a small issue in the face of homelessness, eviction and the heart-wrenching issues that we have heard about, but it is clear that sometimes, because

there are no protections for families with pets, people are forced into a horrible situation. It is fair to say that the culture of a country should be reflected in the laws that govern it, and most of us have pets, so let us ensure that we are allowed to keep them.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) pursue my party's amendments, and I was pleased to hear from the Chair of my Select Committee, the hon. Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi). There has been much cross-party support for the Bill, while we push the Government to go further still. As supportive as I am of the Bill, it could be better and help reduce our casework of heart-wrenching stories of vulnerable tenants pushed out and treated badly by landlords. The Bill will help us, but, through the amendments tabled and others that I know will be proposed in the other place, it could be better.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy** (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): I declare an interest: like one in three households in my constituency, I rent my home. As a renter and an MP who represents a large number of renters, it will come as no surprise that I rise to speak in favour of the Bill, which will bring in some important, long-overdue reforms to provide private renters with decent and secure homes.

Crucially, I am pleased to see the abolition of section 21 evictions, which was promised by the Conservative party, including in its 2019 manifesto, but never delivered. Close to a million people faced no-fault eviction notices in the last Parliament because of that failure, which added to the homelessness crisis that we now face.

I am happy to see measures in the Bill that focus on affordability. In my borough of Lambeth, renting a one-bedroom home now costs the average person more than half their take-home pay. When teachers, rail staff, nurses and other key workers went on strike to call for inflation-matching pay rises, the last Government attacked them and rejected their demands, calling them greedy, but that Government shrugged their shoulders as private landlords collected above-inflation rent hikes from some of those same key workers year after year.

In recent years, the situation has been particularly pronounced. In March 2024, the Office for National Statistics reported that monthly rents rose by 9.1%, the highest annual increase since records began in 2015. I am glad that the Bill brings some common sense to the situation, ensuring that rent increases can no longer be written into contracts and that landlords will be able to legally increase rents only once a year, and protecting tenants from egregious rent hikes.

Also highly positive are the new measures to strengthen enforcement against slum private landlords, to extend the decent homes standard to the private rental sector and to widen council enforcement powers while extending the range of financial penalties available to local authorities to fund enforcement activity.

I am pleased that the Bill legislates for a consultation on improving energy efficiency standards in rented homes. The UK has some of the most energy inefficient homes in Europe, with 2.6 million private rented homes falling below minimum energy efficiency standards in England and Wales alone. Almost a quarter of renters live in fuel poverty, the highest rate of any tenure.

[Bell Ribeiro-Addy]

The Bill contains important measures to provide renters with some basic security and to place some basic responsibility on landlords. However, so much more could be done to strengthen it. I am pleased to see that the Government are supporting the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel), and I am pleased to support amendments 9, 5 and 6 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker), which would better protect sitting tenants from unaffordable rent increases. In its current form, the Bill caps rent increases only at market rate—the prices that landlords set. The amendments would instead cap them at the rate of the consumer prices index or wage growth, whichever is the lowest. I have yet to hear a compelling reason why landlords should see their incomes grow faster than people who actually work for a living. I place on record my support for the Renters' Reform Coalition's call for a national rental affordability commission, to investigate methods to bring down rents relative to incomes.

Although there are not many Members on the Opposition Benches, the few speeches that they have made have talked about homes almost entirely as assets, forgetting that people need to live in them. I welcome the amendments that remember that people with a variety of different circumstances are living in those homes, and they should be viewed with compassion. I welcome and support new clause 10 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), as well as new clause 9 tabled by the hon. Member for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer) on adaptations for disabled people.

It is welcome that the legislation would make it illegal to discriminate against benefit claimants and families for exactly the same reason. I would like further changes to prevent discrimination, such as scrapping right-to-rent checks and reforming the laws around guarantors more generally. I would like the legislation to go further on preventing illegal and back-door evictions. As the London Renters Union has pointed out, for the many families struggling with housing costs, a 20% rent hike is simply a no-fault eviction under a different name.

During my time as an MP, I have seen too many unscrupulous attempts to remove tenants to be unconcerned about a likely increase in illegal evictions in response to scrapping section 21. I welcome new enforcement powers, but we have to acknowledge the financial difficulties that local authorities face after 14 years of massive cuts. The Government must ensure that local authorities have the resources to use these enforcement powers.

3.30 pm

Finally, on disrepair, tenants should have the right to withhold rent when repairs are not carried out within appropriate timescales. That happens far too often. Too many renters are paying for a shoddy service and to live in awful conditions. Too many renters, young people in particular, face a despairing future of spending a lifetime as private renters, and are left living in dire conditions of extreme disrepair while continuing to have to pay their full rental amount each month, lest they face eviction. The Bill should provide that they have the right to withhold rent in such circumstances, thereby supporting its stated intention of ensuring that the decent homes standard applies to the private rented sector.

More generally, renters have been neglected across different pieces of legislation over the years. If this landmark Bill is truly to reform the rental sector and shift the balance of power to create a more equal relationship between renters and landlords, more needs to be done. I urge the Government to agree to the amendments.

**Calum Miller** (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I broadly welcome the Bill and the strength and protections that it will provide private tenants. I associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) and the amendments that he and my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper) have tabled.

I wish to focus on one aspect of the Bill to see if I can encourage some last-minute reconsideration by the Minister. The Government recently repurchased more than 36,000 Ministry of Defence properties from the private sector. This move is a step in the right direction, yet many properties, including those in my constituency of Bicester and Woodstock, have fallen into disrepair, having failed to be managed properly, and are now substandard or unsafe. Service personnel and their families living in Ministry of Defence accommodation in Ambrosden and in Caversfield in my constituency have expressed frustration with the current management and maintenance companies.

Liberal Democrats are clear that our service personnel and their families deserve the same decent standards that the Government are proposing for the rest of the private rented sector. I am proud to support amendment 3 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington. Will the Government now commit to using the Bill to ensure that the recently reacquired Ministry of Defence accommodation will be covered by the decent homes standard, so that those living in service family accommodation in my constituency can access safe, weathertight and warm accommodation?

In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Helen Maguire) the Minister argued that it would not be appropriate to extend the decent homes standard to service family accommodation. Will he therefore clarify, so that I can inform my constituents, whether they should expect to live in service family accommodation that meets that standard and, if they should, how and to whom they can appeal if the accommodation continues to fall below that standard?

**Amanda Martin** (Portsmouth North) (Lab): There are concerns that military accommodation, which I have in my constituency, is not included in the Bill, but one of my main concerns is the immense cut in funding to that accommodation. The properties are in such a state of disrepair that the Government have had to go back and re-buy them. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a larger issue, which we need to deal with when looking at the Armed Forces Commissioner role?

**Calum Miller:** I wholeheartedly agree. The Ministry of Defence's service family accommodation estate is in disrepair because of a significant lack of investment by the last Government, which failed to maintain the standards that should be enjoyed by our hard-working and dedicated service personnel and their families. However, the fact that this Government have made the welcome step to purchase that estate means that it is now their obligation

to uphold standards. As we are talking about legislation that is intended to set the standard that all renters should expect, including those who are paying rent now to the Ministry of Defence for their accommodation, why are the Government resisting the opportunity to set that high standard for service personnel?

Finally, in the notes to the Bill, the Government emphasise that the concerns that led to Awaab's law will now be extended to the private rented sector. Given how serious those concerns were, and given that the death occurred as a result of a failure to maintain property in the social rented sector, will the Minister tell me how I can go back to my constituents, who are tenants of the Ministry of Defence, and tell them they will enjoy the same protection as other private renters under Awaab's law?

**Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab):** Stability for 11 million renters, and, indeed, for 2.3 million landlords, is necessary to build our better Britain. For the tenants enduring the least affordable, poorest quality housing, disregarded renters' rights have had a profound impact on people's lives. Britain deserves more than dodgy landlords, back-door evictions and dismal living standards. The British people deserve to feel secure in their own homes.

Some of my constituents are forced to live in terrible accommodation, facing damp and mould. This treatment is fundamentally unacceptable.

**Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD):** The Defence Committee's recent report described service accommodation as "shocking", saying that two thirds required massive investment to bring it up to standard and that damp and mould were legion. The hon. Gentleman talks of dodgy landlords—would he characterise the Ministry of Defence as one? Should we be bringing those homes up to the decent homes standard that everyone else in the country will benefit from if the Bill is passed?

**Adam Thompson:** In his opening remarks, the Minister addressed the fact that there are issues in the space, but they go beyond the scope of the Bill. We need to continue having these conversations as we move forward. The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point.

Conservative failure has led to more than 200,000 households with children being forced to live in privately rented damp and squalid homes. According to *The Guardian*, each year, 31,000 children aged four and under are admitted to hospital because of damp and mould-related issues. I strongly believe that this simply cannot be allowed to continue. Shelter has recently found that a quarter of renters are afraid to ask their landlords for basic repairs for fear of being evicted, and that 26,000 households are at risk of being made homeless from the no-fault evictions we have been discussing today. We need to change, and fast. The abolition of section 21 will end these no-fault evictions for good. This is a vital part of this legislation, which will ensure peace of mind for tenants in their own homes, to which they devote a sizeable portion of their income.

Pressure on local authorities to provide temporary accommodation has become totally unsustainable. Crisis estimates that £2.2 billion of council funds in England were spent on temporary accommodation for 120,000 households between 2023 and 2024—an increase from 85,000 in 2019. My good colleagues at Erewash borough council tell me that they spent three times more on alternative accommodation in 2024 than in 2019. These

temporary measures are incredibly costly and ultimately untenable. With accommodation including bed and breakfasts and hotels, alternative housing is an inadequate long-term solution. The Bill will make an excellent start to save council taxpayers' money and protect tenants' welfare from unsuitable temporary accommodation.

The vital extension of Awaab's law to include private rental properties will prevent unsafe living conditions, landlord discrimination and bidding on rental properties. Prospective tenants in the housing crisis simply cannot afford bidding wars aimed at pricing them out. Discrimination based on receipt of benefits and having children will be prevented, ensuring an inclusive and impartial rental market. Hazardous properties will require prompt and efficient landlord responses, and tenants will be protected from unjustifiable rent inflation. Today, while we have been debating the Bill, I have received a communication from a constituent whose rental price recently went up by 21%, which is disgusting. The measures are essential for the efficient operation of rental markets in the UK and for the protection of tenants' rights.

The much-needed introduction of the decent homes standard will further empower tenants to leave poor-quality homes and provide better value housing for all. According to the English housing survey 2023, one in five privately rented homes is considered substandard. The enforcement of the decent homes standard will put an end to this appalling practice. With the introduction of a £7,000 penalty for non-compliance, landlords will finally be properly incentivised to maintain the necessary high standards that renters deserve. New legal protections will secure quick, impartial, binding resolutions to protect both renters and landlords. Given the new private rented sector landlord ombudsman and the strengthened council enforcement for which the Bill provides, tenants and adults will feel assured that their concerns are respected and will be handled with compassion and certainty.

The Bill will allow us to end backdoor evictions and extortionate rents designed to force renters out. Periodic tenancies ensuring that rent increases are made per the market rate, once a year, will protect renters from unreasonable increases and unexpected evictions. Access to a private rented sector database will help landlords to understand their legal obligations and demonstrate compliance with the new regulations. These measures will allow for certainty in the law for both landlords and tenants. I understand that landlords are concerned about investing and entering the market for fear of payment insecurity, but the current system is designed around uncertainty. The serious lack of clear legislation has caused decades of chaos for both landlords and tenants, with unsafe homes and unsuitable dispute resolution. A transparent and fair system is needed so that all parties can make informed decisions.

As for student accommodation, the changes proposed in the Bill are necessary for the protection of landlords and students alike. Students deserve security as much as everyone else in society. The assured continuance of annual short-term student tenancies will still provide certainty in respect of landlord income, with the ability to evict tenants at the end of the academic year and to increase rents for new tenants as required. According to the National Union of Students,

"the average student loan...leaves students with just 50p a week to live off after...rent".

[Adam Thompson]

Despite those extortionate costs, cold, damp, unsuitable housing has become the norm in student accommodation. Students are at risk of being unable to pay for basic essentials, so it is vital that they are protected from living in poor conditions under unfair terms.

The Bill will extend vital safety and reassurance to thousands of people in Erewash. My constituents cannot continue to endure poor housing at the hands of inadequate renters' legislation; they deserve security in their own homes. The Renters' Rights Bill is our way forward, and I urge all Members to support it, as amended today by the Government.

**Rachel Gilmour** (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in today's debate on such an important topic. The Bill has many laudable aims, and represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to finally fix the private rented sector for the 11 million people in England—including me—who rent privately. I know that about 13,000 private renters in Tiverton and Minehead will be watching this debate with interest—particularly Owein and his family, whom it took me six months to rehome earlier this year—in the hope and expectation that the House can finally do what it promised to do under the last Government, and pass meaningful rental sector reform. That Conservative Government neglected renters, and I am pleased that this Government are introducing meaningful legislation now. Tiverton and Minehead sits at 88th out of 543 constituencies in England on the barriers to housing and services index of deprivation. I will think closely about anything that the Government can do to improve that, to ensure that it represents a fair deal for renters, particularly those in my constituency.

Let me start by stating the obvious. This is a good Bill, on the whole. It takes strong steps to protect tenants, especially when landlords are not maintaining their properties. Provisions such as Awaab's law should and must be extended to the private rented sector, so that landlords have a duty to fix hazardous living conditions like those that cost that precious toddler his life, within a set timeframe. Shelter is a basic need, not just a want. I am very pleased that the Bill seeks to apply the decent homes standard to the private rented sector for the first time: such an extension is overdue, and very welcome.

As a pet owner, I am happy to see in the legislation the right for tenants to request a pet. Pets are often an integral part of the family, as they have been for me. My party's former spokesperson on this issue, my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan), welcomed the inclusion of this measure in a previous iteration of the Bill, and I echo that welcome.

The Bill should be commended for its ambition in many sectors. For example, it creates a national private rented sector database, so that tenants know about their landlords. It also looks to stop bidding wars, and to ban in-tenancy rent increases being written into the contract. Those are all fantastic reasons to support the Bill today.

3.45 pm

I understand that the Government want the Bill to support cheaper and quicker resolution where there are disputes about a lease arrangement. That is a laudable aim, but I worry about the effect on rural landlords. I welcome the removal of section 21 no-fault evictions

from the rental market, but rural landlords say that issues will arise from the implementation date of the measure not being known; it will come into effect on Royal Assent. Everyone—renters and landlords—is very keen to hear firmer news on that, while respecting the fact that the Bill will have to pass through the other place. There are also nuances to be ironed out regarding the status of agricultural landlords. I would welcome any reflection from the Minister on how the Bill can suitably reflect the concerns of the 85% of rural businesses that provide accommodation as part of their offer to attract staff.

The Bill does make some great strides, but we have the chance to go further, faster and better, and I hope that Members across the House agree. As I represent Tiverton and Minehead, where more households include a veteran than the national average, I explicitly echo the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) about amendment 3, which calls for an extension of the decent homes standard to Ministry of Defence service family accommodation. That should be welcomed across the whole House, but if it is not voted on today or supported, I would still urge the Secretary of State to look at the proposal and seriously consider enacting it for those who spend their life serving our country, and for their families.

We have all seen the inflationary pressures on the cost of energy in recent years, especially in rural areas, where people often pay a rural premium for things. The Bill needs to push for improved energy efficiency standards in rented housing. I join my Liberal Democrat colleagues in asking the Government to reintroduce the requirement on landlords to upgrade the energy efficiency of their homes to an energy performance certificate rating of C or above by 2028. Too many tenants live in subpar housing, which makes them ill and costs the NHS money. The Government might not want to listen on the impact of the winter fuel allowance cuts, but I hope they will proactively take steps to insulate against fuel poverty.

How can we check that the Bill is working? There is no point in seeking to improve the lot of those who rent property if it just means that landlords shift how they categorise their properties, so that they can keep going about their business as they did before. I therefore add my public support to new clause 2, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington, which calls on the Secretary of State to review whether the prohibition on fixed-term contracts has increased the number of landlords choosing to offer short-term lets instead of letting in the private rented sector. I simply ask the Government what they have to lose by accepting the new clause.

My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I welcome the new Government's bringing forward legislation to improve the situation for renters. We have been scrutinising it carefully, to ensure that renters really do get the fair deal that they deserve. It is a step forward, and I will support it, but I urge the Government to go further and take up the challenge of improving the Bill, so that it truly represents the seizing of this once-in-a-generation opportunity.

**Naushabah Khan** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Lab): I join colleagues from across the House in saying that I was proud to serve on the Public Bill Committee. For too long, tenants in my constituency of Gillingham and

Rainham have been at the mercy of a broken rental market. The system has gone unchecked for the last few decades, and left renters with a lack of security, limited rights and too often no choice but to live in unacceptable conditions. The previous Government promised change. Ministers stood at the Dispatch Box and assured the public that they would deliver fair reform in the rental sector, yet they failed. They kicked the can down the road, while tenants faced soaring rents, substandard housing and the ever-present threat of losing their home at a moment's notice.

The failure to address the housing crisis is perhaps one of the most glaring legacies of the last Government. The number of people renting privately has exploded. Many are renting not from choice, but because it is the only option. In Gillingham and Rainham, 22% of households now live in the private rented sector, and rents have risen sharply over the last decade. Families, young people and older residents alike feel trapped. They are locked out of home ownership and housing security, and locked into paying for homes that are too often cold, damp or unsafe.

Recently, my inbox has been full of stories of constituents who have been evicted through section 21 evictions. Pat Cooper, for example, was told just before Christmas that she would have to leave her home of 35 years. It has left her feeling incredibly distressed, facing real uncertainty about what the future holds for her, with limited choices that she can afford. There are countless similar stories of people who have been plunged into uncertainty and the risk of homelessness because of no-fault evictions. The previous Government had every opportunity to end this injustice, but they chose delay and inaction over the wellbeing of often vulnerable families.

My constituents know that this Government are different. Within their first 100 days, they have brought forward this landmark legislation, which I know will deliver the security, dignity and fairness that renters in my constituency deserve. I welcome the fact that the Bill will end the scourge of no-fault evictions once and for all. I welcome the decent homes standard being extended to the private rented sector; that will guarantee that tenants no longer have to put up with mould, disrepair or unsafe conditions. Crucially, I welcome the introduction of an ombudsman to hold accountable those who do not uphold the law, and to give tenants a clear route to justice. I thank the Minister for considering representations from Members of different parties and the amendments in front of us, which introduce new rules to cap advance rent payments and provide safeguards for bereaved families—something that has been spoken about powerfully today.

This Bill sends a clear message: it is the end of the era of unchecked power for landlords who do not want to follow the rules. For far too long, too many tenants have been treated as second-class citizens in their own homes, and I am glad to see that this Government are putting an end to that. It is high time that renters across the country were treated with the fairness, dignity and respect that they deserve, and I am proud to support this Bill as it progresses through this place and the other place. It will give my constituents their basic rights.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** Before I call the next speaker, who I am sure will speak to her amendments, I remind Members that on Report we

should consider the amendments and new clauses to the Bill; the debate is neither a rehash of Second Reading, nor a precursor to Third Reading.

**Carla Denyer (Bristol Central) (Green):** I should declare that I am a member of the Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now, which campaigns on renters' rights. I thank it for its important work on this Bill, including alongside me.

The Bill is hugely welcome, but it can and should go further to fix the grave and urgent housing crisis. I therefore rise to speak to my new clause 7, on rent controls and affordability; new clause 9, on home adaptations for disabled people; and new clauses 17 and 18, on selective licencing schemes. I also want to put on the record my strong support for a number of amendments tabled by others, including the hon. Members for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel), and for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker).

We have people living on the streets and in temporary accommodation because they cannot afford their rent. New clause 7 proposes a living rent body, which would set the rules that applied to the calculation of rent between tenancies. That would control rents and make them fair, considering factors such as the home's property type, condition and size, average local incomes and so on. Local flexibility will be important. The measure is needed. The Bill gives renters a once-in-a-generation set of new rights that they have long been denied, but rent controls are still needed, because it is no help to anyone if they have a right to something that they cannot afford or access.

Once the Bill does away with section 21, we will need rent controls to prevent rogue landlords from instead hiking rents to kick people out. The Government's changes to the tribunal system do not go far enough to protect renters from that. First, most tenants do not have the time or energy to navigate the system. Secondly, tribunal panel judges only judge whether a rent rise is fair compared with market rates, and the market rates are too high.

We have a generation of people who will never be able to earn enough to have a mortgage, and who cannot even afford their rent now. If a 21-year-old in my home city of Bristol rents a single room today at the average rate, they will have put £80,000 into their landlord's bank account by their 30th birthday. No wonder that a third of private renters struggle with their housing costs. New clause 7 addresses the plain fact that the market is failing, with terrible costs for people who are struggling and made homeless.

There are huge economic costs, too; the Government are set to pay private landlords £70 billion of taxpayers' money in the five years from 2021 to 2026. That is multiple times the spend on new affordable homes. Surely that is the wrong way round. We can add to that the huge annual spend on temporary accommodation, which cost councils at least £1.74 billion in 2022-23. Rent rises are far outstripping inflation. The Deposit Protection Service rental index found that rents outstripped inflation by one third in 2023. Rightmove reports show that asking rents outside London have risen 60% since 2020, and I assume that I do not have to tell the House that incomes have not grown by the same amount.

As I set out in Committee, discussion is vital if we are to avoid unintended consequences, and I do not dismiss the importance of that detailed work. At the same time,

[Carla Denyer]

we cannot ignore the acute affordability crisis for renters. Key workers are being forced out of cities, and people are being forced out of communities that they have made their home. The average rent in my constituency of Bristol Central has hit nearly £1,800 a month.

I know what the criticisms will be, but let me remind the House that rent controls are an established part of private renting in 16 European countries, where they are a completely normal part of housing policy. It is interesting that private renters in England spend a higher proportion of their income on rent than those in any European country apart from Luxembourg and Norway. Our homes are in worse condition, too.

Rent controls are of course not a panacea. They are needed alongside a suite of housing policies, and increasing social housing supply is really important. However, the private rented sector is in an affordability crisis now, and it will take huge amounts of effort and time, even with the best will in the world, to increase the social housing supply on a scale that will impact private rents. Modelling from Generation Rent and other economists predicts that building 1.5 million homes over this Parliament will decrease the private rent burden by just over 1%.

Moving on to new clause 9, there are 16 million disabled people in the UK—more than a fifth of the population—and 19% of them live in the private rented sector. The Equality and Human Rights Commission estimates that a shocking one in three disabled people in the private rented sector lives in unsuitable accommodation, and a Government survey reveals that an appalling 44% of private landlords have said that they will not rent to someone who requires home adaptations.

My amendment seeks to ensure that, if all tenants can put up shelves, disabled tenants should be allowed to put up grab rails. If all tenants can replace a showerhead, disabled tenants should be allowed to put in accessible washing facilities. It is not acceptable that disabled tenants must get permission for these most basic adaptations.

In Committee, the Minister was sympathetic to my concern but argued that the Equality Act 2010 already covers this issue. However, it clearly is not doing the job. Disabled people are explaining this very clearly and patiently, as did the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, the hon. Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi), whom I thank.

4 pm

The Equality Act is underused in housing law for several reasons. First, what amounts to a reasonable request is poorly defined. Secondly, the law refers to changes in physical features, but the charity Disability Rights UK tells us that some landlords still refuse. And thirdly, the hassle and delay in appealing an adaptation refusal, given the major backlog in the courts, makes it prohibitive for many and unfairly puts the onus on the tenant. I sincerely hope the Minister will take another look at this issue, which is so important to so many people, and I hope that Members will vote with me on my amendment later today.

New clauses 17 and 18 would remove unnecessary barriers to the use of licensing schemes to improve housing standards. This matters because private renters often face terrible conditions. Constituents tell me about

mould and damp, shorting fire alarms and electrics, rat infestations and, recently, student renters being left without a working boiler for a whole month. I could go on.

Licensing schemes are vital because they enable local authorities to target regulation where it is needed most, on tackling the worst landlords and supporting the most vulnerable tenants. New clause 17 would enable local authorities operating selective licensing schemes to use the conditions of those licensing schemes to improve housing quality directly.

There is currently a strange disconnect in the Housing Act 2004, highlighted by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, where local authorities can introduce selective licensing schemes to address poor housing but cannot include conditions in the licence requiring the physical state of the licensed property to be improved. By contrast, additional licensing schemes for houses in multiple occupation can include such conditions. My new clause 17 simply seeks to close this hole by amending section 90 of the Housing Act to enable local authorities to use licensing conditions to improve housing standards.

The complementary new clause 18 would increase the maximum duration of HMO licensing schemes and selective licensing schemes from five to 10 years. Given that these schemes cost a fair bit to set up in the first place, it does not make sense for local authorities to be limited to only five years of operation. The extension would allow local authorities to advertise longer-term staff posts, including training for new staff, and would allow more time for local partnerships to be set up.

Unfortunately, the lack of time today means that we will not be able to vote on all four of my amendments, but I would like to test the will of the House on new clause 9, on adaptations for disabled people. This is not party political, and it is surely not controversial, so we should be able to agree on this today.

Turning to my other amendments, I sincerely hope that the Minister will consider the need for bold moves to create a system that really tackles the affordability crisis that private renters now face, so that all citizens in this country can access a safe, stable and affordable home.

**Rachel Blake** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): I must declare an interest: my husband works for an organisation that funds the Renters' Reform Coalition, which has been referred to today.

It is a privilege to speak in this debate after serving on the Bill Committee, which took a thorough approach to each element of the Bill. This topic is of great importance to me, I having worked in housing for my entire working life and representing 27,000 private renters in the Cities of London and Westminster. I speak today thinking of those constituents and their experiences.

One landlord revoked a promise to provide free heating for their tenant's home, leading to it becoming infested with mould. The landlord later refused to respond to repeated reports of pests in the property, before subsequently charging that tenant £1,500 to fumigate the house. I also bear in mind my constituents who were evicted under a section 21 notice, are now living in temporary accommodation with three children and have been on the social housing waiting list for nearly 15 years.

After being let down by dither and delay from the Members on the Conservative Benches when they were in Government, renters such as my constituents have



been denied the crucial powers to hold their landlords to account in even the most basic fashion. If those Members had delivered on their promise and tackled the dissenters in their midst, renters would already have the protections that we are introducing in this legislation. Yet the Opposition have the audacity to claim that the legislation and principles that they had tried to introduce when they were in power will, mysteriously, not work now.

On the amendments, the Opposition claim that the legislation will lead to landlords exiting the market, but they repeatedly fail to suggest where the homes owned by landlords would go. Even in his case for new clause 20, the shadow Minister started talking about where the homes might go, so I take the opportunity to ask him directly whether he thinks the homes would disappear. Would he have rather let a home lie vacant than let it out or sell it if it were unprofitable? And if a sale took place, would the mysterious buyers not live there? I will happily give way if he wants to answer—okay, he does not.

To continue on to my main point, I want to focus on the parts of the Bill that consider local authority enforcement and the new clauses that address that. Current regulations in the private rented sector have suffered from a lack of enforcement by local authorities due to a lack of knowledge about private rented stock, limited enforcement capacity and the range and complexity of laws relevant to enforcement. The legislation goes a long way towards addressing those issues. The Bill puts local authorities clearly in the driving seat in enforcing regulation, cleaning up the confusion of the past regime. It expands the range of civil penalties that can be used by local authorities to crack down on poor behaviour. Importantly, it introduces mandatory reporting for local authorities' enforcement activity, ensuring that councils are accountable to their constituents and to central Government.

The introduction of the private rented sector database will also fill a key gap in the existing regime: a lack of knowledge of the location and nature of private rented properties. The remaining gap in the regime will be funding, and it is essential that fees for the private rented sector database are sufficient to fund the enforcement measures in the Bill. It is therefore encouraging to see that recognised by Government amendment 40, which I am happy to support.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I support what the hon. Member says about resources for local government. Does she also accept that there is a real problem, particularly in London, where there is simply a lack of advice available for tenants because the advice agencies are completely overwhelmed and underfunded? We therefore need to fund independent advice agencies as well.

**Rachel Blake:** I will come on to some of the incredible work that advice agencies do in my constituency.

Funding will need to be met with an active approach by local authorities to recruit the right individuals with the appropriate skills to act as inspectors for the regime. Additional funding may be needed for the immediate recruitment and upskilling of inspectors, and to deal with a backlog of cases related to enforcing existing regulations. Most importantly, landlords must have as many points of potential accountability as possible. That means that reporting on enforcement activity should be published publicly, with the naming and shaming of poor-performing landlords.

The Bill marks not just an era of rights for the millions of private renters across the country, but a step change in the necessary enforcement activity by councils and by renters themselves. The campaigning groups and advice agencies that have stood up for renters for years, including Generation Rent and also Z2K, which operates in my constituency, deserve a mountain of praise for their work in keeping this issue on the agenda of parties and actors across the political spectrum, and I pay tribute to them for their work. The scale of support that this Bill has from Members on the Government Benches demonstrates the significance of this issue. It is important that we work together across Government and civil society to enforce this new rights framework and provide renters with their long-overdue protections.

**Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD):** I am sure that all Members have plenty of examples in their inboxes of why this Bill is so needed. Recent cases in my inbox have ranged from someone who had to wait two years for a boiler to be fixed, to someone who has a home so damp that they cannot walk through it without shoes on, as the carpets are permanently wet. They have had numerous electrical appliances fail and have lost their property to mould. Worst of all, they are permanently ill. Even the ombudsman finding in their favour has not produced decisive action to address the problem. It is an outrage that people are living in such conditions in the 21st century and, after the inaction of the previous Government, I welcome the approach set out in this Bill to fixing hazards such as mould.

I also welcome the security of tenancy. So often when people approach their MP about homelessness issues, they talk about the importance of being in a particular location. They say it is because their children are settled in their school, because they need to care for a relative who lives there, and because they need the support of family and friends. Repeatedly moving around robs people of vital community links and stability. It also affects the life chances of children and young people. It is not only no-fault evictions that lead to people moving around; so too do rent rises. So I welcome the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) to limit the maximum rent increase. Far too many people are forced out of their rental properties by exorbitant rent rises, and this Bill does not go far enough to prevent that situation.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) asked where the properties will go. In some cases, as our new clause 2 sets out, they will go to people on short-term contracts. We therefore need to consider the impact on the market as a whole.

I wish to raise one small concern of a landlord about the impact that the changes will have both on them and on their tenants. They own a single, upper-floor, leasehold flat. They own only the inside of the flat—not the exterior, the wall gaps or the loft. The Bill's provisions on energy efficiency and so forth are of concern to them. Obviously, we want people to have homes that they can afford to heat and that meet climate change obligations, but not all small landlords are scrupulous, and relying on them to be so is not appropriate protection for tenants. As the Bill progresses, I ask the Minister to consider how the Government will support small landlords who want to do the right thing, so that the private rental sector does not become the sole preserve of well-heeled, large landlords.

**Matthew Pennycook:** I wonder whether I might provide some helpful clarification: this Bill has no provisions in it that deal with minimum energy-efficiency standards in the private rented sector. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero will shortly go out to consultation on those MEE standards for the PRS, but it is not within the scope of this Bill.

**Claire Young:** I thank the Minister for that clarification.

In conclusion, I welcome the Bill and the protections it provides, but I urge Ministers to accept the Liberal Democrat amendments put forward by my hon. Friends the Members for Taunton and Wellington and for St Albans (Daisy Cooper).

**Paula Barker** (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): This is groundbreaking legislation, and I pay tribute to the Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for the excellent work that they have done so far. In October, I said in this place that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, under the leadership of our Deputy Prime Minister, will get this job done, and they are doing exactly that.

This Government are getting on with the job. The previous Government made empty promise after empty promise, ultimately caving in to the landlord lobby on their own Benches. Perhaps that is why the Opposition Benches are so empty today.

The Bill goes a long way towards redressing the power imbalance between those who own assets and those who need to use such assets for the basic human needs of housing and shelter. It will finally see an end to section 21 evictions. To boot, the Bill ensures a protected period at the beginning of a tenancy, the end of discrimination faced by those in receipt of social security, an end to bidding wars, and the rolling out of the decent homes standard across the private rented sector. Indeed, the Government have indicated their intention to strengthen the Bill further by limiting the amount of rent payable in advance at the start of a tenancy.

4.15 pm

I have tabled several amendments, and I am grateful to the Minister for the constructive dialogue we have had to date, even if we do not agree on all of them. New clause 5 is about deposit reform. New clause 6 would provide help to care leavers by placing a duty on local authorities to help them pay or to guarantee any required deposit to enable them to agree a tenancy in the private rented sector. Amendment 7 would introduce specific requirements for landlord and dwelling entries on the private rented sector database. Amendment 8 would apply the decent homes standard to all temporary accommodation. Amendment 55 relates to landlords passing on the costs of grant schemes for energy efficiency improvements to tenants. I acknowledge that the Minister has said that the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero would probably be the most appropriate Department to have a dialogue with on that issue.

Of course, my amendments 5, 6 and 9 look at rent stabilisation. I am also pleased to support amendments tabled by my hon. Friends the Members for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel). Ministers in this Department know all too well that, as with any legislation, I believe that we should look to go further. I hope that we can continue our constructive dialogue on these specific points in the months ahead.

I thank Shelter, the Renter's Reform Coalition and Generation Rent for their engagement on the contents of the Bill. I wholeheartedly agree with their assessment that affordability in the private rented sector must be tackled head-on. Specifically on amendments 5, 6 and 9, it is all well and good the Government saying that they do not support rent stabilisation, but as a country, we have to come back to this issue. That may not happen tomorrow or next month, but inevitably at some point we will have to, because the private rented sector has lost all sense of proportion, and on that, nothing will change. The problem of affordability will continue to get worse.

Like many right hon. and hon. Members across the House, I am fortunate to be a homeowner. As representatives, however, we should be acutely aware of the unaffordability of rents in south London, Greater Manchester and, of course, my home city of Liverpool and my constituency of Liverpool Wavertree. Sadly, aside from those right hon. and hon. Members with adult children, there is an ignorance among the homeowners in this place, who simply do not understand what it is to face life at the sharp end of the private rented sector.

Our cities have a pull for this generation of young adults, and in those cities we are leaving them to the mercy of landlords and letting agents. Some letting agents play a sinister role, often driving large-scale increases in rent for their own ends. We hear all the time about struggling landlords who run businesses, but how many properties do not have a mortgage next to their name? I would suggest it is a considerable amount, yet rents continue to rise again and again.

The reason we have the Bill in the first place is that, as a society, we have lost faith in the ability of the landlord class to regulate themselves, yet we continue to trust them on the rent they charge. For tenants to break free of handing a gargantuan proportion of their income to fund the passive income of the landlord class, the death of a grandparent or an early advance on their inheritance might help them out, if they are so lucky. This country has utterly failed a generation—the millennials, if you will—who are now not so young and are the first generation not to be better off than their parents by many metrics. In nothing is that more true than housing.

This housing crisis is what happens when we commodify a very basic human need. Forty years on, we still live with the consequences of the Thatcherite settlement that laid the foundations of the modern-day housing crisis. High rents cost the taxpayer considerably: they keep the homeless stuck in temporary accommodation, which costs our councils billions and has put them on the verge of bankruptcy; and they considerably burden the Department for Work and Pensions, whose local housing allowance routinely fails to keep pace with rent increases.

Labour Governments of the past have generally had a radical history on renting, and the Bill keeps that tradition alive. It was Tony Crosland—not exactly from my wing of the party—who remarked in the 1960s:

“The landlord often looks on house-property simply as an investment to give [them] a perpetual return with the minimum of expenditure...Worse still, [they] wield a degree of personal power over [their] tenants which can be offensive and intolerable.”

What Tony said in the '60s remains true in 2025. I am disappointed that the Bill will not address affordability head-on, but I give it my wholehearted and enthusiastic support in the name of progress.

**Liz Jarvis** (Eastleigh) (LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, which is important to my constituents, and to me personally, as I grew up in rented accommodation.

New clause 1 would limit the maximum rent that landlords can request or receive in advance to no more than two months-worth of the tenancy. Excessive deposits mean that far too many people face exclusion from the housing market altogether. For families on lower incomes, younger tenants or those receiving benefits, that practice can make finding a home almost impossible. Landlords increasingly use methods such as requiring rent in advance to exclude those they deem undesirable tenants. According to the charity Shelter, 52% of private landlords refuse to let to tenants receiving housing benefit. By capping rent in advance, the new clause would help to level the playing field and reduce the financial burden on those who are looking for somewhere decent to live but cannot get in the door because they are living pay cheque to pay cheque.

Amendment 1 would ensure that any rent increase is capped at a maximum rate in line with the Bank of England base rate. Unchecked rent increases are driving families in Eastleigh and across the country into financial hardship. In the current system, unscrupulous landlords can impose excessive hikes that effectively force tenants out. One couple in my constituency, who are already working two jobs to provide a home for their young children, were forced out of their rented accommodation when their landlord hiked their rent to an unaffordable level. They had no choice but to move to a smaller property that does not cater as well to their family's needs. Allowing that practice to continue undermines the stability and security that the Bill seeks to provide. Linking rent increases to the Bank of England base rate is both logical and fair. It would create predictability for tenants, while allowing landlords to adjust rents reasonably in response to economic conditions. Office for National Statistics figures show that private rents in Eastleigh rose by 7.6% in 2024. The amendment would provide more protection for people who are struggling because of the cost of living crisis and cannot pay extremely high rents.

New clause 23 would ensure that landlords approve necessary home adaptations for disabled tenants where a professional home assessment has been carried out. One in three disabled people in private rented properties live in unsuitable accommodation. The failure to secure appropriate housing can be life-limiting and make regular activities such as accessing a bathroom or moving between rooms very difficult. In England, 8.8% of disabled people rely on the private rented sector because of the chronic shortage of social housing, yet private rented properties are rarely accessible or adaptable, and only 6.6% of disabled facilities grants are used to make such homes suitable for disabled renters. Unsuitable housing not only hinders independence, but increases reliance on social care, leads to higher hospital admissions and reduces participation in work and community life. The amendment would ensure that disabled tenants have the autonomy and dignity to live independently in homes suited to their needs.

Finally, I express my support for amendment 10, which would extend protections to students in HMO properties. Students are some of the most vulnerable renters, often dealing with insecure housing, high rents

and landlords who fail to maintain properties. This amendment would ensure that landlords of student HMOs are held to the same standards as other landlords, providing greater security and accountability. I also express my support for new clause 6: all young people deserve somewhere safe to call home, and as much support as possible to help them find it.

I welcome this Bill as an opportunity to reset the balance of power in the rental market. My constituents in Eastleigh and renters across the country deserve a rental market that works for them, not against them. I urge Members to support the amendments to which I have spoken, to ensure that the Bill delivers the fair deal that renters have been waiting for.

**Mike Reader** (Northampton South) (Lab): I note for the record my interest in this area, because I am a landlord. As the Member of Parliament for Northampton South, I come to the Chamber today to speak strongly in support of the Bill and many of the amendments. The private and social rented sectors account for around a third of all households in my constituency—that is 35,000 people who will directly benefit from this legislation.

My constituents work hard. Northampton South has a higher economic activity rate than the UK average, yet despite working hard, many people still face incredibly high levels of housing insecurity, high rents and low housing standards. Housing remains the No. 1 issue in my inbox, and the Renters' Rights Bill will help to address the insecurity and unfairness that my constituents have faced when renting. This Government are taking the decisive action that people in Northampton have long asked for.

I will speak to the amendments, but I have to start by addressing section 21. Ending no-fault evictions will protect my constituents. Right now, millions of renters across the country live with that sword hanging over their heads—that they could be forced to leave their home through no fault of their own. That means parents lying awake at night, worried that they will have to move their children mid-term; it means nurses and teachers being forced out of the communities that they work in; and it means families being unable to put roots down or plan for their future because they can be uprooted at any moment.

The numbers impacted by this insecurity are shocking, and it is really positive that the Government have not only recognised this, but included further protections through their amendments to strengthen protection for renters. I am particularly pleased by the amendments that limit rent to be paid in advance. We have heard some shocking stories today—my mouth dropped when I heard some of the rents being asked for in advance in certain parts of the UK. Protecting renters in this way is definitely the right thing to do.

I welcome the provisions that expand the decent homes standard. I have heard from people in my constituency who live in properties plagued by damp, mould and electrical hazards. Having spent nearly 20 years working in the construction industry and having worked with some great private and social landlords, I can say that it is not that difficult for people to maintain and look after the properties that they run. The fact that 21% of private rented homes in this country fail to meet basic standards is simply unacceptable. Landlords who do

[Mike Reader]

not properly maintain safe properties are irresponsible and deserve to be held to account, and this legislation will make sure that that happens.

I am particularly pleased that the Bill will recognise the impact on guarantors in the awful situation where a tenant who they support passes away. The new clauses that have been tabled will mean that guarantors are protected, while also providing fair recourse and support for landlords in that awful situation. I encourage Members to support those amendments.

I am encouraged by the provisions relating to the landlord redress scheme, which provides a clear route for tenants to resolve issues without costly court proceedings. However, I have had extensive conversations with students in Northampton and the Northampton Landlords Association, and with a number of my constituents who are part of the HMO action group, and they told me that, while they support the aims of the scheme—and they have been following the stages of the Bill up to Report in detail—they have concerns that the courts system or the justice system just will not be up to scale. I am encouraged by the Minister's statement that this is being looked at, but it is critical for professional HMO landlords in my constituency, who will need quick resolution to disputes, and measures to deal with antisocial tenants and tenants who negatively impact on their co-habitees.

4.30 pm

I will finish by picking up some of the comments made in his opening statement by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), and some other speeches. Not everyone in this House is of the same mind and some have expressed concerns that reforms may restrict market supply, but I can tell hon. Members that, in my experience, evidence from across the world shows that similar regulations have not prevented growth in the private rented sector. To take Ireland, for example, it introduced protected tenancies way back in 2004, but that sector has doubled and it continues to grow and thrive with those controls in place. Looking at Germany, Australia, Sweden and across the developed world, we see that rebalancing between landlords and tenants has meant that private rented sectors have flourished. The reality is that countries with strong regulation on rental standards have seen faster growth than those that do not have it.

Let me clear: this Bill is pro-market, not anti-landlord. It will help create a more stable rental sector in which good landlords can thrive and bad landlords are held to account. This is good for tenants, it is good for responsible landlords and it is good for our economy.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I rise to speak on new clause 10 in my name and Government new clause 15, but before I do so, I would like to make some brief remarks about other aspects of the Bill. In my constituency of Dulwich and West Norwood, housing is overwhelmingly the biggest challenge that my constituents face. Housing costs have spiralled, and the previous Government wasted more than a decade failing to build the homes we need. The effect of this has been that more and more of my constituents are living in privately rented homes, in which they are currently systematically denied

the basic stability and security that most of us would agree are essential to being able to function properly in the rest of life.

Private tenants live with the constant fear that their landlord can at any time, without reference to the terms of their tenancy agreement, decide that they want their property back and serve an eviction notice. I have seen this happen time and again. It stops people putting down roots in their community, because they know that they are likely not to be able to stay. It means that parents live with the constant anxiety that they may have to move far away from their children's school. It means that older people are denied security of tenure in their retirement. In return for extortionate rents, tenants all too often face appalling standards, and find it far too difficult to get basic health and safety issues addressed.

I therefore welcome this Bill, which delivers the biggest package of reforms to private renting for 40 years, redressing the current imbalance between landlords and tenants, strengthening tenants' rights and providing much-needed additional security. I particularly welcome the scrapping of section 21 evictions—I have been speaking on them in this place since 2016—the strengthening of local authority enforcement powers and the creation of a new private rented sector ombudsman, and the application of Awaab's law to the private rented sector.

There is a very great challenge about the affordability of private renting, particularly in London, and my constituents experience that every day. I hope the Minister will keep under review the measures in this Bill that are designed to limit the rate of rent increases to ensure they are as effective as they need to be to create a functioning rental market. I trust that the Minister will do that, and will not hesitate to take further action in future if it is needed.

I now turn to my own new clause 10 and Government new clause 15, which would ban the use of guarantor agreements in the event of the death of a tenant. In this place, all of us know that there are sometimes emails that stop us in our tracks. So it was for me when, in 2023, I received an email from a constituent that read as follows:

“Late last year I became a guarantor for my son so that he could secure accommodation with some friends for his second year at university; without me doing so, he would have lost the house. I had no real concerns about my son paying the rent as he had shown he was a hard worker in a variety of jobs he engaged with to supplement his student loan, which would have covered the rent anyway. The tenancy was due to start at the beginning of July. Tragically, two weeks ago he took his own life, leaving myself, my wife and his sister utterly devastated. On top of everything, I now find myself liable to pay the rent for his room for the entire length of his tenancy if a replacement tenant cannot be found...I wonder if there might be scope to look into the practice of expecting bereaved parents to continue in a role of guarantor to a loved one after they have died.”

I do not think anyone could read that email and think that what happened to my constituents who were facing the worst kind of pain was remotely acceptable. I contacted the letting agent who refused to budge, simply stating that they were following the contract that had been signed.

**Florence Eshalomi**: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for making such a powerful speech and reading out what must have been a difficult email to receive on behalf of her constituent. Does she agree

that, sadly, many other tenants up and down the country might have had to go through that, and suffered in silence because they were grieving?

**Helen Hayes:** I agree with my hon. Friend, and I will speak in a moment about evidence I have received that this issue is more widespread than any of us might have imagined. I raised the issue at Prime Minister's questions, and after that I was contacted by many people, including families who had experienced exactly that, as well as letting agents who told me that they explicitly did not use such clauses, and that such clauses were not necessary because the loss of rental income in the event of the death of a tenant is an insurable risk for landlords.

I am grateful to Members across the House who have supported my campaign, including 48 Members who signed new clause 10, and those who signed my amendment to the Renters (Reform) Bill in the last Parliament. I engaged extensively with two different housing Ministers in the previous Government, both of whom said that they were sympathetic but declined to take action in that Bill or support my amendment. I am therefore grateful to the Minister for Housing and Planning for his compassionate and rigorous engagement on this issue. He has listened and, more importantly, he has acted where his predecessors did not. Government new clause 15, tabled this week, bans the use of guarantor agreements in the event of the death of a tenant who is a family member. That is what my constituent asked of me, and I am proud that that is what we will achieve today. I hope my constituents will take some small comfort from knowing that by speaking out and contacting their MP, other families faced with the heartbreak of losing a loved one will not be pursued by a greedy landlord or letting agent, adding financial stress and hardship to an already unbearable situation.

New clause 15 does not go as far as new clause 10, extending protection only to bereaved guarantors who are related to the tenant. While that protection would have helped my constituent, and while I agree that institutional guarantors should not automatically be released from their responsibilities on the death of a tenant, the limitations of the new clause mean that there could still be hard cases in future—for example, a close friend who is bereaved. I therefore trust that the Minister will keep the situation under review to ensure that new clause 15 is as effective as he intends. As a consequence of the Minister's engagement on this matter, I am content to withdraw new clause 10 and support Government new clause 15. I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to do the same, and to support this Bill, which will deliver the step change in regulation of the private rented sector that we have all been needing for far too long.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), and I pay tribute to her for the work she has done in trying to alleviate the pain caused when someone dies and all the demands then descend unexpectedly on those who were rent guarantors. She has done a very good job on that and I welcome Government new clause 15.

My constituency, like other constituencies in London and most of our big cities, has a huge number of people living in the private rented sector, with probably more

than one-third of the electorate living in private rented accommodation. Collectively, they face insecurity. Collectively, they are often stressed. Collectively, they are often paying high and excessive levels of rent. It is heartbreaking to see the number of people who make their home in the area, become active in the community and make a huge contribution to our community life in lots of ways, but then the rents go up and up, and they simply can no longer afford to stay. Anyone looking for private rented accommodation within the local housing allowance in most inner London constituencies would search for a long time and be unlikely to find anywhere remotely near that allowance. I see my friend the hon. Member for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer) nodding, and the same situation exists in many other cities across the country.

People on average earnings and working-class communities are simply being driven out by the greed of the private rented sector and the market that goes with it, with rents going up by 10%, 15% and sometimes 20%. That is why I intervened on the Minister earlier, and I am grateful that he gave way and acknowledged the real crisis happening day in, day out across the country. Long-term private sector tenants are at threat, because their landlords know this Bill is coming and that there will be greater restrictions—perhaps there should be more—on their raising of rents and doing no-fault evictions, so they are presently trying to evict large numbers of tenants. I meet many constituents who are going through incredible levels of stress about that. I realise that the Bill is not yet law and has to go through the House of Lords, and I am not clear what date it will be finally enacted; I just hope it is soon. I urge the Minister to consider any kind of urgent action and advice he can give to protect existing tenants in the run-up to the introduction of this legislation.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker) for the amendment she has tabled on rent levels. While there is much in the Bill that I welcome, it is sadly a bit of a missed opportunity. Although it restricts the ability of landlords to raise rents in the future, it does not protect those rents being at a reasonable level. Her amendment, which is a good step forward, would link all rent increases to a combination of wage levels and CPI and give local authorities the power to enforce that. We surely should return to that. I hope that the Government will accept one or other of the many amendments that talk about the ability to review this legislation a year on and two years on to see its effects on rent levels and, above all, on security of tenure and whether ways have been found to get around it.

New clause 9, tabled by the hon. Member for Bristol Central, concerns the protection of tenants with disabilities to ensure that they are not discriminated against, and it is important. It has been widely supported across the House, and I hope the Government will agree it, or at least introduce something similar on Report in the Lords if necessary. The hon. Member is representing an important and genuine need across the country.

Lastly, we have a housing crisis in Britain that is utterly beyond belief and utterly unnecessary. I talk to people every day where I live who are rough sleepers. They are walking around, spending the whole day trying to sell *The Big Issue* to raise £10 or £20 to pay for a bed in a night shelter that they can only access in the evening and have to leave in the morning. It is not

[Jeremy Corbyn]

accommodation, it is literally just that: a night shelter. Their life is searching for £20 in order just to survive. I am not saying that the local authority does not do all it can to help—it does. I am not saying there are not lots of housing charities that do the same—there are. But we have a well known number of people living in destitution in our society, grotesque overcrowding in many council and housing association homes, and insecurity in the private rented sector. The Bill goes a long way in reducing insecurity in the private rented sector, but it must be a wake-up call for our society to invest far more in council housing and in sustainable, affordable social housing.

4.45 pm

I understand all the demand for building housing, but owner-occupation, right to buy and all that will not necessarily solve the housing crisis that so many face. It is up to us in Parliament and the Government to do a great deal more to try to alleviate the massive levels of housing stress. The Bill goes some way towards that, but we could go further on rent controls and protection of tenants, and we could do much more on the empowerment of tenants.

I conclude by saying thank you to the often underfunded voluntary sector agencies that do so much to give advice. They are essentially part of the housing community. I thank in particular Acorn, which has done so much to empower tenants in the private rented sector to realise that they are not alone in facing irrational decisions by landlords who should know better than to pursue no-fault evictions, which will thankfully be ended by the Bill.

**Alex Sobel:** I express my gratitude to the Minister and the Secretary of State for tabling amendments on regulating the student lettings season, and on rent in advance. Both are issues that I have been campaigning on. Over a year ago, I went to Leeds University Union's cost of living event, where those issues and others were brought home to me starkly. They were also brought home to me by the National Union of Students' cost of living inquiry, and the all-party parliamentary group on students, which was led by our former colleague Paul Blomfield, and on which I served.

I really thank the Government for tabling amendments 18 and 53 on regulating the student letting season, building on the work of Paul Blomfield, who spearheaded work on this in his constituency of Sheffield Central. I will not press my new clause 4, and I urge Members to support those Government amendments. If there is no regulation of the letting season, students are pressured and intimidated by the rental market into signing tenancies with people they hardly know, sometimes nine months before they are due to move in. Students of all backgrounds are forking out deposits to hold properties. Care leavers, estranged students and students from low economic backgrounds are left to either spend money that they do not have or risk housing insecurity for the next academic year. The Government's decision to limit the letting season to six months gives students the space and time to create healthy social relationships and save money for a deposit for the next academic year, drastically improving their mental wellbeing.

Government new clauses 13 and 14 are landmark measures that ensure that students are not subject to excessive and exploitative up-front costs by limiting rent in advance. That creates a fairer, more accessible rental market. For example, my constituent Olivia was once required to pay £2,500—six months' rent up front—to move into a four-bed shared property. She is moving to Leeds to begin her masters. Leaving her without savings for a move to a new city is not how we should treat any person vulnerable to the rental market or looking to be an asset to the community. The Government new clauses will help prevent such unreasonable demands and alleviate financial pressure on tenants, so I am withdrawing my new clause 3 on limiting rents, and urge support for the Government new clauses.

My constituent Olivia's up-front costs were so high because she could not get a guarantor. Now that we have set limits on rent in advance, we must deal with the other side of the issue: the requirement for tenants to provide guarantors. The practice can exclude individuals who cannot meet those demands, or limit their access to secure housing. Adults who earn their own income can be excluded from signing up to rent basic accommodation in a shared house simply because they are not related to someone who owns UK property. My new clause 11 would place tighter restrictions on the requirement for tenants to provide a guarantor, especially when a tenant's rental history or income offer sufficient security. By refining those provisions, we can balance the legitimate interests of landlords with the rights and needs of tenants.

My new clause suggests that the need for a guarantor should be restricted when the following circumstances apply: when a reasonable assessment shows that personal income, including state benefits received and any other lawful source of income, is sufficient for the tenant to pay the full rent due under the tenancy; when arrangements are made for housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit to be paid directly to the landlord; when the landlord has entered into a contract of insurance, through which they are insured against non-payment of rent—that has been covered by other amendments—and in such other circumstances as may be prescribed in regulations by the Secretary of State. That gives the Government a wide avenue for implementing my new clause.

The expectation that tenants, despite entering into legally binding rental agreements, must secure a third-party guarantor undermines the very purpose of their rental contract. For many students, particularly those who cannot rely on family support, such as care leavers and estranged individuals, that requirement can make renting nearly impossible. The Bill provides a generational opportunity to raise standards of living in the UK to where they should be. As I will not push my new clause to a vote, I would welcome further discussion and engagement with the Minister as the Bill progresses on how we can change the reliance on guarantors in our rental markets. I know that he is open to that discussion.

In my constituency, 44.8% of constituents live in private rentals, compared with a national average of 19.4%. Leeds is home to a population of over 36,000 non-home students. The Bill is imperative to my constituents. Through its measures, I am hopeful that we can establish a rental market that promotes fairness, reduces inequality and strengthens communities across the UK. I am very happy to support the Government amendments.

**Jessica Toale** (Bournemouth West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for introducing the Bill, and all hon. Members on the Bill Committee who gave their time to consider with gravity this long-overdue reform, which will provide greater security and stability for millions of renters across the country. The Bill is particularly important to my constituency, where more than 31% of households are in the private rental sector. That figure is as high as 55% in some wards such as Bournemouth Central, and up to 45% in the wards of Winton, Westbourne and West Cliff.

The private rental sector should provide people with flexibility and be a stepping stone to home ownership, and it should support our local economies, but for too many, as we have heard from many hon. Members, it exacerbates instability and adds financial stress, locking people out of building the savings that they need to get on the housing ladder, as well as adding to mental health issues. That is particularly salient in my constituency, where the cost of housing is disproportionately expensive, given the wages that people can command. The average rent and property price is above the national average in Bournemouth, but average wages are 5% lower than the national average.

The Bill is timely, because in recent months I have been deeply concerned about the growing number of residents who have been in touch to raise issues about housing, to the point that we are hosting three additional housing super-surgeries, aimed at providing constituents with the opportunity to share specific issues, and at giving them advice and guidance from many local organisations that specialise in these issues.

I want to raise a few issues relating to the amendments that many hon. Members will find apply in their constituencies. The first is poor-quality accommodation. In my constituency, one young woman and her daughter have been bounced from mouldy bedsit to mouldy bedsit while they wait for an appropriate social home. In the process, the woman's daughter has developed asthma. I welcome the reforms relating to the decent homes standard and Awaab's law.

Lots of people have been in touch who are being forced into homelessness by eye-watering rental increases or section 21 notices. The average increase last year for a one-bed flat in my constituency was 10%. Another young woman and her daughter were made homeless by a section 21 notice following an unaffordable rent increase. She has been unable to find anything that meets her physical and mental health needs—but in any case, she cannot meet the up-front cost of much private rental sector accommodation in our constituency. I welcome the amendment to address up-front costs. Her situation is compounded by long social housing waiting lists. I welcome the wider housing reforms that the Government are bringing forward, including the increased targets for social housing and the wider house building programme.

There are almost 20,000 students living in my constituency. I recently met student union representatives from Bournemouth University and the Arts University Bournemouth, who told me about the struggles their students face, from the stress of finding an appropriate place to live to the timetables for finding accommodation and the struggle to rent. Many students are forced to couch surf because they cannot afford the deposit money or do not have a guarantor who meets the requirements.

Bournemouth is one of the top 10 most expensive places to be a student in the UK; some 95% of the maintenance loan is eaten up by housing costs, leaving many students with about £4 a week afterwards. That is not a sustainable situation. I therefore welcome the measures to protect student tenancies and address the up-front costs for students. It is my hope that in the longer run, many students will benefit from these reforms, will fall in love with Bournemouth and want to stay, and will be able to find appropriate and affordable places to live.

As we have heard, good and responsible landlords have nothing to fear from these reforms. I welcome the measures to give landlords more clarity and a better understanding of their legal obligations, and to address repossession rights. The abolition of section 21, Awaab's law and the up-front cost provisions will allow my constituents and many across the country to breathe a sigh of relief. I therefore welcome the Bill and new clause 13.

**Jacob Collier** (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): For years, renters have faced instability, insecurity and, in many cases, exploitation. Today, we are taking a decisive step towards confronting these injustices. It was a pleasure to serve on the Bill Committee; I believe that we will look back on the Bill as one of the proudest achievements of this Labour Government.

I am proud to support the Government's new clause 13, which limits the security deposit that a landlord can demand from tenants to just one month's rent. This change addresses one of the most significant barriers for renters in my constituency: the crippling up-front cost of high security deposits. Previously, landlords were able to demand deposits of up to six months' rent, a practice that has often priced out renters and left many unable to secure a home. By capping deposits at just one month's rent, we are making it far easier for tenants to move into their home without facing a financial burden that has long been a barrier to entry to the rental market. New clause 13 is a vital step in making the rental market more accessible and affordable, particularly to those who have been excluded from the market due to high costs. This change will ensure that renters are treated fairly and can more easily get the stability that they need, without facing financial hardship.

The Bill is just one part of a package of measures that support renters and tackle the housing crisis in this country. Those measures include getting on with building those 1.5 million new homes through planning reform; an industrial strategy that gives us the tools to build those homes; and the technical excellence colleges that will deliver skilled people. This Government recognise that the housing crisis is not a problem that can be solved in isolation.

As one of the younger Members of this House, I am part of a generation that feels that we have been trapped in renting. Recent data shows that under-30s are spending more than 30% of their income on rent, which is more than any other group. The people who told us to stop eating avocados and cancel Netflix were not serious about confronting the gravity of the situation. They failed my generation; it is this Government who are taking action today.

The previous Conservative Government had ample opportunity to enact meaningful reform, and I note that Conservatives continue to fail to stand up for renters. Despite their promises to abolish section 21 no-fault

[Jacob Collier]

evictions—a leading cause of homelessness—they failed to deliver. Instead, under their watch, Parliament was clocking off early while the problems in the country mounted up. They retreated from their housing commitments, and prioritised the appeasement of powerful landlord interests over the welfare of millions of renters.

On Second Reading, the Leader of the Opposition said that resolving the housing crisis hinges solely on increasing housing supply and reducing immigration. Need I remind her that her Government did the exact opposite? In response to comments from the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), let me note that the Government have already increased housing targets and acted decisively to address illegal migration. However, I reject the premise that renters rights' should be contingent on these factors alone. The protection and empowerment of renters is entirely independent of such matters.

As we heard from Shelter and Generation Rent in the Bill Committee, we need to rebalance the power between landlords and tenants. In recent years the balance has favoured landlords over tenants, but the Bill and the Government amendments introduce several key reforms designed to rebalance that relationship. For renters in my constituency, the Bill presents transformative change: families will no longer face the fear of sudden, arbitrary evictions and can truly make their rented properties their homes.

5 pm

The tragic death of Awaab Ishak, caused by mould exposure in his social housing, highlights an issue that we must address. Extending Awaab's law to the private rented sector is a crucial step towards ensuring safe and healthy living conditions for all. Key to this will be enforcement of the law, and I know that the Government are fully aware of that following the Minister's commitments in Committee, which he has repeated today.

One of the Bill's most significant but often overlooked reforms is the creation of a national landlord database, which will empower tenants to make informed choices and protect them from rogue landlords. Remarkably, we often have more information about the available takeaway options than about those whom we trust with our homes and our incomes. This measure raises market standards while also recognising the responsible landlords who maintain quality homes. Having introduced a similar system as community officer in the University of Nottingham students' union, I am aware of the positive impact such transparency brings, and I am proud to see that vision realised here today.

In contrast, I must express my concerns about the Opposition's new clause 21, which proposes that the Secretary of State consult the insurance industry to ensure that specific insurance products are available to landlords who are letting properties to tenants who are on benefits or will be keeping pets. On the surface that may appear to be a constructive solution, but in practice it risks perpetuating harmful stereotypes and creating further barriers for tenants. The implication that tenants on benefits or pet owners inherently represent a greater risk is both unfair and unhelpful. It reinforces outdated prejudices at a time when we should be focusing on inclusivity and reducing discrimination in the rental market,

which is exactly what the Bill is about. As we heard from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour), pets are part of our families, and I am glad to see the provisions that support that.

Moreover, introducing specialised insurance products may have the unintended consequence of discouraging landlords from letting to those specific groups. Such products are unlikely to make renting more attractive; instead, they may result in higher premiums or more complex terms that landlords will interpret as a reason to avoid letting properties to a tenant altogether. We must not jeopardise the gains in the Bill by introducing measures that risk creating an unequal and discriminatory rental system. The future of the rental market should be one in which responsible landlords and renters co-exist on an equal footing, supported by policies that prioritise fairness and dignity.

These reforms are not mere administrative changes; they represent a profound shift toward justice and equity in our housing system. They acknowledge that while many landlords operate ethically, there exists a minority whose practices undermine the integrity of the rental market and the wellbeing of tenants. To them, we are sending a clear message: "Your time of exploiting loopholes and avoiding accountability is over."

Ultimately, what our constituents want is simple: they want the security of a roof over their head for them and their family, a job that pays the bills, and healthcare that works for them when they need it. This Government are getting on with delivering all those things, and the Bill is a key part of that. It is a pivotal step towards a fairer, more just housing system. It reflects Labour's unwavering commitment to protecting renters, supporting good landlords and rectifying the systemic issues that have plagued our rental market for far too long. I am proud to be supporting the Bill and the Government amendments tonight.

**Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): A third of people in my constituency live in private rented accommodation. That is already pretty high, and well above the national average of 19%, but in some wards, such as Southall Green, it rises to almost 50% of people living in rented homes. Ealing borough is what is known as super-diverse, with people from all over the world having made it their home. For many of my constituents in Southall, English is a second, third or even fourth language that they sometimes struggle with. That leaves them wide open to abuse by rogue landlords, and under the previous Government there was nothing they could do about it.

The Conservatives made promise after promise to renters but never delivered. In hock to vested interests, they reneged on every pledge they made to renters, and some of the amendments tabled by the Opposition today continue to prioritise the needs of bad landlords over those of renters.

In 2023, Generation Rent produced a report into renting by the British-Indian community, using data from renters in Southall. The report found that over a third had not received any of the six important documents they were entitled to from their landlord. A third stated that their landlord had threatened them with an unaffordable rent increase. Over half said that their rent had increased in the previous six months, with the average increase being £200 per month, and many were



living in damp, overcrowded conditions. The Renters' Rights Bill will ensure that vulnerable tenants such as those in Ealing Southall are able to go to the housing ombudsman for help. They will also be able to challenge arbitrary evictions and unfair rent rises.

I welcome the Government's amendments today, which strengthen the Bill even further, particularly new clause 13, which will end the astronomical deposits often demanded from tenants in advance. That is a very important change, particularly in Ealing Southall, because where people face low pay and massive rent costs, it will reduce a barrier to them getting into good-quality, safe housing and ensure that we do not continue to see people sleeping on the streets.

The previous Government sat back while renters in my constituency were condemned to mouldy flats, huge rent rises and the threat of no-fault evictions, but Ealing's Labour council took action. It introduced a new selective licensing scheme for private landlords, and these schemes were discussed in Committee. Selective landlord licensing schemes require private landlords to have a licence to rent out properties in designated areas of high deprivation or poor housing conditions. They have to meet certain conditions to obtain the licence, such as providing safe and suitable accommodation, complying with fire safety regulations and managing their properties in a responsible manner. In the absence of action from the previous Government, these schemes have allowed councils such as Ealing to enforce higher standards for renters, as the licensing fees and any fines raised from irresponsible landlords are ringfenced for enforcing standards. In Ealing it has also increased awareness for vulnerable tenants of the minimum standards to be expected in rented accommodation.

The previous Government were not big supporters of licensing landlords in this way. They preferred standing up for landlords, rather than standing up for renters. In fact, they changed the law to give the Secretary of State a veto on selective licensing schemes that covered more than 20% of a council area. It looks like the Conservatives still are not big supporters of these schemes, as one of the amendments they tabled in Committee would have removed selective landlord licensing altogether. That would be a massive backwards move, and I am glad the Minister agrees with me.

In fact, before Christmas the Minister announced that he would be removing the Conservatives' veto, and councils will now be able to expand schemes such as the one in Ealing to the whole borough if they want to. I am delighted that the Government have taken fast action on this without waiting for the Bill to pass, and I look forward to more councils with poor housing and high deprivation levels being able to bring in successful licensing schemes such as the one in Ealing. I also welcome the Government amendments, which will give more power to local authorities to enforce renters' rights and to pay for enforcement and investigation.

The Conservatives have proved today that they do not care about renters, and most of the points that they have raised are about protecting bad landlords—although so few of the party's Members have turned up that I wonder whether they care about anything. By contrast, Labour believes that it is time we rebalanced the power relationship between landlords and tenants so that constituents such as mine know their rights and can enforce them, including the rights to fair rent, to safe

homes and to secure tenancies. I welcome the real difference that this Bill and the Government amendments will make to the lives of families in Ealing Southall.

**Steve Yemm** (Mansfield) (Lab): The reforms outlined in this Bill and the amendments are, of course, long overdue. When I stood for election last year, I promised that I would deliver on five missions for Mansfield, one of which was to fix our broken housing market and ensure that people have affordable homes to rent. Sadly, that mission is necessary because many of my constituents face the constant risk of eviction. They live in fear of massive rent hikes, or endure substandard and even dangerous conditions in their homes.

I will discuss two key aspects of the amendments. First, I support Government new clause 13, particularly in respect of rent and deposits in advance. I will read a few lines from a recent casework email that I received from one of my constituents:

"I saw a house listed for rent and paid a deposit and rent in advance to secure the property. There were a few things that needed doing, which the agency said they would let the landlord know about and get fixed. I received the keys and was shocked that the damp and mould was still there, the radiator in one of the bedrooms was left on the floor and the bathtub was still out of place. The agent told me that the gas engineers told them that 'the pipes in the house are all botched'. Winter is around the corner and if the heaters were to stop working, I'd have to stay in the house freezing. I'm a nurse and it would not be ideal for me to be off work sick."

My constituent further wrote:

"I tried every day to get an update and find out if the landlord had sorted out the problems. Every time I had to leave in disappointment. Expecting to move into the new house, I vacated my previous occupancy. I was so mentally, emotionally, physically and financially drained that I went to the agency and I gave them the keys back. I did not feel comfortable living in a house where the landlord is neglecting tenants. If I was to move in and something was to go wrong, he would never come out or get it fixed on time."

Those are really powerful words from my constituent.

Following that, my constituent was denied any kind of refund for a period of months. They were only able to secure a refund due to a last-minute intervention by my office, after I had suggested that I would name the letting agent in my speech. The letting agent was kind enough to get back to my constituent and has provided them with a full refund today. That outlines the importance of Government new clause 13 and why I am pleased to support it, and it emphasises why the reform set out in the Bill and the amendments is needed. I understand that the decent homes standard outlined in the Bill will force landlords in the private rented sector to make their homes safe and secure, and to give tenants more avenues for financial redress when things go wrong, as in the case of my constituent.

My second point is that we have seen rents increase at a dramatic rate year after year, and it is time that people in the private rented sector got a better deal. There are usually many applications from prospective tenants when a new property comes to market in my constituency, which often leads to bidding wars driving up the price that is paid to rent the property, pitting tenant against tenant. This leaves only one winner.

I am pleased that the Government have also set the target of building 1.5 million new homes in England over five years, which will make a huge difference. I recognise and welcome those measures.

5.15 pm

Finally, by abolishing section 21 no-fault evictions and fixed terms, the Bill will remove the threat of arbitrary evictions from my constituents and increase tenant security. A constituent recently came to me following a disagreement with her landlord about a proposed increase in her rent and repairs needed to the property. I understand that halfway through the repair process, the landlord suspended the work and served her with a section 21 notice. This was particularly difficult given the tenant's medical issues and her son's special educational needs. No reason at all was given for serving the notice. This Bill and the amendments will outlaw such practices and give tenants in my constituency security in their homes.

For the reasons I have outlined, and indeed for the many more reasons that have been outlined by my colleagues in the Chamber today, this Bill and the amendments will have a significant impact on the quality of life of the people in Mansfield who elected me to this place. By supporting this legislation, I am delivering on one of my missions to help fix the broken housing market for local people in my constituency.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan** (Poole) (Lab): I would like to echo the comments of my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Jessica Toale), and the references that she made to the housing problems in our area. Today marks a once-in-a-generation moment, with the biggest change to private renting since the Conservatives' Housing Act 1988. The Thatcher reforms aimed to rejuvenate private renting by making it more attractive to landlords, but instead they helped to sow the seeds of the housing crisis we see today.

England's 12 million private renters face some of the worst-quality housing in the developed world, with shocking levels of damp and mould and low rates of insulation resulting in health problems and unaffordable energy bills. Instead of producing competitive and affordable housing, decades of tipping the scale towards landlords has resulted in homes that are insecure, eye-wateringly expensive and often short term in nature. While renters in countries such as Germany enjoy secure, long-lasting tenancies with rights to redress when things go wrong, tenants in England can be put out on the street by a no-fault eviction if they complain about a leaky roof or a broken boiler.

I rise to speak in support of new clause 3, which would limit rent in advance of tenancy; new clause 7, which would limit proposed rent levels; and new clause 9, which covers the right to have home adaptations made to a property. We know that this legislation will end the exploitative bidding wars that drive up rental prices, stamp out discrimination on renting to families with children or those on benefits, and give renters the right to request pets in their home.

With section 21 finally consigned to history, tenants will also benefit from longer notice periods, giving them more security in their homes, and we will hold landlords accountable for health hazards in their properties. No longer should tenants and their families suffer damage to their health because a landlord refuses to act. However, to truly deliver a more secure future for renters in England, the Bill needs to close a loophole that would allow no-fault evictions to continue via rent hikes. Amendment 9, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker), would cap in-tenancy rent rises.

It would introduce a cap on the amount a landlord can raise the rent of a sitting tenant, so that no one has to face a rent hike higher than wage growth or inflation.

Everyone deserves to have basic security in their home, whether they rent or own. People with mortgages tend to have relatively predictable costs. Tenants have no such peace of mind. Today, there is nothing to protect tenants from extortionate, unjust rent hikes. The Renters' Rights Bill does not do enough to change that. Last year, a Government survey of landlords found that rent increases of 15% or more when renewing or extending a contract are common. Despite the Bill's passage, renters who cannot afford extortionate rent hikes will continue to have no alternative but to move, fall into debt or face eviction. There is a real danger that landlords will continue to evict tenants or threaten them with eviction at will, with unfair rent increases taking the place of section 21 evictions.

The Bill's provisions to allow renters the right to appeal to a tribunal that can determine a market rate increase are insufficient. By definition, market rates are already unaffordable for many renters. Only capping rent increases will give renters genuine security in their home and stop landlords threatening vulnerable people with unaffordable rent hikes or homelessness.

Beyond security, the biggest issue most renters face is the fast-growing cost of having a home to live in. The amount of income that families in this country are losing to rent is rapidly becoming unsustainable. Nearly two thirds of working renters in England struggle to afford their rent, according to recent research by Shelter. Rent produces almost zero social benefit. It takes money away from working-class people who could otherwise spend it in their community, and it passes that money to property owners. What simpler, more effective way could there be to ease the cost of living crisis for millions of people and put money back in their pockets than by limiting their largest outgoing?

Rent stabilisation measures are common across Europe. In France, the annual increase is limited to 3.5%. Meanwhile, in England, rent has been rising faster than wages for well over a year, and the average annual increase reported in December was 9.3%. A cap on rent increases has the support of housing charities, renters' organisations and major unions. It also has strong public support. When it comes to the housing crisis, we must keep all options on the table, and I hope the Government will back these changes to the Bill.

Ultimately, we need to increase the supply of council housing at affordable rents. In my constituency of Poole, we have some of the highest rents relative to wages in the country. Change, therefore, cannot come soon enough for those renters, and this Bill is a welcome first step.

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): I will address new clauses 5 to 7 and amendments 9, 5 and 6, which deal with rent controls.

Before I do so, I should say that I take a particular interest in new clause 9, tabled by the hon. Member for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer), which I have signed. I chair an unpaid carers group, and there is a real concern that even where renters have an assessment done for aids and adaptations, they cannot enforce it on their landlord, which leaves them vulnerable. They then have

no choice but to move, with all the disruption that involves, particularly if they are caring for someone with significant disabilities.

I did not think that this was a contentious issue, and I hope the Minister will assure the hon. Member for Bristol Central that there can be further dialogue as the Bill goes to the House of Lords. If we have that dialogue, I think we can find something that will satisfy all concerned, to give strength to those with disabilities and those caring for them, while satisfying the Government about the ramifications of an amendment of this nature. If we can get that form of words, I would urge the hon. Member not to press her amendment to a vote. If it were voted down, it would send a message to the Lords that the Commons does not support it, whereas I think there is support in this House, but not necessarily for this form of words. Sometimes it is best not to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. I think we might have something here, but I will leave that to the hon. Member's judgment.

Briefly, on rent controls, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) mentioned her constituency. Mine is next door, and I represent a working-class, multicultural community, where we have been going through a housing crisis for at least the last decade. I have lived there for 50 years and the crisis is on a scale that we have never seen before, caused, as others have said, by the selling off of our council houses. The irony here is that the same council houses that have been put into the hands of private landlords are now being rented back at very high rents to house the homeless people the council is placing in them.

With the Government's policy of increasing housing supply and the 1.5 million new homes we are about to build, I hope that a large number of those homes will be social or council housing. As a result, we can start to tackle the housing crisis in my constituency. In the meantime, however, we will be dependent on the private rented sector.

The only reason I am speaking is the representations I have had from constituents, knowing that the Bill was coming up. I have also worked with Acorn, the Renters' Reform Coalition and various other agencies. Those constituents have said, "Can you try to at least get across the plight we are facing at the moment?" That plight is dependent, to be honest, on landlords who are ripping them off. The concept of price gouging is emerging in all our discussions about the economy; well, here is an element of price gouging. With private rented landlords, particularly in London, we have seen profit ratios of anything between 5% and 20%. The argument is made that we can have a tribunal system. People can go to the tribunal, which will determine things on the basis of the market rent. In fact, the market rent is determined by what is almost an oligopoly of landlords in a particular area, who maintain high rents because they want to maximise profits.

The housing conditions in the private rented sector in my constituency are, in some instances, absolutely appalling. If a tenant complains, that is when the section 21 comes in. Indeed, tenants are terrified of complaining because if they get evicted, they probably face higher rent elsewhere. That is why we need a comprehensive system of rent controls. I do not see any other solution and I hope that, although the Government will not accept the

amendments today, we can have a dialogue. That way, maybe between now and the Bill's passage through the Lords or in future legislation, we can address the issue of rent controls.

The argument is very simple: we just want a system where rents are linked to wages or inflation. That way, people cannot be ripped off by higher rent increases. That is not rocket science. I am old enough to remember when we had rent controls, with a local rent officer who the local authority would send round. They would determine a fair rent and also what was fair in terms of wages and income for any future rental levels. Rent controls operate across Europe and it has not had an impact on the supply of private rented housing elsewhere. It is a system that could be readily introduced.

I worry that if we do not do that now, we will be back here in a couple of years' time with the same problems. Although we want to build new homes at speed, we will still be dependent on the private rented sector and on some, but not all, landlords—we have good landlords as well—who are basically profiteering at the expense of homeless people.

Turning to my final point, the issue of developing a tribunal system was raised by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). The tribunal system needs to ensure that people are properly represented and have time to take on the system. Most of us with a trade union background will have dealt with employment tribunals over the years. They can be effective, but the only reason for that is that we have the might and organisation of the trade union movement. We do not have that in the rental sector to represent tenants.

Although I welcome the idea that we will have a thorough tribunal system that is effective in dealing with hard cases, it is not realistic to expect tenants in my constituency to utilise that without the resources to do so, particularly as we have lost a lot of our advice agencies as a result of austerity. That is why we will need to come back and discuss again the solution of rent controls, which my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker) brought forward.

**Amanda Martin:** Good-quality, secure and decent rentals should not be too much to ask, and I thank those landlords who do provide that in my city and beyond. I welcome the Government amendments to this detailed Bill, which will help residents in Portsmouth North to rent homes that are both secure and decent.

5.30 pm

This new, fairer system includes an end to excessive, up-front costs, huge deposits and advance rents. It will also prevent students from feeling pressured to sign up to an agreement very early in their term, and protect bereaved families by limiting a guarantee liability in the event of the death of a family member or a tenant. The changes, along with the expansion to the decent homes standard, are necessary and part of a significant package of reforms. Behind each one of these issues is a human face and a heartbreaking story.

The reforms will reverse the environment of uncertainty and fear. In the past, tenants' fear of raising issues has destabilised families and communities and contributed to the broader housing crisis. This is no more starkly seen than in a section 21 no-fault eviction, which was

mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles (Michael Wheeler). As a teacher, I, too, have seen distraught kids who have been evicted from their homes as a result of a section 21 notice.

I wish to share the stories of two of my constituents—Sally and Rachel. Sally is a student nurse in receipt of universal credit with a child with special educational needs and disabilities. She has privately rented her home for 14 years. The landlord has neglected the property significantly during this time, and the house has had extensive issues, with mould, leaks and water damage. Despite that, Sally wants to stay. Her landlord decided that it would be easier simply to evict her through a section 21 notice in order to carry out the extensive repairs that needed to be done to the house, leaving her and her son homeless. The callous use of a section 21 notice to displace a family in order to more conveniently perform repairs that should have already been done shocked me.

Rachel is a mum in Portsmouth North with four children, two of whom have SEND. She was given a section 21 notice by her private landlord before Christmas and asked to leave on 8 January—a no-fault eviction with no reason. The cruelty of the timing is shocking. Had the previous Government enacted their 2019 manifesto, Rachel would not be in this situation. She has since been informed by the council that she could be waiting for five or six years for a property that meets her needs, and she is now facing living in costly temporary accommodation that will not meet her children's needs. In addition, the housing team at the council have warned her that, as too few houses have been built in the city over the past decade, she may be housed in a different area—away from her children's schools, away from her support network and away from her job.

The Bill finally removes section 21 no-fault evictions, and today's amendments will strengthen the fairness of the market for a wider set of tenants. On behalf of all the Sallys and Rachels, I wish to acknowledge the work of this Government in their commitment to rebalance the relationship between landlords and tenants and to produce changes that are pro-market, pro-tenant and pro-community. The abolition of section 21 notices and the fair changes that we need cannot come soon enough. It is too late for some people, but this Bill and its provisions will ensure that people in Portsmouth and across the country have access to a good-quality and fair housing system.

**Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab):** There can be few places in our country that need this Bill more than Bournemouth East. A total of 33% of households in my constituency are in private rented accommodation, which is considerably more than the national average of 19%. In Boscombe West, a ward, 60% are private renting, and in East Cliff, where I live, it is 56%. Rents went up in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole by 9% in the year to October 2024, which is higher than the national average. Some 81% of respondents to Shelter's Dorset survey in BCP said that they were struggling to pay their rent. As somebody who used to lead a mental health charity, I know the link between health outcomes, poor mental health and poor rented accommodation. For everybody living in poor rented accommodation in Bournemouth East, I know there will be a significant effect on health outcomes.

I want to talk briefly about the abolition of no-fault evictions and bring my constituents into the debate. My constituent Caroline from Boscombe had lived in overcrowded private rented housing with her two children with special educational needs and disabilities for 11 years before being given a section 21. Being forced to move at short notice has significantly negatively affected her mental health. The Labour Government's abolition of so-called no-fault evictions in the Bill will go a long way to giving tenants like Caroline greater security.

I also welcome a decent homes standard now being applied to the private rented sector. My constituent Naomi, from Boscombe, recently contacted me about the repeated incidence of mould in her one-bedroom rented flat, which she shares with her partner and their 10-week-old baby. The flat also has dangerous loose floorboards, a leaking shower and fire doors that do not close. Her landlord continues to ignore her emails. The provisions in the Bill that apply the decent homes standard to the private rented sector will give renters like Naomi safer, better-value homes and remove the blight of poor-quality homes from our communities.

**Mr Luke Charters (York Outer) (Lab):** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. May I raise the case of one of my constituents? He is a dad with a young daughter, and he has a chronic illness. Not only did he have many unfair deductions to his deposit at the end of his tenancy, but the landlord refused to fix the shower because they claimed it was some other sort of device—what a disgrace. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to get through that Division Lobby, fight for our constituents and reform renters' rights once and for all?

**Tom Hayes:** I never disagree with my hon. Friend, and his point shows why we need the Bill.

I welcome the Bill's protections against unreasonable rent rises and rental bidding. My disabled constituent Tracey, also from Boscombe, got in contact with me about how a substantial hike in her rent acted as an effective eviction as she was unable to pay. Despite looking to use her personal independence payment towards her rent, she was forced to look for alternative accommodation, and we all know how difficult that is in the private rented sector for people with disabilities. I welcome the protections in the Bill against unreasonable rent rises because they will provide much-needed security for renters like Tracey who struggle to find appropriate accommodation in the rented sector to meet their needs.

I also welcome the introduction of a new ombudsman service, which will provide quick, fair, impartial and binding resolutions for tenants' complaints about their landlord, bringing tenant-landlord complaint resolution on a par with established redress practices for tenants in social housing or consumers of property agent services. I welcome the move to make it illegal for landlords to discriminate against tenants in receipt of housing benefit or other benefits or with children when choosing to let their property. That particularly affects James in my constituency, who is homeless and cannot secure private rented housing because he is in receipt of benefits.

All of us who hold constituency surgeries week in, week out will know these stories. All of us have campaigned for better renters' rights because we have heard those stories on the doorstep, and I commend the Government for bringing forward the Bill at such an early stage in

this Parliament. We must of course make the point that not all landlords are bad, but the Bill is important because it weeds out those bad landlords so that the good landlords—those who care about their tenants and who provide an important duty to the housing market—can continue to have a good reputation, and so the overall market continues to have that good reputation.

I commend the Bill and the ministerial team for bringing it forward. I am thrilled that renters in Bournemouth and across Britain will finally, after many years of delay, get the renters' rights they deserve—no, that they are entitled to.

**Matthew Pennycook:** Let me begin by thanking all hon. Members for their contributions. It has been a thoughtful and good-natured debate, and while there are many genuine points of difference and emphasis, there is a consensus across the House that reform of the private rented sector is long overdue and must be taken forward.

In the time I have available to me, I will respond to a number of the amendments and key arguments. In his contribution, the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), suggested that Government new clauses 13 and 14 risk locking out of the rental market those renters who are on the financial margins and fettering landlords and tenants coming to fair agreements on tenancies in the assured regime that we are introducing. I gently say to him that he seriously downplays the imbalance between landlords and tenants, and the fact that requiring multiple months of rent from a tenant in advance when agreeing a tenancy is unfair, places considerable strain on tenants and can exclude some people and families from renting altogether.

Landlords will continue to be able to take a holding deposit of up to one week, a tenancy deposit of five or six weeks' rent and up to one month's rent in advance before a tenancy has begun. They will also be free to undertake the necessary referencing and affordability checks to give them confidence that a tenancy is sustainable for all parties. If and when they are not satisfied by the outcomes of pre-tenancy checks, options are available to tenants and landlords to ensure that rent in advance need not be used—requesting a guarantor or engaging in landlord insurance, for example. I hope that provides the shadow Minister with a degree of reassurance on that point.

The shadow Minister tabled a number of amendments—several of which we debated in detail in Committee. With regard to amendments 57, 58 and 60, I restate the argument that I made in Committee: fixed terms mean that tenants are locked into tenancy agreements without the freedom to move should their personal circumstances change, and compel tenants to pay rent regardless of whether a property is fit to live in, reducing the incentive for unscrupulous landlords to complete repairs. For that reason, the Government remain firmly of the view that there is no place whatsoever for fixed terms of any kind in the new tenancy regime that the Bill introduces.

A number of hon. Members referred to problems with short-term lets. The Government are cognisant of the impact that excessive concentrations of short-term lets can have on the affordability and availability of local housing and the sustainability of local communities. We are committed to monitoring that issue and, as the

Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos), knows, we are exploring what further powers local authorities need to bear down on it. However, putting an arbitrary deadline in law, as new clause 2 would do, is not the way to proceed.

**Gideon Amos:** I am grateful to the Minister for his response on that issue. Will he comment on the question of a use class order for second homes?

**Matthew Pennycook:** The hon. Gentleman tempts me to engage in an entirely different debate. I am more than happy to update him, at the appropriate time, with all the measures that the Government will take forward in response to that issue. He can be assured, however, that we are giving it serious attention, and this will not be a case of the Government kicking something into the long grass.

The Government are clear that we will not delay on giving renters the long-term security, rights and protections that they deserve by making the necessary and long-overdue transformation of the sector, contingent on a broad and undefined assessment of the possession process, as new clause 19 and amendment 56 propose. The shadow Minister knows that I fully agree with him that court readiness is essential to the successful operation of the new system. That is why my officials and I are working closely with the Minister for Courts and Legal Services and her team to ensure that the Courts and Tribunals Service is ready when the new tenancy system is brought into force.

The shadow Minister also pressed the Government to place in the Bill a legal requirement to publish an annual review of its impact on the availability of homes. He will know that the Government have published a green-rated impact assessment. We will, of course, closely monitor the impact of the Bill on the housing market, but setting an arbitrary deadline in law for doing so would, we believe, detract from that work. Although I do not begrudge him for tabling new clause 20 to make that point, he will know that no Government could accept such an amendment.

The Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington, and several Members of his party raised the issue of military accommodation and tabled amendment 3. There is no dispute about that amendment's objective—namely to ensure that all service accommodation equals or exceeds the decent homes standard. The Government have made that commitment. Where we do disagree is on whether the approach that we are taking in the Bill is appropriate for the unique circumstances surrounding Ministry of Defence accommodation. We do not believe that it is, for various reasons that we discussed at length in Committee, including the problems that local authorities have in inspecting accommodation that is behind the wire on sensitive MOD bases. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Ministry of Defence is committed to reviewing its decent homes-plus standard for accommodation, with the aim of improving the standard of SFA across the estate, where it needs improvement, as part of its long-term strategy for service accommodation. That review will be informed by my Department's work on housing standards, including our review of the content of the DHS, which Ministers

[Matthew Pennycook]

in the Ministry of Defence are committed to aligning with. The Ministry of Defence will provide further information on the review of its target early in 2025.

**Gideon Amos:** The Minister is generous in giving way. On the question of accommodation behind the wire, to clarify, amendment 3 deals with service family accommodation. Service family accommodation is generally not behind the wire; it is on the street, where councils can access it.

5.45 pm

**Matthew Pennycook:** That is only one of the issues; as the hon. Gentleman knows, we debated many others in Committee. I appreciate that there is a principled disagreement on this point. We share his objective, but we think that there is a different and more sensible way to go about meeting it. Addressing service accommodation through this Bill is not the way to proceed.

**Calum Miller:** Will the Minister give way?

**Matthew Pennycook:** I will, happily, and then I will make some progress.

**Calum Miller:** I am very grateful to the Minister; I appreciate the time constraints that he faces. The critical question is when those in our communities who live in service accommodation can expect it to reach the standards that he and his colleagues intend to set out. I appreciate the co-operation with Defence Ministers, but can the Minister give us a date by which that standard will be in place?

**Matthew Pennycook:** I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's question and his desire for that information, but it is not for me to give a date from the Dispatch Box today; my colleagues in the Ministry of Defence will provide further information on the review of that target standard early this year.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker) and the hon. Member for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer), spoke in support of their respective amendments to introduce forms of rent control. I assure each of those Members that I entirely understand their concerns about the affordability of rent generally, and specifically the potential for retaliatory no-fault economic evictions. Once section 21 evictions are done away with, unscrupulous landlords will no doubt attempt to evict tenants who assert their rights by means of extortionate rent rises.

However, as we debated extensively in Committee, the Government sincerely believe that the introduction of rent controls in the private rented sector could harm tenants as well as landlords by reducing supply and discouraging investment. While I fully appreciate that there is a broad spectrum of regulation that falls under the title of rent control, there is, as we debated at length in Committee, sufficient international evidence from countries such as Sweden and Germany, cities such as San Francisco and Ontario, and the Scottish experience since 2017, to attest to the potential detrimental impacts of rent control. For that reason, we believe that we

should proceed on the basis of the protections that the Bill provides against unreasonable within-tenancy rent rises, as well as wider action to improve affordability, not least support for the growth of the build-to-rent sector.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Wavertree also tabled new clause 5, which would place a duty on the Secretary of State to conduct a review of the tenancy deposit protection schemes and requirements. The contracts governing those schemes are due to end next year, and their re-procurement provides an opportunity for the Department to review their objectives and how they operate. I am more than happy to engage with my hon. Friend on that process; on that basis, I ask her to not divide the House on her new clause. I am also more than happy to ensure that she is closely involved in the development of the PRS database. We believe that there are good reasons for the detail relating to that database to be laid out in secondary legislation, rather than put in the Bill, as her amendment 7 stipulates. However, it is our clear expectation that the database will capture key information about landlords, and we recognise that there may be clear benefits in using it to collect a wider range of information, as her amendment suggests.

My hon. Friend also tabled new clause 6, which would require local authorities, if requested, to pay or guarantee the tenancy deposits of care leavers seeking to access the private rented sector. I am of the view that local authorities, rather than central Government, are best placed to assess the best way of supporting care leavers in their area. I reassure my hon. Friend that while local authorities maintain their ability to support care leavers in their areas, the Government are committed to putting in place the support that local government needs to do so effectively.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel) made a strong case for new clause 11 on acting to limit guarantors. I appreciate fully that obtaining a guarantor can be difficult for some prospective tenants, and I understand the reasoning behind his amendment. However, I am also mindful that in some instances the use of guarantors can provide good landlords with the assurance necessary to let their properties to tenants who may otherwise find it difficult to access private rented accommodation. For example, there are those with a poor credit history—the kind of tenant who the shadow Minister worries our rent-in-advance amendments will harm. Having considered this issue in great detail, I ultimately concluded that limiting guarantors could inadvertently make life more difficult for certain types of renter. That said, I will keep the matter under review, and I am more than happy to engage in a dialogue with my hon. Friend about this in the weeks and months to come.

Several Opposition Members mentioned new clause 22, in the name of the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper). The Government are clear that all landlords must keep their properties in a fit state, and that there need to be robust routes of redress when they do not. However, tenants can already take their landlord to court if their home is unfit for human habitation, and if the courts find that landlords have not met their obligations, they can award compensation, as well as requiring landlords to carry out repairs. For that reason, while agreeing entirely with the objective, I believe that the hon. Lady's amendment is unnecessary.

I will briefly refer to two amendments on the amendment paper that were not spoken to by the Members who tabled them. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) rightly called for protection from discrimination for renters who require home adaptations. The rental discrimination provisions in the Bill are specifically designed to protect victims of discrimination who may not be eligible to make a case under the Equality Act 2010, such as those who have children or are in receipt of benefits. People with a disability are already afforded protections from discrimination relating to the provision of housing or services under the Act. For that reason, we do not believe her new clause 24 is warranted, but I am more than happy to discuss the matter with her outside the Chamber.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) tabled amendment 11 to make rent repayment orders available for initial failure to be a member of the PRS landlord ombudsman or to register with the PRS database. She will recognise that we have significantly strengthened the RRO provisions in the previous Government's Renters (Reform) Bill. However, I took the view that it would be inappropriate to extend rent repayment orders to non-criminal breaches of the kind that her amendment covers. Instead, local authorities will be able to issue civil penalties for the initial failures in question, with the possibility of higher financial penalties and RROs if landlords fail to sign up, having been fined.

Finally, I will mention the amendments relating to home adaptations—both new clause 9, in the name of the hon. Member for Bristol Central, and new clause 23, in the name of the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington. Both amendments seek to require PRS landlords to permit home disability adaptations for assured tenants when these have been recommended in a local authority home assessment. The hon. Member for Bristol Central tabled the same amendment in Committee, and as we discussed then, the Equality Act already provides that landlords cannot unreasonably refuse a request for reasonable adjustments to a disabled person's home. As I said in Committee, measures already in this Bill will improve the situation for disabled renters who request home adaptations. The abolition of section 21 notices will remove the threat of retaliatory eviction, empowering tenants to request the home adaptations they need and to complain if their requests are unreasonably refused. In addition, we are establishing the new PRS ombudsman, which will have strong powers to put things right for tenants where their landlord has failed to resolve a legitimate complaint.

I must say candidly to the hon. Lady that I remain somewhat unconvinced that these amendments are the way to address this absolutely legitimate issue—I recognise the problem she identifies—and for that reason, the Government will not be able to accept them. However, I can give her the assurance that we will commit to continuing to consider what more we may need to do to ensure that requests for reasonable adjustments cannot be unreasonably refused, including those recommended by local authority home assessments. I am more happy to engage with Members across the House, and to meet her, the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington and other Members who have concerns on the subject, to

discuss her amendment and the problem generally in more detail. I hope that, on that basis, she will consider not pressing her new clause to a vote.

**Carla Denyer:** If the Minister can confirm that the cross-party meeting will include the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, and that it will take place before the Bill goes to the Lords, I will be happy to withdraw my new clause.

**Matthew Pennycook:** I will happily give the hon. Member that assurance, and I am more than happy to ensure that my hon. Friend the Chair of the Committee attends, as well as any other Member with an interest in this issue. It is important, and I understand the problem that the hon. Member outlines. There are reasons why we do not think the new clause is necessarily the best way to approach the issue, but I am more than happy to have a dialogue on that point.

In conclusion, today we are making targeted amendments that aim to ensure that the Bill operates as intended. In many cases, we think that the amendments pushed by hon. Members are unnecessary, because we think that the Bill strikes the right balance between the interests of landlords and those of tenants. On that basis, I hope the whole House can get behind the Bill this evening.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*New clause 13 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.*

#### **New Clause 14**

##### **PROHIBITION OF RENT IN ADVANCE BEFORE LEASE ENTERED INTO**

- (1) Schedule 1 to the Tenant Fees Act 2019 (permitted payments) is amended in accordance with subsections (2) and (3).
- (2) After paragraph 1(1) (rent is a permitted payment) insert—
  - “(1A) But a payment of rent is a prohibited payment if—
    - (a) it is payable before the tenancy is entered into, and
    - (b) the tenancy is an assured tenancy.
  - (1B) This paragraph is subject to paragraph 1A.”
- (3) For sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 1 substitute—

*“Increased rent*

- 1A (1) If the amount of rent payable in respect of any relevant period (“P1”) is more than the amount of rent payable in respect of any later relevant period (“P2”), the additional amount payable in respect of P1 is a prohibited payment.
- (2) That is subject to the following provisions of this paragraph.”
- (4) After section 5 of the Tenant Fees Act 2019 insert—

*“Other provision about rent in advance*

##### **5A Pre-tenancy payments of rent: prohibitions**

- (1) A landlord must not—
  - (a) invite or encourage a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to the landlord in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England,
  - (b) accept an offer from a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to the landlord in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England, or
  - (c) accept from a relevant person a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England.
- (2) A landlord must not—
  - (a) invite or encourage a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to a third

party in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England,

- (b) accept an offer from a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to a third party in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England, or
- (c) accept from a third party a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England.
- (3) A letting agent must not—
- (a) invite or encourage a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to the letting agent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England,
- (b) accept an offer from a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to the letting agent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England, or
- (c) accept from a relevant person a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England.
- (4) A letting agent must not—
- (a) invite or encourage a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to a third party in connections with an assured tenancy of housing in England,
- (b) accept an offer from a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to a third party in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England, or
- (c) accept from a third party a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England.

(5) The Secretary of State may, by regulations made by statutory instrument, amend this section for the purpose of making provision about the descriptions of rent due in advance to which any provision of subsection (1), (2), (3) or (4) applies.

For this purpose “rent due in advance” means rent due before the period for which it is payable.

- (6) Regulations under subsection (5)—
- (a) may make different provision for different purposes;
- (b) may make supplemental, incidental, consequential, transitional, transitory or saving provision;
- (c) are to be made by statutory instrument.

(7) A statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (5) may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(8) In this section “prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent” means a payment of rent that is prohibited by paragraph 1(1A) of Schedule 1.

#### 5B Effect of a breach of section 5A

A term of an agreement between a letting agent and a relevant person which breaches section 5A is not binding on a relevant person.

Where a term of an agreement is not binding on a relevant person as a result of this section, the agreement continues, so far as practicable, to have effect in every other respect.”

- (5) The Tenant Fees Act 2019 is further amended as follows—
- (a) in section 6 (enforcement by local weights and measures authorities)—
- (i) in subsection (1), in paragraph (b) omit “and” and after that paragraph insert—
- “(ba) section 5A (pre-tenancy payments of rent: prohibitions), and”;
- (ii) in subsection (3), for “or 2” substitute “, 2 or 5A”;
- (b) in section 7 (enforcement by district councils), in subsection (1), for “and 2” substitute
- “, 2 and 5A”;

(c) in section 8 (financial penalties), in subsection (1), for “or 2” substitute “, 2 or 5A”;

(d) in section 10 (recovery by enforcement authority of amount paid)—

- (i) in subsection (1)(a), for “or 2” substitute “, 2 or 5A”;
- (ii) after subsection (2) insert—

“(2A) But that obligation to pay the amount, or remaining part, of the prohibited payment is subject to subsection (3), unless it is a case where the payment is prohibited by paragraph 1(1A) of Schedule 1 (pre-tenancy payment of rent).”;

- (iii) in subsection (3), for “But subsection (2) does not apply in relation to a prohibited payment” substitute “Subsection (2) does not apply in relation to the prohibited payment”;

(e) in section 15 (recovery by relevant person of amount paid), in subsection (1)(a), for “or 2” substitute “, 2 or 5A”.—

(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This amends the Tenant Fees Act 2019 so that rent in advance payable before the tenancy is entered into is a “prohibited payment” for the purposes of that Act. The new section 5A then also adds new prohibitions relating to that kind of prohibited payment.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 372, Noes 114.*

#### Division No. 75]

[5.57 pm

#### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Ady</i> )	Berry, Siân
Abbott, Jack	Billington, Ms Polly
Abrahams, Debbie	Bishop, Matt
Adam, Shockat	Blake, Olivia
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Blake, Rachel
Akehurst, Luke	Bloore, Chris
Alaba, Mr Bayo	Blundell, Mrs Elsie ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )
Aldridge, Dan	Bonavia, Kevin
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Botterill, Jade
Alexander, rh Heidi	Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Brash, Mr Jonathan
Ali, Rushanara	Bryant, Chris
Ali, Tahir	Buckley, Julia
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Burgon, Richard
Allister, Jim	Burke, Maureen
Amesbury, Mike ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Burton-Sampson, David
Anderson, Callum	Butler, Dawn
Anderson, Fleur	Byrne, Ian
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Byrne, rh Liam
Arthur, Dr Scott	Cadbury, Ruth
Asato, Jess	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Asser, James	Campbell, Mr Gregory
Athwal, Jas	Campbell, Irene
Atkinson, Catherine	Campbell, Juliet
Atkinson, Lewis	Campbell-Savours, Markus
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Carling, Sam
Bailey, Olivia	Carns, Al
Baines, David	Champion, Sarah
Baker, Alex	Charalambous, Bambos
Bance, Antonia	Charters, Mr Luke
Barker, Paula	Chowens, Ellie
Barron, Lee	Clark, Feryal
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Coleman, Ben
Baxter, Johanna	Collier, Jacob
Beales, Danny	Collinge, Lizzi
Beavers, Lorraine	Collins, Tom
Begum, Apsana	Conlon, Liam
Bell, Torsten	Coombes, Sarah
Benn, rh Hilary	Cooper, Andrew
	Cooper, Dr Beccy
	Corbyn, rh Jeremy



Costigan, Deirdre	Hanna, Claire	McEvoy, Lola	Rushworth, Sam
Cox, Pam	Hardy, Emma	McIntyre, Alex	Russell, Mrs Sarah
Coyle, Neil	Harris, Carolyn	McKee, Gordon	Rutland, Tom
Craft, Jen	Hatton, Lloyd	McKenna, Kevin	Ryan, Oliver
Creagh, Mary	Hayes, Helen	McKinnell, Catherine	Sackman, Sarah
Creasy, Ms Stella	Hayes, Tom	McMahon, Jim	Sandher, Dr Jeevun
Crichton, Torcuil	Hazelgrove, Claire	McMorrin, Anna	Scroggham, Michelle
Curtis, Chris	Hendrick, Sir Mark	McNally, Frank	Sewards, Mr Mark
Dakin, Sir Nicholas	Hillier, Dame Meg	McNeill, Kirsty	Shah, Naz
Dalton, Ashley	Hinchliff, Chris	Midgley, Anneliese	Shanker, Baggy
Darlington, Emily	Hinder, Jonathan	Minns, Ms Julie	Shanks, Michael
Davies, Jonathan	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Mishra, Navendu	Siddiq, Tulip
Davies, Paul	Hopkins, Rachel	Mohamed, Iqbal	Simons, Josh
De Cordova, Marsha	Hughes, Claire	Moon, Perran	Slaughter, Andy
Dean, Josh	Hume, Alison	Morden, Jessica	Slinger, John
Dearden, Kate	Huq, Dr Rupa	Morgan, Stephen	Smith, Cat
Denyer, Carla	Hurley, Patrick	Morris, Grahame	Smith, David
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Hussain, Mr Adnan	Morris, Joe	Smith, Jeff
Dickson, Jim	Ingham, Leigh	Mullane, Margaret	Smith, Nick
Dixon, Anna	Irons, Natasha	Murphy, Luke	Smith, Sarah
Dixon, Samantha	Jameson, Sally	Murray, Chris	Snell, Gareth
Dodds, rh Anneliese	Jarvis, Dan	Murray, James	Sobel, Alex
Dollimore, Helena	Jogee, Adam	Murray, Katrina	Stainbank, Euan
Dowd, Peter	Jones, rh Darren	Naish, James	Stevens, rh Jo
Downie, Graeme	Jones, Gerald	Naismith, Connor	Stewart, Elaine
Duffield, Rosie	Jones, Lillian	Narayan, Kanishka	Stone, Will
Duncan-Jordan, Neil	Jones, Louise	Newbury, Josh	Strathern, Alistair
Eagle, Dame Angela	Jones, Ruth	Niblett, Samantha	Strickland, Alan
Eagle, rh Maria	Josan, Gurinder Singh	Nichols, Charlotte	Stringer, Graham
Eastwood, Colum	Joseph, Sojan	Onn, Melanie	Sullivan, Kirsteen
Eccles, Cat	Juss, Warinder	Onwurah, Chi	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Efford, Clive	Kane, Chris	Opher, Dr Simon	Sultana, Zarah
Egan, Damien	Kane, Mike	Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena	Swallow, Peter
Ellis, Maya	Kaur, Satvir ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Osamor, Kate	Swann, Robin
Elmore, Chris	Kendall, rh Liz	Osborne, Kate	Tami, rh Mark
Entwistle, Kirith	Khan, Afzal	Osborne, Tristan	Tapp, Mike
Eshalomi, Florence	Khan, Ayoub	Owatemi, Taiwo	Taylor, Alison
Esterson, Bill	Khan, Naushabah	Owen, Sarah	Taylor, David
Evans, Chris	Kinnock, Stephen	Paffey, Darren	Taylor, Rachel
Fahnbulleh, Miatta	Kirkham, Jayne	Pakes, Andrew	Thomas, Fred ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )
Falconer, Mr Hamish	Kitchen, Gen	Patrick, Matthew	Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Farnsworth, Linsey	Kumar, Sonia	Payne, Michael	Thompson, Adam
Ferguson, Mark	Kumaran, Uma	Peacock, Stephanie	Tidball, Dr Marie
Ferguson, Patricia	Kyle, rh Peter	Pearce, Jon	Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Fleet, Natalie	Kyrke-Smith, Laura	Pennycook, Matthew	Toale, Jessica
Foody, Emma	Lamb, Peter	Perkins, Mr Toby	Tomlinson, Dan
Fookes, Catherine	Lavery, Ian	Pinto-Duschinsky, David	Trickett, Jon
Foster, Mr Paul	Law, Noah	Pitcher, Lee	Tufnell, Henry
Foxcroft, Vicky	Leadbeater, Kim	Platt, Jo	Turmaine, Matt
Francis, Daniel	Leishman, Brian	Powell, Joe	Turner, Karl
Frith, Mr James	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Powell, rh Lucy	Turner, Laurence
Furniss, Gill	Lewin, Andrew	Poynton, Gregor	Twigg, Derek
Gardiner, Barry	Lewis, Clive	Prinsley, Peter	Twist, Liz
Gardner, Dr Allison	Lightwood, Simon	Qureshi, Yasmin	Uppal, Harpreet
Gelder, Anna	Lockhart, Carla	Race, Steve	Vaughan, Tony
Gemmell, Alan	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Ramsay, Adrian	Vaz, rh Valerie
German, Gill	MacAlister, Josh	Ranger, Andrew	Vince, Chris
Gilbert, Tracy	Macdonald, Alice	Rayner, rh Angela	Wakeford, Christian
Gill, Preet Kaur	MacNae, Andy	Reader, Mike	Walker, Imogen
Gittins, Becky	Madders, Justin	Reed, rh Steve	Ward, Chris
Glindon, Mary	Mahmood, rh Shabana	Reid, Joani	Ward, Melanie
Goldsborough, Ben	Martin, Amanda	Reynolds, Emma	Waugh, Paul
Gould, Georgia	Maskell, Rachael	Rhodes, Martin	Webb, Chris
Grady, John	Mayer, Alex	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	Webb, Michelle
Greenwood, Lilian	McAllister, Douglas	Richards, Jake	Western, Andrew
Griffith, Dame Nia	McCarthy, Kerry	Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny	Wheeler, Michael
Gwynne, Andrew	McCluskey, Martin	Rigby, Lucy	Whitby, John
Hack, Amanda	McDonagh, Dame Siobhan	Rimmer, Ms Marie	White, Jo
Haigh, rh Louise	McDonald, Andy	Robertson, Dave	White, Katie
Hall, Sarah	McDonald, Chris	Robinson, rh Gavin	Williams, David
Hamilton, Fabian	McDonnell, rh John	Roca, Tim	Witherden, Steve
Hamilton, Paulette		Rodda, Matt	

Woodcock, Sean  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Yemm, Steve

Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Keir Mather and**  
**Anna Turley**

#### NOES

Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote cast by Gagan Mohindra*)  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Argar, rh Edward  
 Atkins, rh Victoria  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Bedford, Mr Peter  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Bool, Sarah  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cleverly, rh Mr James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Cocking, Lewis  
 Cooper, John  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
 Cross, Harriet  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh David  
 Dewhurst, Charlie  
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Farage, Nigel  
 Fortune, Peter  
 Fox, Sir Ashley  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Freeman, George  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Glen, rh John  
 Grant, Helen  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Griffiths, Alison  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Jopp, Lincoln  
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)

Kruger, Danny  
 Lam, Katie  
 Lamont, John  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lowe, Rupert  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 McMurdock, James  
 McVey, rh Esther  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Morton, rh Wendy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 Obese-Jecty, Ben  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paul, Rebecca  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Raja, Shivani  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Reed, David  
 Robertson, Joe  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec  
 Simmonds, David  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, rh Sir Julian  
 Snowden, Mr Andrew  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, Patrick  
 Stafford, Gregory  
 Stephenson, Blake  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Thomas, Bradley  
 Tice, Richard  
 Timothy, Nick  
 Trott, rh Laura  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wild, James  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Mr Richard Holden and**  
**Rebecca Smith**

6.11 pm

*Proceedings interrupted ( Programme Order, 9 October 2024 ).*

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

#### New Clause 14

##### PROHIBITION OF RENT IN ADVANCE BEFORE LEASE ENTERED INTO

“(1) Schedule 1 to the Tenant Fees Act 2019 (permitted payments) is amended in accordance with subsections (2) and (3).

(2) After paragraph 1(1) (rent is a permitted payment) insert—

“(1A) But a payment of rent is a prohibited payment if—  
 (a) it is payable before the tenancy is entered into, and  
 (b) the tenancy is an assured tenancy.

(1B) This paragraph is subject to paragraph 1A.”

(3) For sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 1 substitute—

“*Increased rent*

1A (1) If the amount of rent payable in respect of any relevant period (“P1”) is more than the amount of rent payable in respect of any later relevant period (“P2”), the additional amount payable in respect of P1 is a prohibited payment.

(2) That is subject to the following provisions of this paragraph.”

(4) After section 5 of the Tenant Fees Act 2019 insert—

“*Other provision about rent in advance*

##### 5A Pre-tenancy payments of rent: prohibitions

(1) A landlord must not—

- (a) invite or encourage a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to the landlord in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England,
- (b) accept an offer from a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to the landlord in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England, or
- (c) accept from a relevant person a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England.

(2) A landlord must not—

- (a) invite or encourage a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to a third party in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England,
- (b) accept an offer from a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to a third party in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England, or
- (c) accept from a third party a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England.

(3) A letting agent must not—

- (a) invite or encourage a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to the letting agent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England,
- (b) accept an offer from a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to the letting agent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England, or
- (c) accept from a relevant person a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England.

(4) A letting agent must not—

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*New clause 14 read a Second time, and added to the Bill.*

- (a) invite or encourage a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to a third party in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England,
  - (b) accept an offer from a relevant person to make a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent to a third party in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England, or
  - (c) accept from a third party a prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent in connection with an assured tenancy of housing in England.
- (5) The Secretary of State may, by regulations made by statutory instrument, amend this section for the purpose of making provision about the descriptions of rent due in advance to which any provision of subsection (1), (2), (3) or (4) applies.
- For this purpose “rent due in advance” means rent due before the period for which it is payable.
- (6) Regulations under subsection (5)—
    - (a) may make different provision for different purposes;
    - (b) may make supplemental, incidental, consequential, transitional, transitory or saving provision;
    - (c) are to be made by statutory instrument.
  - (7) A statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (5) may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.
  - (8) In this section “prohibited pre-tenancy payment of rent” means a payment of rent that is prohibited by paragraph 1(1A) of Schedule 1.

#### 5B Effect of a breach of section 5A

- (1) A term of an agreement between a letting agent and a relevant person which breaches section 5A is not binding on a relevant person.
  - (2) Where a term of an agreement is not binding on a relevant person as a result of this section, the agreement continues, so far as practicable, to have effect in every other respect.”
- (5) The Tenant Fees Act 2019 is further amended as follows—
- (a) in section 6 (enforcement by local weights and measures authorities)—
    - (i) in subsection (1), in paragraph (b) omit “and” and after that paragraph insert—(ba)section 5A (pre-tenancy payments of rent: prohibitions), and;
    - (ii) in subsection (3), for “or 2” substitute “, 2 or 5A”;
  - (b) in section 7 (enforcement by district councils), in subsection (1), for “and 2” substitute “, 2 and 5A”;
  - (c) in section 8 (financial penalties), in subsection (1), for “or 2” substitute “, 2 or 5A”;
  - (d) in section 10 (recovery by enforcement authority of amount paid)—
    - (i) in subsection (1)(a), for “or 2” substitute “, 2 or 5A”;
    - (ii) after subsection (2) insert—
      - (2A)But that obligation to pay the amount, or remaining part, of the prohibited payment is subject to subsection (3), unless it is a case where the payment is prohibited by paragraph 1(1A) of Schedule 1 (pre-tenancy payment of rent).”;
    - (iii) in subsection (3), for “But subsection (2) does not apply in relation to a prohibited payment” substitute “Subsection (2) does not apply in relation to the prohibited payment”;
  - (e) in section 15 (recovery by relevant person of amount paid), in subsection (1)(a), for “or 2” substitute “, 2 or 5A”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This amends the Tenant Fees Act 2019 so that rent in advance payable before the tenancy is entered into is a “prohibited payment” for the purposes of that Act. The new section 5A then also adds new prohibitions relating to that kind of prohibited payment.*

*Brought up, and added to the Bill.*

#### New Clause 15

##### GUARANTOR NOT LIABLE FOR RENT PAYABLE AFTER TENANT’S DEATH

“In the 1988 Act, after section 16M (inserted by section 17 of this Act) insert—

“*Guarantors*

##### 16N Guarantor not liable for rent payable after tenant’s death

(1) This section applies where—

- (a) an individual (the “guarantor”) is a party to an arrangement (the “guarantee”) under which the individual guarantees payment by the tenant of rent under an assured tenancy (“guaranteed rent”), and
- (b) the guarantor became a party to the guarantee on or after the commencement date.

(2) If—

- (a) only one person is the tenant under the assured tenancy, and
- (b) that person dies,

the guarantee is of no effect if, or to the extent that, it guarantees payment of guaranteed rent for the period beginning with the death of that person.

(3) If—

- (a) two or more persons are the tenant under the assured tenancy, and
- (b) all of those persons die,

the guarantee is of no effect if, or to the extent that, it guarantees payment of guaranteed rent for the period beginning with the deaths of those persons (if they all die on the same day) or beginning with the death of the last of those persons to die (if they do not all die on the same day).

(4) If—

- (a) two or more persons are the tenant under the assured tenancy,
- (b) the guarantor is a family member of only one of those persons, and
- (c) that family member of the guarantor dies,

the guarantee is of no effect if, or to the extent that, it guarantees payment of guaranteed rent for the period beginning with the death of that family member.

(5) If—

- (a) two or more persons are the tenant under the assured tenancy,
- (b) the guarantor is a family member of more than one of those persons, and
- (c) all of those family members of the guarantor die,

the guarantee is of no effect if, or to the extent that, it guarantees payment of guaranteed rent for the period beginning with the deaths of those family members (if they all die on the same day) or beginning with the death of the last of those family members to die (if they do not all die on the same day).

(6) For the purposes of this section, the guaranteed rent for the period beginning with the death of a person, or with the deaths of two or more persons, is—

- (a) guaranteed rent which—
  - (i) is for the rent period during which the person dies or persons die (the “relevant rent period”), and
  - (ii) is attributable to the time after the death of the person or persons, and
- (b) guaranteed rent for every rent period after the relevant rent period.

(7) For that purpose, the guaranteed rent for the relevant rent period which is attributable to the time after the death of the person or persons is the amount calculated in accordance with this formula—

(D/T)×R

where—

D is the total number of days in the relevant rent period which fall on and after the day of the death of the person or persons;

T is the total number of days in the relevant rent period;

R is the guaranteed rent for the relevant rent period.

#### 16P Section 16N: application and interpretation

- (1) Section 16N applies to a guarantee—
  - (a) whether or not it is in writing;
  - (b) if it is in writing, whether or not it is in the lease;
  - (c) whether or not it also guarantees the payment of any sum other than the rent.
- (2) In section 16N and this section—
 

“commencement date” has the meaning given by section 143(3) of the Renters' Rights Act 2024;

“family member” is to be read in accordance with subsections (3) and (4);

“rent period” means a period for which rent is payable.
- (3) For the purposes of section 16N, the guarantor is a family member of the following persons—
  - (a) the spouse, civil partner or co-habitee of the guarantor;
  - (b) a person who is—
    - (i) a child,
    - (ii) a grandchild,
    - (iii) a parent,
    - (iv) a grandparent,
    - (v) a sibling,
    - (vi) a niece or nephew,
    - (vii) an aunt or uncle, or
    - (viii) a cousin,
 of the guarantor or of the spouse, civil partner or co-habitee of the guarantor;
  - (c) a person who is the spouse, civil partner or co-habitee of a person falling within paragraph (b).
- (4) If, in accordance with subsection (3), a person (F)—
  - (a) is a family member of the guarantor when the guarantee is entered into, or
  - (b) becomes a family member of the guarantor after the guarantee is entered into,

F is to be regarded as being a family member of the guarantor at all times afterwards (regardless of whether F continues to be so in accordance with subsection (3)).

- (5) For the purposes of this section—
  - (a) one person (C) is the “co-habitee” of another person (P) if P lives with C as if they were married or in a civil partnership;
  - (b) a “niece or nephew” of a person (P) is a child—
    - (i) of a sibling of P, or
    - (ii) of a person who is the spouse, civil partner or co-habitee of a sibling of P;
  - (c) an “aunt or uncle” of a person (P) is a sibling of a parent of P;
  - (d) a “cousin” of a person (P) is a child—
    - (i) of an aunt or uncle of P, or
    - (ii) of a person who is the spouse, civil partner or co-habitee of an aunt or uncle of P;
  - (e) “sibling” includes a sibling of the half-blood and a step-sibling.”—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This limits a guarantor's liability for rent following the death of the tenant.*

*Brought up, and added to the Bill.*

### New Clause 16

#### LIMITATION ON OBLIGATION TO PAY REMOVAL EXPENSES

“(1) Section 11 of the 1988 Act (payment of removal expenses) is amended as follows.

(2) In the heading, after “expenses” insert “by social landlords”.

(3) Before subsection (1) insert—

“(A1) This section applies to a dwelling-housing let on an assured tenancy if—

- (a) the landlord is a relevant social landlord, and
- (b) the dwelling-house is social housing.”

(4) In subsection (1), for “a dwelling-house let on an assured tenancy on Ground 6 or Ground 9” substitute “the dwelling-house on Ground 6, 6ZA or 9”.

(5) After subsection (1) insert—

“(1A) If the court makes the order for possession on Ground 6 in circumstances where—

- (a) the additional RSL condition is met, and
- (b) that condition is met in case B (alternative accommodation provided temporarily until other alternative accommodation becomes available),

the landlord must also pay to the tenant a sum equal to the reasonable expenses likely to be incurred by the tenant in removing from the alternative accommodation provided temporarily.”

(6) In subsection (2), after “(1)” insert “or (1A)”.

(7) After subsection (3) insert—

“(4) In this section—

“relevant social landlord” means—

- (a) a private registered provider of social housing,
- (b) a body registered as a social landlord in the register maintained under section 1 of the Housing Act 1996,
- (c) a body registered as a social landlord in the register kept under section 20(1) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, or
- (d) a housing trust, within the meaning of the Housing Associations Act 1985, which is a charity;

“social housing” has the same meaning as in Part 2 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008.”—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This replaces clause 21. It expands section 11 of the Housing Act 1988 to cover possession on the new Ground 6ZA and limits the availability of removal expenses to cases where the landlord is a “relevant social landlord” and the dwelling-house is social housing.*

*Brought up, and added to the Bill.*

### New Clause 20

#### REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF THE ACT ON THE HOUSING MARKET

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish an annual report outlining the impact of the provisions of this Act on the housing market in the UK.

(2) A report under this section must include the impact of this Act on—

- (a) the availability of homes in the private rental sector;
- (b) rents charged under tenancies;
- (c) house prices; and
- (d) requests for social housing.

(3) A report under this section must be laid before Parliament.”—(*David Simmonds.*)

*Brought up.*

*Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.*

*The House divided: Ayes 181, Noes 363.*

## Division No. 76]

[6.12 pm

## AYES

Allister, Jim  
 Amos, Gideon  
 Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Gagan Mohindra*)  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Aquarone, Steff  
 Argar, rh Edward  
 Atkins, rh Victoria  
 Babarinde, Josh  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Bedford, Mr Peter  
 Bennett, Alison  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Bool, Sarah  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Brewer, Alex  
 Brown-Fuller, Jess  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Chadwick, David  
 Chamberlain, Wendy  
 Chambers, Dr Danny  
 Cleverly, rh Mr James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Cocking, Lewis  
 Collins, Victoria  
 Cooper, Daisy  
 Cooper, John  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey  
 Cross, Harriet  
 Dance, Adam  
 Darling, Steve  
 Davey, rh Ed  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh David  
 Dean, Bobby  
 Dewhurst, Charlie  
 Dillon, Mr Lee  
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Dyke, Sarah  
 Eastwood, Sorcha  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Farage, Nigel  
 Farron, Tim  
 Forster, Mr Will  
 Fortune, Peter  
 Fox, Sir Ashley  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Franklin, Zöe  
 Freeman, George  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 George, Andrew  
 Gilmour, Rachel  
 Glen, rh John  
 Glover, Olly  
 Goldman, Marie  
 Gordon, Tom  
 Grant, Helen  
 Green, Sarah  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Griffiths, Alison  
 Harding, Monica  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heylings, Pippa  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Hussain, Mr Adnan  
 Jarvis, Liz  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Jones, Clive  
 Jopp, Lincoln  
 Kohler, Mr Paul  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lam, Katie  
 Lamont, John  
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
 Lockhart, Carla  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lowe, Rupert  
 MacCleary, James  
 MacDonald, Mr Angus  
 Maguire, Ben  
 Maguire, Helen  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Martin, Mike  
 Mathew, Brian  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 Maynard, Charlie  
 McMurdock, James  
 McVey, rh Esther  
 van Mierlo, Freddie  
 Miller, Calum  
 Milne, John  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morgan, Helen  
 Morrison, Mr Tom (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster*)  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Morton, rh Wendy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Susan  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 Obese-Jecty, Ben  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Patel, rh Priti

Paul, Rebecca  
 Perteghella, Manuela  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Pinkerton, Dr Al  
 Raja, Shivani  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Reed, David  
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
 Robertson, Joe  
 Robinson, rh Gavin  
 Roome, Ian  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Sabine, Anna  
 Savage, Dr Roz  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec  
 Simmonds, David  
 Slade, Vikki  
 Smart, Lisa  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, rh Sir Julian  
 Snowden, Mr Andrew  
 Sollom, Ian  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, Patrick  
 Stafford, Gregory  
 Stephenson, Blake  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Swann, Robin  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Taylor, Luke  
 Thomas, Bradley  
 Thomas, Cameron  
 Tice, Richard  
 Timothy, Nick  
 Trott, rh Laura  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wild, James  
 Wilkinson, Max  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy  
 Wrigley, Martin  
 Young, Claire

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Mr Richard Holden and**  
**Rebecca Smith**

## NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)  
 Abbott, Jack  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir  
 Akehurst, Luke  
 Alaba, Mr Bayo  
 Aldridge, Dan  
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas  
 Alexander, rh Heidi  
 Al-Hassan, Sadik  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
 Amesbury, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Anderson, Callum  
 Anderson, Fleur  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Arthur, Dr Scott  
 Asato, Jess  
 Asser, James  
 Athwal, Jas  
 Atkinson, Catherine  
 Atkinson, Lewis  
 Bailey, Mr Calvin  
 Bailey, Olivia  
 Baines, David  
 Baker, Alex  
 Bance, Antonia  
 Barker, Paula  
 Barron, Lee  
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex  
 Baxter, Johanna  
 Beales, Danny  
 Beavers, Lorraine  
 Begum, Apsana  
 Bell, Torsten  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Berry, Siân  
 Billington, Ms Polly  
 Bishop, Matt  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blake, Rachel  
 Bloore, Chris  
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Bonavia, Kevin  
 Botterill, Jade  
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena  
 Brash, Mr Jonathan  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buckley, Julia  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burke, Maureen  
 Burton-Sampson, David  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Caliskan, Nesil  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Campbell, Irene  
 Campbell, Juliet  
 Campbell-Savours, Markus  
 Carling, Sam  
 Carns, Al  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Charters, Mr Luke  
 Chownes, Ellie  
 Clark, Feryal  
 Coleman, Ben  
 Collier, Jacob  
 Collinge, Lizzi  
 Collins, Tom  
 Conlon, Liam  
 Coombes, Sarah

Cooper, Andrew	Hamilton, Fabian	McIntyre, Alex	Ryan, Oliver
Cooper, Dr Beccy	Hamilton, Paulette	McKee, Gordon	Sackman, Sarah
Costigan, Deirdre	Hanna, Claire	McKenna, Kevin	Sandher, Dr Jeevun
Cox, Pam	Hardy, Emma	McKinnell, Catherine	Scrogham, Michelle
Coyle, Neil	Harris, Carolyn	McMahon, Jim	Sewards, Mr Mark
Craft, Jen	Hatton, Lloyd	McMorrin, Anna	Shah, Naz
Creagh, Mary	Hayes, Helen	McNally, Frank	Shanker, Baggy
Creasy, Ms Stella	Hayes, Tom	McNeill, Kirsty	Shanks, Michael
Crichton, Torcuil	Hazelgrove, Claire	Midgley, Anneliese	Siddiq, Tulip
Curtis, Chris	Hillier, Dame Meg	Minns, Ms Julie	Simons, Josh
Dakin, Sir Nicholas	Hinchliff, Chris	Mishra, Navendu	Slughter, Andy
Dalton, Ashley	Hinder, Jonathan	Moon, Perran	Slinger, John
Darlington, Emily	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Morden, Jessica	Smith, Cat
Davies, Jonathan	Hopkins, Rachel	Morgan, Stephen	Smith, David
Davies, Paul	Hughes, Claire	Morris, Grahame	Smith, Jeff
De Cordova, Marsha	Hume, Alison	Morris, Joe	Smith, Nick
Dean, Josh	Huq, Dr Rupa	Mullane, Margaret	Smith, Sarah
Dearden, Kate	Hurley, Patrick	Murphy, Luke	Smyth, Karin
Denyer, Carla	Ingham, Leigh	Murray, Chris	Snell, Gareth
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Irons, Natasha	Murray, James	Sobel, Alex
Dickson, Jim	Jameson, Sally	Murray, Katrina	Stainbank, Euan
Dixon, Anna	Jarvis, Dan	Naish, James	Stevens, rh Jo
Dixon, Samantha	Jogee, Adam	Naismith, Connor	Stewart, Elaine
Dodds, rh Anneliese	Jones, rh Darren	Narayan, Kanishka	Stone, Will
Dollimore, Helena	Jones, Gerald	Newbury, Josh	Strathern, Alistair
Dowd, Peter	Jones, Lillian	Niblett, Samantha	Streeting, rh Wes
Downie, Graeme	Jones, Louise	Nichols, Charlotte	Strickland, Alan
Duffield, Rosie	Jones, Ruth	Onn, Melanie	Stringer, Graham
Duncan-Jordan, Neil	Josan, Gurinder Singh	Onwurah, Chi	Sullivan, Kirsteen
Eagle, Dame Angela	Joseph, Sojan	Opher, Dr Simon	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Eagle, rh Maria	Juss, Warinder	Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena	Sultana, Zarah
Eastwood, Colum	Kane, Chris	Osamor, Kate	Swallow, Peter
Eccles, Cat	Kane, Mike	Osborne, Kate	Tami, rh Mark
Efford, Clive	Kaur, Satvir ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Osborne, Tristan	Tapp, Mike
Egan, Damien	Kendall, rh Liz	Owatemi, Taiwo	Taylor, Alison
Ellis, Maya	Khan, Afzal	Owen, Sarah	Taylor, David
Elmore, Chris	Khan, Naushabah	Paffey, Darren	Taylor, Rachel
Entwistle, Kirth	Kinnock, Stephen	Pakes, Andrew	Thomas, Fred ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )
Eshalomi, Florence	Kirkham, Jayne	Patrick, Matthew	Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Esterson, Bill	Kitchen, Gen	Payne, Michael	Thompson, Adam
Evans, Chris	Kumar, Sonia	Peacock, Stephanie	Tidball, Dr Marie
Fahnbulleh, Miatta	Kumaran, Uma	Pearce, Jon	Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Falconer, Mr Hamish	Kyle, rh Peter	Pennycook, Matthew	Toale, Jessica
Farnsworth, Linsey	Kyrke-Smith, Laura	Perkins, Mr Toby	Tomlinson, Dan
Ferguson, Mark	Lamb, Peter	Pinto-Duschinsky, David	Trickett, Jon
Ferguson, Patricia	Lavery, Ian	Platt, Jo	Tufnell, Henry
Fleet, Natalie	Law, Noah	Powell, Joe	Turmaine, Matt
Foody, Emma	Leadbeater, Kim	Powell, rh Lucy	Turner, Karl
Fookes, Catherine	Leishman, Brian	Poynton, Gregor	Turner, Laurence
Foster, Mr Paul	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Prinsley, Peter	Twigg, Derek
Foxcroft, Vicky	Lewin, Andrew	Qureshi, Yasmin	Twist, Liz
Francis, Daniel	Lewis, Clive	Race, Steve	Uppal, Harpreet
Frith, Mr James	Lightwood, Simon	Ramsay, Adrian	Vaughan, Tony
Furniss, Gill	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Ranger, Andrew	Vaz, rh Valerie
Gardiner, Barry	MacAlister, Josh	Rayner, rh Angela	Vince, Chris
Gardner, Dr Allison	Macdonald, Alice	Reader, Mike	Wakeford, Christian
Gelder, Anna	MacNae, Andy	Reed, rh Steve	Walker, Imogen
Gemmell, Alan	Madders, Justin	Reid, Joani	Ward, Chris
German, Gill	Mahmood, rh Shabana	Reynolds, Emma	Ward, Melanie
Gilbert, Tracy	Martin, Amanda	Rhodes, Martin	Waugh, Paul
Gill, Preet Kaur	Maskell, Rachael	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	Webb, Chris
Gittins, Becky	Mayer, Alex	Richards, Jake	Welsh, Michelle
Glindon, Mary	McAllister, Douglas	Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny	Western, Andrew
Goldsborough, Ben	McCarthy, Kerry	Rigby, Lucy	Wheeler, Michael
Gould, Georgia	McCluskey, Martin	Rimmer, Ms Marie	Whitby, John
Grady, John	McDonagh, Dame Siobhain	Robertson, Dave	White, Jo
Greenwood, Lilian	McDonald, Andy	Roca, Tim	White, Katie
Griffith, Dame Nia	McDonald, Chris	Rodda, Matt	Williams, David
Gwynne, Andrew	McDonnell, rh John	Rushworth, Sam	Witherden, Steve
Hack, Amanda	McEvoy, Lola	Russell, Mrs Sarah	Woodcock, Sean
Haight, rh Louise	McGovern, Alison	Rutland, Tom	Yang, Yuan
Hall, Sarah			

Yasin, Mohammad  
Yemm, Steve  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Keir Mather and**  
**Anna Turley**

*Question accordingly negated.*

### Clause 1

ASSURED TENANCIES TO BE PERIODIC WITH RENT  
PERIOD NOT EXCEEDING A MONTH

*Amendment proposed:* 57, page 1, line 13, at end insert  
“unless the tenant meets the student test where the tenancy is entered into.

(1A) For the purposes of this section, a tenant who meets the student test when a tenancy is entered into has the same meaning as in Ground 4A.”—(*David Simmonds.*)

*Question put,* That the amendment be made.

*The House divided:* Ayes 118, Noes 434.

**Division No. 77]**

**[6.26 pm**

### AYES

Allister, Jim	Griffith, Andrew
Anderson, Stuart ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Gagan Mohindra</i> )	Griffiths, Alison
Andrew, rh Stuart	Harris, Rebecca
Argar, rh Edward	Hayes, rh Sir John
Atkins, rh Victoria	Hinds, rh Damian
Bacon, Gareth	Hoare, Simon
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Hollinrake, Kevin
Barclay, rh Steve	Holmes, Paul
Bedford, Mr Peter	Huddleston, Nigel
Bhatti, Saqib	Hudson, Dr Neil
Blackman, Bob	Hunt, rh Jeremy
Bool, Sarah	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Bowie, Andrew	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Jopp, Lincoln
Braverman, rh Suella	Kearns, Alicia ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i> )
Burghart, Alex	Kruger, Danny
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Lam, Katie
Cartledge, James	Lamont, John
Cleverly, rh Mr James	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Cocking, Lewis	Lockhart, Carla
Cooper, John	Lopez, Julia
Costa, Alberto	Lowe, Rupert
Coutinho, rh Claire ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i> )	Mak, Alan
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Malthouse, rh Kit
Cross, Harriet	Mayhew, Jerome
Davies, Gareth	McMurdock, James
Davies, Mims	McVey, rh Esther
Davis, rh David	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Dewhurst, Charlie	Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Moore, Robbie
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver	Morrissey, Joy
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Morton, rh Wendy
Evans, Dr Luke	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Fortune, Peter	Mundell, rh David
Fox, Sir Ashley	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Norman, rh Jesse
Freeman, George	Obese-Jecty, Ben
French, Mr Louie	O'Brien, Neil
Gale, rh Sir Roger	Patel, rh Priti
Garnier, Mark	Paul, Rebecca
Glen, rh John	Philp, rh Chris
Grant, Helen	Raja, Shivani
	Rankin, Jack
	Reed, David

Robertson, Joe  
Robinson, rh Gavin  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec  
Simmonds, David  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, rh Sir Julian  
Snowden, Mr Andrew  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, Patrick  
Stafford, Gregory  
Stephenson, Blake  
Stride, rh Mel  
Stuart, rh Graham  
Swann, Robin

Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
Thomas, Bradley  
Tice, Richard  
Timothy, Nick  
Trott, rh Laura  
Vickers, Martin  
Vickers, Matt  
Whately, Helen  
Wild, James  
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wood, Mike  
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Mr Richard Holden and**  
**Rebecca Smith**

### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Ady</i> )	Bonavia, Kevin
Abbott, Jack	Botterill, Jade
Abrahams, Debbie	Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
Adam, Shockat	Brash, Mr Jonathan
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Brewer, Alex
Akehurst, Luke	Brown-Fuller, Jess
Alaba, Mr Bayo	Bryant, Chris
Aldridge, Dan	Buckley, Julia
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Burgon, Richard
Alexander, rh Heidi	Burke, Maureen
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Burton-Sampson, David
Ali, Rushanara	Butler, Dawn
Ali, Tahir	Byrne, Ian
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Byrne, rh Liam
Amesbury, Mike ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Cadbury, Ruth
Amos, Gideon	Caliskan, Nesil
Anderson, Callum	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Anderson, Fleur	Campbell, Irene
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Campbell, Juliet
Aquarone, Steff	Campbell-Savours, Markus
Arthur, Dr Scott	Carling, Sam
Asato, Jess	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Asser, James	Carns, Al
Athwal, Jas	Chadwick, David
Atkinson, Catherine	Chamberlain, Wendy
Atkinson, Lewis	Chambers, Dr Danny
Babarinde, Josh	Champion, Sarah
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Charalambous, Bambos
Bailey, Olivia	Charters, Mr Luke
Baines, David	Chowns, Ellie
Baker, Alex	Clark, Feryal
Bance, Antonia	Coleman, Ben
Barker, Paula	Collier, Jacob
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Collinge, Lizzi
Baxter, Johanna	Collins, Tom
Beales, Danny	Collins, Victoria
Beavers, Lorraine	Conlon, Liam
Begum, Apsana	Coombes, Sarah
Bell, Torsten	Cooper, Andrew
Benn, rh Hilary	Cooper, Dr Becca
Bennett, Alison	Cooper, Daisy
Berry, Siân	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Billington, Ms Polly	Costigan, Deirdre
Bishop, Matt	Cox, Pam
Blake, Olivia	Coyle, Neil
Blake, Rachel	Craft, Jen
Bloore, Chris	Creagh, Mary
Blundell, Mrs Elsie ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Creasy, Ms Stella
	Crichton, Torcuil
	Curtis, Chris
	Dakin, Sir Nicholas
	Dalton, Ashley

Dance, Adam	Gwynne, Andrew	MacNae, Andy	Pinto-Duschinsky, David
Darling, Steve	Hack, Amanda	Madders, Justin	Pitcher, Lee
Darlington, Emily	Haigh, rh Louise	Maguire, Ben	Platt, Jo
Davey, rh Ed	Hall, Sarah	Maguire, Helen	Powell, Joe
Davies, Jonathan	Hamilton, Fabian	Mahmood, rh Shabana	Powell, rh Lucy
Davies, Paul	Hamilton, Paulette	Martin, Amanda	Poynton, Gregor
De Cordova, Marsha	Hanna, Claire	Maskell, Rachael	Prinsley, Peter
Dean, Bobby	Harding, Monica	Mathew, Brian	Qureshi, Yasmin
Dean, Josh	Hardy, Emma	Mayer, Alex	Race, Steve
Dearden, Kate	Harris, Carolyn	Maynard, Charlie	Ramsay, Adrian
Denyer, Carla	Hatton, Lloyd	McAllister, Douglas	Ranger, Andrew
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Hayes, Helen	McCarthy, Kerry	Rayner, rh Angela
Dickson, Jim	Hayes, Tom	McCluskey, Martin	Reader, Mike
Dillon, Mr Lee	Hazelgrove, Claire	McDonald, Andy	Reed, rh Steve
Dixon, Anna	Heylings, Pippa	McDonald, Chris	Reid, Joani
Dixon, Samantha	Hillier, Dame Meg	McDonnell, rh John	Reynolds, Emma
Dodds, rh Anneliese	Hinchliff, Chris	McEvoy, Lola	Reynolds, Mr Joshua
Dollimore, Helena	Hinder, Jonathan	McGovern, Alison	Rhodes, Martin
Dowd, Peter	Hobhouse, Wera	McIntyre, Alex	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Downie, Graeme	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	McKee, Gordon	Richards, Jake
Duffield, Rosie	Hopkins, Rachel	McKenna, Kevin	Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
Duncan-Jordan, Neil	Hughes, Claire	McMahon, Jim	Rigby, Lucy
Dyke, Sarah	Hume, Alison	McMorrin, Anna	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Eagle, Dame Angela	Huq, Dr Rupa	McNally, Frank	Robertson, Dave
Eagle, rh Maria	Hurley, Patrick	McNeill, Kirsty	Roca, Tim
Eastwood, Colum	Hussain, Mr Adnan	Midgley, Anneliese	Rodda, Matt
Eastwood, Sorcha	Ingham, Leigh	Miller, Calum	Roome, Ian
Eccles, Cat	Irons, Natasha	Milne, John	Rushworth, Sam
Efford, Clive	Jameson, Sally	Minns, Ms Julie	Russell, Mrs Sarah
Egan, Damien	Jarvis, Dan	Mishra, Navendu	Rutland, Tom
Ellis, Maya	Jarvis, Liz	Mohamed, Iqbal	Ryan, Oliver
Elmore, Chris	Jogee, Adam	Moon, Perran	Sabine, Anna
Entwistle, Kirith	Johnson, rh Dame Diana	Moran, Layla	Sackman, Sarah
Eshalomi, Florence	Jones, Clive	Morden, Jessica	Sandher, Dr Jeevun
Esterson, Bill	Jones, rh Darren	Morgan, Helen	Savage, Dr Roz
Evans, Chris	Jones, Gerald	Morgan, Stephen	Scroggham, Michelle
Fahnbulleh, Miatta	Jones, Lillian	Morris, Grahame	Sewards, Mr Mark
Falconer, Mr Hamish	Jones, Louise	Morris, Joe	Shah, Naz
Farnsworth, Linsey	Jones, Ruth	Morrison, Mr Tom ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster</i> )	Shanker, Baggy
Farron, Tim	Josan, Gurinder Singh	Mullane, Margaret	Shanks, Michael
Ferguson, Mark	Joseph, Sojan	Murphy, Luke	Siddiq, Tulip
Ferguson, Patricia	Juss, Warinder	Murray, Chris	Simons, Josh
Fleet, Natalie	Kane, Chris	Murray, James	Slade, Vikki
Foody, Emma	Kane, Mike	Murray, Katrina	Slaughter, Andy
Fookes, Catherine	Kaur, Satvir ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Murray, Susan	Slinger, John
Forster, Mr Will	Kendall, rh Liz	Naish, James	Smart, Lisa
Foster, Mr Paul	Khan, Afzal	Naismith, Connor	Smith, Cat
Foxcroft, Vicky	Khan, Ayoub	Narayan, Kanishka	Smith, David
Francis, Daniel	Khan, Naushabah	Newbury, Josh	Smith, Jeff
Franklin, Zöe	Kinnock, Stephen	Niblett, Samantha	Smith, Nick
Frith, Mr James	Kirkham, Jayne	Nichols, Charlotte	Smith, Sarah
Furniss, Gill	Kitchen, Gen	Olney, Sarah	Smth, Karin
Gardiner, Barry	Kohler, Mr Paul	Onn, Melanie	Snell, Gareth
Gardner, Dr Allison	Kumar, Sonia	Onwurah, Chi	Sobel, Alex
Gelder, Anna	Kumaran, Uma	Opher, Dr Simon	Sollom, Ian
Gemmell, Alan	Kyle, rh Peter	Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena	Stainbank, Euan
George, Andrew	Kyrke-Smith, Laura	Osamor, Kate	Stevens, rh Jo
German, Gill	Lamb, Peter	Osborne, Kate	Stewart, Elaine
Gilbert, Tracy	Lavery, Ian	Osborne, Tristan	Stone, Will
Gill, Preet Kaur	Law, Noah	Owatemi, Taiwo	Strathern, Alistair
Gilmour, Rachel	Leadbeater, Kim	Owen, Sarah	Streeting, rh Wes
Gittins, Becky	Leishman, Brian	Paffey, Darren	Strickland, Alan
Glindon, Mary	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Pakes, Andrew	Stringer, Graham
Glover, Olly	Lewin, Andrew	Patrick, Matthew	Sullivan, Kirsteen
Goldman, Marie	Lewis, Clive	Payne, Michael	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Goldsborough, Ben	Lightwood, Simon	Peacock, Stephanie	Sultana, Zarah
Gordon, Tom	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Pearce, Jon	Swallow, Peter
Gould, Georgia	MacAlister, Josh	Pennycook, Matthew	Tami, rh Mark
Grady, John	MacCleary, James	Perkins, Mr Toby	Tapp, Mike
Green, Sarah	Macdonald, Alice	Perteghella, Manuela	Taylor, Alison
Greenwood, Lilian	MacDonald, Mr Angus	Pinkerton, Dr Al	Taylor, David
Griffith, Dame Nia			Taylor, Luke



Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Cameron  
 Thomas, Fred (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris

Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 Western, Andrew  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Wilkinson, Max  
 Williams, David  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrigley, Martin  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Yemm, Steve  
 Young, Claire  
 Zeichner, Daniel

#### Tellers for the Noes:

Keir Mather and  
 Anna Turley

*Question accordingly negated.*

#### Clause 4

##### CHANGES TO GROUNDS FOR POSSESSION

*Amendments made:* 12, page 5, line 3, after “5H” insert “or Ground 6ZA”

*This is consequential on Amendment 22.*

Amendment 13, page 5, line 23, leave out the words from “(a),” to the end of the line and insert “for “, 2, 5” substitute “to 5H, 6ZA, 6A”

*This replaces the amendment to section 7(5A)(a) of the Housing Act 1988 with a new amendment to take full account of the changes to the grounds under Schedule 2 to that Act made by Part 1 of the Bill.*

Amendment 14, page 5, line 25, at end insert—

“(5B) In relation to the making of an order for possession of a dwelling-house let on an assured periodic tenancy arising under Schedule 10 to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, Ground 6 is to apply as if—

- (a) in paragraph (b), the words “, but only in a case where section 7(5ZA) applies in relation to the tenancy” were omitted;
- (b) in the general redevelopment conditions, paragraph (f) was omitted;
- (c) in the landlord’s acquisition condition, in paragraph (a), the reference to the grant of the tenancy is a reference to the grant of the long residential tenancy which existed immediately before the assured periodic tenancy arose.”

*This inserts a further amendment into section 7 of the Housing Act 1988 to take full account of the changes to the grounds under Schedule 2 to that Act made by Part 1 of the Bill.*

Amendment 15, page 5, line 26, leave out “(5B)” and insert “(5C)”

*This amendment is consequential on Amendment 14.*

Amendment 16, page 5, line 40, at end insert—

“(5D) In subsection (5B), a reference to a “long residential tenancy” is a reference to a tenancy to which Schedule 10 to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 applies.”

*This amendment is consequential on Amendment 14.*

Amendment 17, page 6, line 15, after “6” insert “, 6ZA”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This is consequential on Amendment 22.*

#### Clause 9

##### REPAYMENT OF RENT PAID IN ADVANCE

*Amendment made:* 27, page 13, line 23, leave out from “rent” to “as” in line 24 and insert—

“for days after end of tenancy

(1) A person who paid rent”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This provides that the right to repayment of rent paid for days after a tenancy ends arises whenever the rent is paid.*

#### Clause 12

##### DUTY OF LANDLORD AND CONTRACTOR TO GIVE STATEMENT OF TERMS ETC

*Amendment made:* 28, page 17, line 18, after “5H” insert “, 6ZA”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This is consequential on Amendment 22.*

#### Clause 13

##### OTHER DUTIES

*Amendment made:* 29, page 18, line 19, after “5H” insert “, 6ZA”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This is consequential on Amendment 22.*

#### Clause 21

##### LIMITATION ON OBLIGATION TO PAY REMOVAL EXPENSES

*Amendment made:* 30, page 32, line 33, leave out clause 21.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This is replaced by NC16.*

#### Clause 30

##### TENANCIES OF MORE THAN SEVEN YEARS

*Amendment made:* 34, page 39, leave out lines 18 to 20 and insert—

“Fixed term tenancies of more than 21 years

3D A fixed term tenancy of a term certain of more than 21 years from the date of the grant of the tenancy.

*Fixed term tenancies of 7 to 21 years granted before the Renters’ Rights Act 2024*

3E (1) A tenancy of a term certain of—

- (a) 21 years or less, but
- (b) more than 7 years,

from the date of the grant of the tenancy.

(2) This paragraph applies only to tenancies entered into—

- (a) before the day on which the Renters’ Rights Act 2024 was passed,
- (b) during the period of two months beginning with that day, or
- (c) after the end of that period under a contract entered into before the end of that period.

*Regulated home purchase plans*

3F (1) A tenancy which, when it is granted, forms part of a regulated home purchase plan.

- (2) In this paragraph “regulated home purchase plan” has the same meaning that it has from time to time in regulation 63F(3)(a) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) Order 2001 (S.I. 2001/544).
- (3) The Secretary of State may, by regulations, amend this paragraph in consequence of an order made under section 22 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.
- (4) Regulations under this paragraph—
- may make different provision for different purposes;
  - are to be made by statutory instrument.
- (5) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this paragraph may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.”—  
(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*The Bill currently provides that a fixed term tenancy of more than 7 years is not an assured tenancy. This moves the boundary from 7 years to 21 years. It also provides for other kinds of leases not to be assured tenancies: existing leases of between 7 and 21 years; and leases in a “regulated home purchase plan”.*

### Clause 63

#### APPROVAL AND DESIGNATION OF LANDLORD REDRESS SCHEMES

*Amendments made:* 35, page 92, line 8, leave out “level” and insert “amount or amounts”.

*This makes the wording here consistent with Amendment 40.*

Amendment 36, page 92, line 12, leave out sub-paragraph (ii) and insert—

“(ii) about the amount or amounts of those fees.”.

*This replaces “level” with “amount or amounts” (for consistency with Amendment 40) and omits other provision which is replaced by provision contained in Amendment 37.*

Amendment 37, page 92, line 41, at end insert—

“(4A) Fee conditions relating to—

- fees payable in respect of compulsory aspects of the scheme may provide for the amount or amounts of the fees to be calculated by reference to such of the scheme costs as may be specified in the regulations, which may include scheme costs relating to the voluntary aspects of the scheme;
- fees payable in respect of voluntary aspects of the scheme must provide for the amount or amounts of the fees to be calculated so that (taking one year with another) they are sufficient to meet such of the costs of the voluntary aspects of the scheme as may be specified in the regulations.”

*This deals with how the amount or amounts of fees paid by members of a redress scheme are to be calculated. In particular, fees payable in respect of the compulsory aspects of the scheme could recover scheme costs which relate to the voluntary aspects of the scheme.*

Amendment 38, page 93, line 16, leave out paragraph (e).

*This omits provision which is replaced by provision contained in Amendment 37.*

Amendment 39, page 93, line 34, at end insert—

““costs of the voluntary aspects”, in relation to a scheme, means the scheme costs if, or to the extent that, they relate to the voluntary aspects of the scheme (including scheme costs that are attributed to the voluntary aspects of the scheme);

“fee condition” means a condition set out in regulations by virtue of subsection (3)(h) or (i)(ii);

“scheme costs”, in relation to a scheme, means the costs (whether or not connected with a fee-payer) that are incurred in or associated with, or likely to be incurred in or associated with—

- the establishment and administration of the scheme (including the investigation and determination of complaints under the scheme);
- the performance of any other functions under this Chapter;
- the performance of any other functions under the scheme;

including such costs that are, or are likely to be incurred by—

- the administrator of a redress scheme, or
- the individual responsible for overseeing and monitoring the investigation and determination of complaints under the scheme,

in connection with enforcement by other persons of requirements imposed by or under this Chapter.”—  
(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This sets out definitions of terms used in Amendment 37.*

### Clause 79

#### FEEs FOR LANDLORDS AND DWELLING ENTRIES

*Amendments made:* 40, page 102, leave out from line 23 to “be” in line 37 and insert—

“(2) The regulations must—

- specify the amount or amounts of the fee, or
- provide for the amount or amounts of the fee to be determined by the database operator by reference to such of the relevant costs as may be specified in the regulations.

(3) The amount or amounts specified in the regulations under subsection (2)(a) may be calculated by reference to the relevant costs.

(3A) The “relevant costs” are the costs (whether or not connected with a fee-payer) that are incurred in or associated with, or likely to be incurred in or associated with—

- the establishment and operation of the database;
- the enforcement of requirements imposed by or under this Chapter;
- the performance of any other functions under this Chapter;
- the enforcement of any other requirements imposed by or under this Act or otherwise in relation to the private rented sector.

(3B) The amount or amounts specified in the regulations under subsection (2)(a) or determined in accordance with subsection (2)(b) may, in the case of a fee charged for an entry in the database to become active again after becoming inactive as a result of provision made by virtue of section 77(2)(a),”

*These changes enable fees charged in relation to the private rented sector database to be set by reference to costs associated with or likely to be associated with the relevant costs (as defined) as well as by reference to costs relating to the enforcement of any requirements under the Renters' Rights Act or otherwise relating to the private rental sector.*

Amendment 41, page 103, line 7, at end insert—

“(7) For the purposes of this section—

Requirements “in relation to the private rented sector” means requirements relating to—

- residential premises in England that are let, or intended to be let, under a tenancy;
- the common parts of such premises;
- the activities of a landlord under a tenancy of residential premises in England;

- (d) the activities of a superior landlord in relation to such a tenancy;
- (e) the activities of a person carrying on English letting agency work within the meaning of section 54 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 in relation to such premises;
- (f) the activities of a person carrying on English property management work within the meaning of section 55 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 in relation to such premises;

“residential premises” has the meaning given by section 1 of the Housing Act 2004 except that it does not include social housing within the meaning of Part 2 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008;

“tenancy” includes a licence to occupy.”—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This defines what requirements in relation to the private rented sector and other terms mean for the purpose of the amendment inserted by Amendment 40.*

### Clause 98

#### DECENT HOMES STANDARD

*Amendment proposed:* 3, page 117, line 33, after “(homelessness),” insert—

“or that is provided by the Ministry of Defence for use as service family accommodation.”—(*Mr Amos.*)

*This amendment would extend the Decent Homes Standard to Ministry of Defence service family accommodation.*

*Question put,* That the amendment be made.

*The House divided:* Ayes 186, Noes 360.

#### Division No. 78]

[6.43 pm

#### AYES

Adam, Shockat	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Allister, Jim	Cocking, Lewis
Amos, Gideon	Collins, Victoria
Anderson, Stuart ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Gagan Mohindra</i> )	Cooper, Daisy
Andrew, rh Stuart	Cooper, John
Aquarone, Steff	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Argar, rh Edward	Costa, Alberto
Atkins, rh Victoria	Coutinho, rh Claire ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i> )
Babarinde, Josh	Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Bacon, Gareth	Cross, Harriet
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Dance, Adam
Barclay, rh Steve	Darling, Steve
Bedford, Mr Peter	Davey, rh Ed
Bennett, Alison	Davies, Gareth
Berry, Siân	Davies, Mims
Bhatti, Saqib	Dean, Bobby
Blackman, Bob	Denyer, Carla
Bool, Sarah	Dewhurst, Charlie
Bowie, Andrew	Dillon, Mr Lee
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Braverman, rh Suella	Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
Brewer, Alex	Dyke, Sarah
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Eastwood, Sorcha
Burghart, Alex	Evans, Dr Luke
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Farron, Tim
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Forster, Mr Will
Cartlidge, James	Fortune, Peter
Chadwick, David	Fox, Sir Ashley
Chamberlain, Wendy	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Chambers, Dr Danny	Freeman, George
Chowns, Ellie	French, Mr Louie
Cleverly, rh Mr James	Gale, rh Sir Roger

Garnier, Mark	Morton, rh Wendy
George, Andrew	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Gilmour, Rachel	Mundell, rh David
Glen, rh John	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Glover, Olly	Norman, rh Jesse
Goldman, Marie	Obese-Jecty, Ben
Gordon, Tom	O'Brien, Neil
Grant, Helen	Olney, Sarah
Green, Sarah	Patel, rh Priti
Griffith, Andrew	Paul, Rebecca
Griffiths, Alison	Perteghella, Manuela
Harding, Monica	Philp, rh Chris
Harris, Rebecca	Pinkerton, Dr Al
Hayes, rh Sir John	Raja, Shivani
Heylings, Pippa	Ramsay, Adrian
Hinds, rh Damian	Rankin, Jack
Hoare, Simon	Reed, David
Hobhouse, Wera	Reynolds, Mr Joshua
Holden, rh Mr Richard	Robertson, Joe
Hollinrake, Kevin	Robinson, rh Gavin
Holmes, Paul	Roome, Ian
Huddleston, Nigel	Sabine, Anna
Hudson, Dr Neil	Savage, Dr Roz
Hunt, rh Jeremy	Shannon, Jim
Hussain, Mr Adnan	Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Jarvis, Liz	Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Simmonds, David
Jenrick, rh Robert	Slade, Vikki
Johnson, Dr Caroline	Smart, Lisa
Jones, Clive	Smith, Greg
Jopp, Lincoln	Smith, rh Sir Julian
Kearns, Alicia ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i> )	Smith, Rebecca
Khan, Ayoub	Snowden, Mr Andrew
Kohler, Mr Paul	Sollom, Ian
Kruger, Danny	Spencer, Dr Ben
Lam, Katie	Spencer, Patrick
Lamont, John	Stafford, Gregory
Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Stephenson, Blake
Lewis, rh Sir Julian	Stone, Jamie
Lockhart, Carla	Stride, rh Mel
Lopez, Julia	Stuart, rh Graham
Lowe, Rupert	Swann, Robin
MacCleary, James	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
MacDonald, Mr Angus	Taylor, Luke
Maguire, Ben	Thomas, Bradley
Maguire, Helen	Thomas, Cameron
Mak, Alan	Tice, Richard
Malthouse, rh Kit	Timothy, Nick
Martin, Mike	Trott, rh Laura
Mathew, Brian	Vickers, Martin
Mayhew, Jerome	Vickers, Matt
Maynard, Charlie	Whately, Helen
McMurdock, James	Wild, James
McVey, rh Esther	Wilkinson, Max
van Mierlo, Freddie	Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Miller, Calum	Wilson, Munira
Milne, John	Wilson, rh Sammy
Mohamed, Iqbal	Wood, Mike
Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Moore, Robbie	Wrigley, Martin
Moran, Layla	Young, Claire
Morgan, Helen	
Morrison, Mr Tom ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster</i> )	
Morrissey, Joy	

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
Susan Murray and  
Zöe Franklin

#### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy</i> )	Abrahams, Debbie
Abbott, Jack	Ahmed, Dr Zubir
	Akehurst, Luke

Alaba, Mr Bayo	Costigan, Deirdre	Harris, Carolyn	McMahon, Jim
Aldridge, Dan	Cox, Pam	Hatton, Lloyd	McMorrin, Anna
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Coyle, Neil	Hayes, Helen	McNally, Frank
Alexander, rh Heidi	Craft, Jen	Hayes, Tom	McNeill, Kirsty
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Creagh, Mary	Hazelgrove, Claire	Midgley, Anneliese
Ali, Rushanara	Creasy, Ms Stella	Hillier, Dame Meg	Minns, Ms Julie
Ali, Tahir	Crichton, Torcuil	Hinchliff, Chris	Mishra, Navendu
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Curtis, Chris	Hinder, Jonathan	Moon, Perran
Amesbury, Mike ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Dakin, Sir Nicholas	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Morden, Jessica
Anderson, Callum	Dalton, Ashley	Hopkins, Rachel	Morgan, Stephen
Anderson, Fleur	Darlington, Emily	Hughes, Claire	Morris, Graham
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Davies, Jonathan	Hume, Alison	Morris, Joe
Arthur, Dr Scott	Davies, Paul	Huq, Dr Rupa	Mullane, Margaret
Asato, Jess	De Cordova, Marsha	Hurley, Patrick	Murphy, Luke
Asser, James	Dean, Josh	Ingham, Leigh	Murray, Chris
Athwal, Jas	Dearden, Kate	Irons, Natasha	Murray, James
Atkinson, Catherine	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Jameson, Sally	Murray, Katrina
Atkinson, Lewis	Dickson, Jim	Jarvis, Dan	Naish, James
Bailey, Mr Calvin	Dixon, Anna	Jogee, Adam	Naismith, Connor
Bailey, Olivia	Dixon, Samantha	Johnson, rh Dame Diana	Narayan, Kanishka
Baines, David	Dodds, rh Anneliese	Jones, rh Darren	Newbury, Josh
Baker, Alex	Dollimore, Helena	Jones, Gerald	Niblett, Samantha
Bance, Antonia	Dowd, Peter	Jones, Lillian	Nichols, Charlotte
Barker, Paula	Downie, Graeme	Jones, Louise	Onn, Melanie
Barron, Lee	Duncan-Jordan, Neil	Jones, Ruth	Onwurah, Chi
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Eagle, Dame Angela	Josan, Gurinder Singh	Opher, Dr Simon
Baxter, Johanna	Eagle, rh Maria	Joseph, Sojan	Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
Beales, Danny	Eastwood, Colum	Juss, Warinder	Osamor, Kate
Beavers, Lorraine	Eccles, Cat	Kane, Chris	Osborne, Kate
Begum, Apsana	Efford, Clive	Kane, Mike	Osborne, Tristan
Bell, Torsten	Egan, Damien	Kaur, Satvir ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Owatemi, Taiwo
Benn, rh Hilary	Ellis, Maya	Kendall, rh Liz	Owen, Sarah
Billington, Ms Polly	Elmore, Chris	Khan, Afzal	Paffey, Darren
Bishop, Matt	Entwistle, Kirith	Khan, Naushabah	Pakes, Andrew
Blake, Olivia	Eshalomi, Florence	Kinnock, Stephen	Patrick, Matthew
Blake, Rachel	Esterson, Bill	Kirkham, Jayne	Payne, Michael
Bloore, Chris	Evans, Chris	Kitchen, Gen	Peacock, Stephanie
Blundell, Mrs Elsie ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Fahnbulleh, Miatta	Kumar, Sonia	Pearce, Jon
Bonavia, Kevin	Falconer, Mr Hamish	Kumar, Uma	Pennycook, Matthew
Botterill, Jade	Farnsworth, Linsey	Kyle, rh Peter	Perkins, Mr Toby
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena	Ferguson, Mark	Kyrke-Smith, Laura	Pinto-Duschinsky, David
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Ferguson, Patricia	Lamb, Peter	Pitcher, Lee
Bryant, Chris	Fleet, Natalie	Lavery, Ian	Platt, Jo
Buckley, Julia	Foody, Emma	Law, Noah	Powell, Joe
Burgon, Richard	Fookes, Catherine	Foster, Mr Paul	Powell, rh Lucy
Burke, Maureen	Foxcroft, Vicky	Leadbeater, Kim	Poynton, Gregor
Burton-Sampson, David	Francis, Daniel	Leishman, Brian	Prinsley, Peter
Butler, Dawn	Frith, Mr James	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Qureshi, Yasmin
Byrne, Ian	Furniss, Gill	Lewin, Andrew	Race, Steve
Byrne, rh Liam	Gardiner, Barry	Lewis, Clive	Ranger, Andrew
Cadbury, Ruth	Gardner, Dr Allison	Lightwood, Simon	Rayner, rh Angela
Caliskan, Nesil	Gelder, Anna	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Reader, Mike
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Gemmell, Alan	MacAlister, Josh	Reed, rh Steve
Campbell, Irene	German, Gill	Macdonald, Alice	Reid, Joani
Campbell, Juliet	Gilbert, Tracy	MacNae, Andy	Reynolds, Emma
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Gill, Preet Kaur	Madders, Justin	Rhodes, Martin
Carling, Sam	Gittins, Becky	Mahmood, rh Shabana	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Carns, Al	Glindon, Mary	Martin, Amanda	Richards, Jake
Champion, Sarah	Goldborough, Ben	Maskell, Rachael	Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos	Gould, Georgia	Mayer, Alex	Rigby, Lucy
Charters, Mr Luke	Grady, John	McAllister, Douglas	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Clark, Feryal	Greenwood, Lilian	McCarthy, Kerry	Robertson, Dave
Coleman, Ben	Griffith, Dame Nia	McCluskey, Martin	Roca, Tim
Collier, Jacob	Gwynne, Andrew	McDonald, Andy	Rodda, Matt
Collinge, Lizzi	Hack, Amanda	McDonald, Chris	Rushworth, Sam
Collins, Tom	Haigh, rh Louise	McDonnell, rh John	Russell, Mrs Sarah
Conlon, Liam	Hall, Sarah	McEvoy, Lola	Rutland, Tom
Coombes, Sarah	Hamilton, Fabian	McGovern, Alison	Ryan, Oliver
Cooper, Andrew	Hamilton, Paulette	McIntyre, Alex	Sackman, Sarah
Cooper, Dr Beccy	Hanna, Claire	McKee, Gordon	Sandher, Dr Jeevun
	Hardy, Emma	McKenna, Kevin	Scroggham, Michelle
		McKinnell, Catherine	Sewards, Mr Mark

Shah, Naz  
 Shanker, Baggy  
 Shanks, Michael  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Sarah  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Will  
 Strathern, Alistair  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sullivan, Kirsteen  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Fred (*Proxy vote  
 cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie

Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 Western, Andrew  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Williams, David  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Yemm, Steve  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Keir Mather and**  
**Anna Turley**

*Question accordingly negated.*

### Clause 100

RENT REPAYMENT ORDERS: LIABILITY OF LANDLORDS  
 AND SUPERIOR LANDLORDS

*Amendments made:* 42, page 120, line 22, after “landlord”  
 insert  
 “or superior landlord who committed the offence”.

*This amendment clarifies that a rent repayment order can be made  
 against a superior landlord who has committed an offence to which  
 Chapter 4 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 applies.*

Amendment 43, page 120, line 24, after “tenant”  
 insert  
 “(whether the rent was paid to the landlord or superior landlord  
 against whom the order is made, or to another person)”.

*This amendment to the Housing and Planning Act 2016 ensures  
 that it is possible to obtain a rent repayment order against a  
 landlord or superior landlord who has committed an offence  
 whether or not the rent was paid directly to them.*

Amendment 44, page 120, line 27, at end insert—

“(2A) In a case where the offence was committed by a  
 superior landlord—

- (a) references in the following provisions of this  
 Chapter to the landlord are to be read as  
 references to the superior landlord, and
- (b) housing in relation to which the person in  
 question is a superior landlord is to be treated  
 for the purposes of this Chapter as let by that  
 person.”

*This amendment moves provision that was to go into section 52 of  
 the Housing and Planning Act 2016 into section 40 of that Act to  
 ensure that references to the “landlord” in Chapter 4 of that Act  
 are in appropriate cases read as references to the “superior  
 landlord”.*

Amendment 45, page 120, line 27, at end insert—

“(2A) In section 41 (application for rent repayment order),  
 in subsection (1), for “person” substitute  
 “landlord”.

*This amendment is consequential on Amendment 44 and ensures  
 that a rent repayment order is available against both landlords and  
 superior landlords.*

Amendment 46, page 120, line 33, at end insert—

“(ai) after “rent paid” (in the first place) insert “by, or on  
 behalf of, the tenant”.

*This clarifies that the amount to be paid to the tenant under the  
 rent repayment order must relate to the rent paid by them or on  
 their behalf in respect of the specified period.*

Amendment 47, page 120, line 34, at end insert—

“(ia) in the heading to the second column to the table,  
 after “by” insert “, or on behalf of,” and”.

*This amendment is consequential on Amendment 46.*

Amendment 48, page 120, line 36, at end insert “and,

(ii) in paragraph (a), after “paid” insert “by, or on behalf  
 of, the tenant”.

*This clarifies that the amount to be paid to the tenant under the  
 rent repayment order must not exceed the rent paid by them or on  
 their behalf in respect of the specified period (less any award of  
 universal credit made during that period).*

Amendment 49, page 120, line 36, at end insert—

“(c) in subsection 4, after paragraph (a) insert—  
 “(aa) the amount of any rent received by the tenant  
 in respect of the period mentioned in the table  
 in relation to the housing let to the tenant.”

*This requires the tribunal, when making a rent repayment order in  
 favour of a tenant, to take into account any rent received by the  
 tenant for the rent period which any amount paid to the tenant  
 would be calculated by reference to, where that rent relates to the  
 housing let to the tenant.*

Amendment 50, page 121, line 19, leave out from  
 “(interpretation),” to the end of line 26 and insert—

“in subsection (1), in the appropriate place, insert—  
 ““landlord” is to be read in accordance with section  
 40(2A);”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This amendment is consequential on Amendment 44.*

### Clause 102

UNLICENSED HMOs AND HOUSES: OFFENCES

*Amendments made:* 51, page 123, after line 11 insert—

“(4C) For the purposes of subsection (4B), a term in the  
 tenancy agreement or licence to occupy relating to  
 the occupation of the building or part of the building  
 that is an HMO does not on its own constitute a  
 defence under any of paragraphs (a) to (c) of that  
 subsection.”

*This provides that a landlord under a tenancy agreement or licence  
 to occupy cannot rely on a term under that agreement or licence  
 about the occupation of the building, or part of the building, to on  
 its own prove a defence to the offence of failing to obtain a licence  
 for an HMO.*

Amendment 52, page 124, after line 4 insert—

“(3C) For the purposes of subsection (3B), a term in the  
 tenancy agreement or licence to occupy relating to  
 the occupation of the house does not on its own  
 constitute a defence under any of paragraphs (a) to  
 (c) of that subsection.”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This provides that a landlord under a tenancy agreement or licence to occupy cannot rely on a term under that agreement or licence about the occupation of the house to on its own prove a defence to the offence of failing to obtain a licence under Part 3 of the Housing Act 2004.*

### Schedule 1

#### CHANGES TO GROUNDS FOR POSSESSION

*Amendments made:* 18, page 160, line 25, at end insert—

“(ca) the period—

- (i) beginning with the day on which the tenancy was entered into, and
- (ii) ending with the day on which the tenant was entitled to possession of the dwelling-house,

is six months or less.”

*This ensures that Ground 4A is not available if the tenancy of the student accommodation is granted more than 6 months before it begins.*

Amendment 19, page 166, line 28, leave out from beginning to end of line 13 on page 167 and insert

“For Ground 6 (excluding the italic heading) substitute—

These conditions are met—

- (a) the general redevelopment conditions (in every case);
- (b) the landlord’s acquisition condition, but only in a case where section 7(5ZA) applies in relation to the tenancy;
- (c) the additional RSL condition, but only in a case where the landlord seeking possession is—
  - (i) a relevant social landlord, and
  - (ii) the person who intends to carry out the work mentioned in this ground.

The “general redevelopment conditions” are met if—

- (a) the landlord seeking possession is mentioned in the first column in a row of the table in this ground;
- (b) the tenancy is mentioned in the second column of that row;
- (c) a person mentioned in the third column of that row intends to—
  - (i) demolish or reconstruct the whole or a substantial part of the dwelling-house, or
  - (ii) carry out substantial works on the dwelling-house or any part of it, or any building of which it forms part;
- (d) the intended work cannot reasonably be carried out without the tenant giving up possession of the dwelling-house because—
  - (i) the tenant is not willing to agree to such a variation of the terms of the tenancy as would give such access and other facilities as would permit the intended work to be carried out,
  - (ii) the nature of the intended work is such that no such variation is practicable,
  - (iii) the tenant is not willing to accept an assured tenancy of such part only of the dwelling-house (in this sub-paragraph referred to as “the reduced part”) as would leave in the possession of the landlord so much of the dwelling-house as would be reasonable to enable the intended work to be carried out and, where appropriate, as would give such access and other facilities over the reduced part as would permit the intended work to be carried out, or
  - (iv) the nature of the intended work is such that such a tenancy is not practicable;

(e) either —

- (i) the assured tenancy began at least 6 months before the relevant date, or
- (ii) notice of a compulsory acquisition was given in respect of the dwelling-house where—
  - (A) the acquiring authority was the person who became the landlord who is seeking possession, and
  - (B) the dwelling-house was transferred to that landlord within the period of 12 months ending with the relevant date;

(f) the assured tenancy on which the dwelling-house is let did not come into being by virtue of any provision of Schedule 1 to the Rent Act 1977, as amended by Part 1 of Schedule 4 to this Act or, as the case may be, section 4 of the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976, as amended by Part 2 of that Schedule.

The “landlord’s acquisition condition” is met if—

- (a) the landlord seeking possession acquired their interest in the dwelling-house before the grant of the tenancy, or
- (b) that interest was in existence at the time of that grant and neither that landlord (or, in the case of joint landlords, any of them) nor any other person who, alone or jointly with others, has acquired that interest since that time acquired it for money or money’s worth.

The “additional RSL condition” is met in case A, case B or case C.

*Case A:* a case where alternative accommodation that meets the following conditions is available for the tenant or will be available for the tenant when the order for possession takes effect—

- (a) it is let as a separate dwelling with adequate security of tenure;
- (b) it is affordable;
- (c) it is in an appropriate location;
- (d) it is not overcrowded.

*Case B:* a case where alternative accommodation that meets the following conditions is available for the tenant or will be available for the tenant when the order for possession takes effect—

- (a) it is being provided temporarily until other alternative accommodation becomes available which will meet the conditions in case A;
- (b) it is affordable;
- (c) it is in an appropriate location;
- (d) it is not overcrowded.

*Case C:* a case where—

- (a) the tenancy of the dwelling-house was not granted pursuant to a nomination as mentioned in section 159(2)(c) of the Housing Act 1996,
- (b) when the tenancy was granted, the landlord intended to—
  - (i) demolish or reconstruct the whole or a substantial part of the dwelling-house, or
  - (ii) carry out substantial works on the dwelling-house or any part of it, or any building of which it forms part,

within a specific period, and

- (c) the relevant social landlord gave the tenant, before the tenancy was entered into, a written statement of the landlord’s wish to be able to recover possession on the basis of that intention to carry out that work within that period (and that period must be included in the statement).

For the purpose of the additional RSL condition, accommodation—

- (a) is let “with adequate security of tenure” if it is let—
  - (i) on an assured tenancy, or

- (ii) on terms which will, in the opinion of the court, afford to the tenant security of tenure reasonably equivalent to the security afforded by an assured tenancy;
- (b) is “affordable” if it is—
  - (i) no more expensive than the dwelling-house of which possession is being sought, or
  - (ii) reasonably suitable to the means of the tenant;
- (c) is “in an appropriate location” if it is—
  - (i) reasonably close to the dwelling-house of which possession is being sought, or
  - (ii) reasonably suitable to the needs of the tenant and the tenant’s family as regards proximity to place of work;
- (d) is “overcrowded” if the result of the occupation of the accommodation by the tenant and the tenant’s family would be that it would be an overcrowded dwelling for the purposes of Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985.”

*This rewrites Ground 6 to incorporate the amendments already contained in paragraph 20 of Schedule 1 and other additional amendments.*

Amendment 20, page 167, leave out lines 17 to 23.

*The provision made in the first row of this table is superseded by the expansion of the provision made in the second row (see Amendment 21).*

Amendment 21, page 167, leave out lines 24 to 30 in the second column and insert

“any tenancy”.

*This expands the provision made in the second column of the second row of this table so that it applies in relation to any tenancy.*

Amendment 22, page 168, line 25, at end insert—

*“New ground for possession of alternative accommodation provided during redevelopment*

20A After Ground 6 insert—

“Ground 6ZA

These conditions are met—

- (a) the landlord seeking possession (the “current landlord”) is a relevant social landlord;
- (b) the dwelling-house (the “current home”) was made available for occupation by the tenant, or a predecessor in title of the tenant, to enable redevelopment of another dwelling-house (the “previous home”) which—
  - (i) was the only or principal home of the tenant or predecessor in title, and
  - (ii) was occupied by the tenant or predecessor in title under a tenancy (the “previous tenancy”) of which the landlord was—
    - (A) a relevant social landlord, or
    - (B) a registered provider of social housing other than a private registered provider of social housing;
- (c) alternative accommodation that—
  - (i) consists of the previous home and is affordable, or
  - (ii) consists of other premises and is affordable, in an appropriate location and not overcrowded, is available for the tenant or will be available for the tenant when the order for possession takes effect;
- (d) that alternative accommodation is to be let as a separate dwelling with adequate security of tenure.

For the purpose of this ground, accommodation—

- (a) is let “with adequate security of tenure” if it is let—
  - (i) on an assured tenancy, or
  - (ii) on terms which will, in the opinion of the court, afford to the tenant security of tenure reasonably equivalent to the security afforded by an assured tenancy;

- (b) is “affordable” if it—
  - (i) is no more expensive than the previous home, making these assumptions—
    - (A) that the redevelopment of the previous home has not taken place, and
    - (B) that the tenant, or predecessor in title, has continued to be the tenant of the previous home under the previous tenancy, or
  - (ii) is reasonably suitable to the means of the tenant;
- (c) is “in an appropriate location” if it is—
  - (i) reasonably close to the previous home, or
  - (ii) reasonably suitable to the needs of the tenant and the tenant’s family as regards proximity to place of work;
- (d) is “overcrowded” if the result of the occupation of the accommodation by the tenant and the tenant’s family would be that it would be an overcrowded dwelling for the purposes of Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985.

In this Ground—

“redevelopment”, in relation to the dwelling-house that is the previous home, means—

- (a) demolishing or reconstructing the whole or a substantial part of the dwelling-house, or
- (b) carrying out substantial works on the dwelling-house or any part of it, or any building of which it forms part;

“relevant social landlord” has the same meaning as in Ground 6.”

*This creates a new ground for possession that is available where a tenant has been provided with alternative accommodation by a registered social landlord while redevelopment affecting the tenant’s original home is carried out.*

Amendment 23, page 168, line 27, leave out “6” and insert

“6ZA (inserted by paragraph 20A)”.

Amendment 24, page 170, line 10, leave out from “paragraph” to end of line 11 and insert

“for the words from “The tenancy” to “devolved” insert “The tenancy has devolved on a person (the “new tenant”)”;

(aa) after the first unnumbered paragraph insert—

“But, if the new tenant is occupying the dwelling-house as the new tenant’s only or principal home immediately before the death of the former tenant, an order for possession on this Ground may not be made unless—

- (a) the tenancy has previously devolved on the former tenant under a will or intestacy (whenever that devolution occurred), or
- (b) the tenancy is a special tenancy immediately before the death of the former tenant.

In this Ground “special tenancy” means—

- (a) a tenancy of social housing (within the meaning given by Part 2 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008) where the landlord is a private registered provider of social housing;
- (b) a tenancy entered into pursuant to a rent-to-buy agreement (which has the same meaning as in Ground 1B) where the landlord is a private registered provider of social housing;
- (c) a tenancy of supported accommodation, within the meaning given by paragraph 12 of Schedule 2;
- (d) a tenancy where the former tenant’s occupation of the dwelling-house is in pursuance of a local housing authority’s duty to the tenant under section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 (and here “local housing authority” has the same meaning as in Ground 5G);

- (e) a tenancy which meets the conditions in paragraphs (a), (b), (d) and (e) in the first paragraph of Ground 5H.””

*This removes the possibility of using Ground 7 where the person who inherits was residing in the dwelling-house, except where the deceased person had themselves inherited the dwelling or where the tenancy is a “special tenancy”.*

Amendment 25, page 172, line 31, leave out

“Grounds 2ZA, 2ZC, 5C, 5H and 6A”

and insert “certain Grounds”.

*This is consequential on Amendment 26.*

Amendment 26, page 173, line 4, at end insert—

“(ea) amend the definition of “special tenancy” in Ground 7;”—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This enables the definition of “special tenancy” in Ground 7 to be amended by regulations subject to the affirmative procedure.*

## Schedule 2

### AMENDMENTS RELATING TO CHAPTER 1 OF PART 1

*Amendments made:* 31, page 179, leave out lines 42 and 43 and insert—

“27 The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 is amended as follows.

28 In Schedule 10 (security of tenure on ending of long residential tenancies)—

- (a) in paragraph 5(1)(a), omit “, other than Ground 16”;
- (b) for paragraph 5(2) substitute—

“(2) Ground 6 in Schedule 2 to the 1988 Act may not be specified in a landlord’s notice to resume possession if the tenancy is a former 1954 Act tenancy.

(2A) Where that Ground applies to any other long residential tenancy in accordance with subparagraph (1), it is to apply as if—

- (a) in paragraph (b) of that Ground, the words “, but only in a case where section 7(5ZA) applies in relation to the tenancy,” were omitted;
- (b) in the general redevelopment conditions, paragraph (f) was omitted.”;

(c) in paragraph 6(3)(c)—

- (i) omit “(other than an assured shorthold tenancy)”;
- (ii) for “5” substitute “5H”;

(d) in paragraph 11(3)—

- (i) in the opening words, omit “(not being an assured shorthold tenancy)”;
- (ii) in paragraph (c), for “5” substitute “5H”;

(e) in paragraph 11(5)—

- (i) in the opening words, omit “(not being an assured shorthold tenancy)”;
- (ii) in paragraph (c), for “5” substitute “5H”;

(f) in paragraph 12(1), omit “or Chapter II”;

(g) in paragraph 13(4), for “15” substitute “18”.

29 In Schedule 11 (minor and consequential amendments), omit paragraphs 103 and 108.”

*This replaces the amendment made to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and makes new amendments to the provisions in that Act relating to security of tenure on the ending of long residential leases to take account of the changes made by Part 1 of the Bill.*

Amendment 32, page 182, line 12, after “(aa)” insert “where the EDMO is to be made by a local housing authority in England.”.

*This restricts the new requirement on local housing authorities when making an empty dwelling management order to notify the proprietor of their rights and powers under the order, including the right to grant a lease, to local housing authorities in England.*

Amendment 33, page 182, line 24, leave out from beginning to “(possession” and insert—

“61A The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 is amended as follows.

61B In section 180 (right to acquire)—

- (a) in subsection (2)(a), omit “, other than a long tenancy”;
- (b) in subsection (2A), omit “shorthold”.

62 In Schedule 11”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This makes consequential amendments of section 180 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008.*

## Schedule 6

### APPLICATION OF CHAPTER 1 OF PART 1 TO EXISTING TENANCIES: TRANSITIONAL PROVISION

*Amendments made:* 53, page 219, line 27, at end insert—

“(aa) paragraph (ca) were omitted;”

*This is consequential on Amendment 18.*

Amendment 54, page 220, line 7, leave out “(ab)” and insert

“(c) in case C where the “additional RSL condition” is met”.—(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

*This is consequential on Amendment 19.*

### Third Reading

*King’s consent signified.*

6.57 pm

**Matthew Pennycook:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It has been a real privilege to take this vital piece of legislation through the House. I want to thank everyone who has played a role in getting the Bill to this stage: my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for her passionate commitment to improving the lives of England’s 11 million private renters; the Department’s Bill team who have worked tirelessly on the legislation for the past six months; my outstanding private office, including my fantastic private secretary Will Gaby, who has led the team on the Bill; the Clerks, Chairs and parliamentary counsel for facilitating its progress; the witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee; and hon. Members from across the House who provided valuable input today and at previous stages.

The current system for private renting is broken. While the Government recognise that the majority of landlords provide high-quality homes and a good service to their tenants, it remains the case that the private rented sector still provides the least affordable, poorest quality and most insecure housing of all tenures. This intolerable state of affairs is why renters have been demanding change for many years, and I am extremely proud that this Government have acted so early in the Parliament to deliver it.

The Renters’ Rights Bill will deliver on our manifesto commitment to overhaul the regulation of the private rented sector and to decisively raise standards within it. It is bitterly disappointing that despite not forcing a



single Division in Committee, the Opposition decided today to set their face firmly against private rented sector reform on the basis of a series of specious and, indeed, spurious arguments. They may be intent on letting down England's private renters once again, but this Labour Government will not put tens of thousands of them at risk of homelessness, nor will we prolong the uncertainty that responsible landlords across the country have experienced over recent years by hesitating. We will finish the job and give England's 11 million private renters the greater security, rights and protections they deserve. I wish Baroness Taylor the best with moving the Bill forward in the other place, and I commend it to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I call Kevin Hollinrake, who has 35 seconds.

6.59 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I draw the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

It is not wrong, spurious or specious to stand up for 11 million tenants. We know that tenants and landlords are two sides of the same coin. As the Leader of the Opposition said, we agree that tenants need a better deal, but this Bill will not give that to them. The Minister is following in the footsteps of Scotland. The Bill will reduce supply and push up rent, and that is why we are against it—

7 pm

*Debate interrupted (Programme Order, 9 October).*

*The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair*

*(Standing Order No. 83E), That the Bill be now read the Third time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 440, Noes 111.*

## Division No. 79]

[7 pm

### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Ady</i> )	Asato, Jess
Abbott, Jack	Asser, James
Abrahams, Debbie	Athwal, Jas
Adam, Shockat	Atkinson, Catherine
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Atkinson, Lewis
Akehurst, Luke	Babarinde, Josh
Alaba, Mr Bayo	Bailey, Mr Calvin
Aldridge, Dan	Bailey, Olivia
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Baines, David
Alexander, rh Heidi	Baker, Alex
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Bance, Antonia
Ali, Rushanara	Barker, Paula
Ali, Tahir	Barron, Lee
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Allister, Jim	Baxter, Johanna
Amesbury, Mike ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Beales, Danny
Amos, Gideon	Beavers, Lorraine
Anderson, Callum	Begum, Apsana
Anderson, Fleur	Bell, Torsten
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Benn, rh Hilary
Aquarone, Steff	Bennett, Alison
Arthur, Dr Scott	Berry, Siân
	Billington, Ms Polly
	Bishop, Matt
	Blake, Olivia

Blake, Rachel	Dowd, Peter
Bloore, Chris	Downie, Graeme
Blundell, Mrs Elsie ( <i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i> )	Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Bonavia, Kevin	Dyke, Sarah
Botterill, Jade	Eagle, Dame Angela
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena	Eagle, rh Maria
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Eastwood, Colum
Brewer, Alex	Eastwood, Sorcha
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Eccles, Cat
Bryant, Chris	Efford, Clive
Buckley, Julia	Egan, Damien
Burgon, Richard	Ellis, Maya
Burke, Maureen	Elmore, Chris
Burton-Sampson, David	Entwistle, Kirith
Butler, Dawn	Eshalomi, Florence
Byrne, Ian	Esterson, Bill
Byrne, rh Liam	Evans, Chris
Cadbury, Ruth	Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Caliskan, Nesil	Falconer, Mr Hamish
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Farnsworth, Linsey
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Farron, Tim
Campbell, Irene	Ferguson, Mark
Campbell, Juliet	Ferguson, Patricia
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Fleet, Natalie
Carling, Sam	Foody, Emma
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Fookes, Catherine
Carns, Al	Forster, Mr Will
Chadwick, David	Foster, Mr Paul
Chamberlain, Wendy	Foxcroft, Vicky
Chambers, Dr Danny	Francis, Daniel
Champion, Sarah	Franklin, Zöe
Charalambous, Bambos	Frith, Mr James
Charters, Mr Luke	Furniss, Gill
Chowns, Ellie	Gardiner, Barry
Clark, Feryal	Gardner, Dr Allison
Coleman, Ben	Gelder, Anna
Collier, Jacob	Gemmell, Alan
Collinge, Lizzi	George, Andrew
Collins, Tom	German, Gill
Collins, Victoria	Gilbert, Tracy
Conlon, Liam	Gill, Preet Kaur
Coombes, Sarah	Gilmour, Rachel
Cooper, Andrew	Gittins, Becky
Cooper, Dr Beccy	Glendon, Mary
Cooper, Daisy	Glover, Olly
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Goldman, Marie
Costigan, Deirdre	Goldsbrough, Ben
Cox, Pam	Gordon, Tom
Coyle, Neil	Gould, Georgia
Creasy, Ms Stella	Grady, John
Crichton, Torcuil	Green, Sarah
Curtis, Chris	Greenwood, Lilian
Dakin, Sir Nicholas	Griffith, Dame Nia
Dalton, Ashley	Gwynne, Andrew
Dance, Adam	Hack, Amanda
Darlington, Emily	Haigh, rh Louise
Davey, rh Ed	Hall, Sarah
Davies, Ann	Hamilton, Fabian
Davies, Jonathan	Hamilton, Paulette
Davies, Paul	Hanna, Claire
De Cordova, Marsha	Harding, Monica
Dean, Josh	Hardy, Emma
Dearden, Kate	Harris, Carolyn
Denyer, Carla	Hatton, Lloyd
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Hayes, Helen
Dickson, Jim	Hayes, Tom
Dillon, Mr Lee	Hazelgrove, Claire
Dixon, Anna	Heylings, Pippa
Dixon, Samantha	Hillier, Dame Meg
Dodds, rh Anneliese	Hinchliff, Chris
Dollimore, Helena	Hinder, Jonathan
	Hobhouse, Wera

Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hughes, Claire  
 Hume, Alison  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurley, Patrick  
 Hussain, Mr Adnan  
 Ingham, Leigh  
 Irons, Natasha  
 Jameson, Sally  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Jarvis, Liz  
 Jogee, Adam  
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana  
 Jones, Clive  
 Jones, rh Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Lillian  
 Jones, Louise  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Josan, Gurinder Singh  
 Joseph, Sojan  
 Juss, Warinder  
 Kane, Chris  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Kendall, rh Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Khan, Ayoub  
 Khan, Naushabah  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kirkham, Jayne  
 Kitchen, Gen  
 Kohler, Mr Paul  
 Kumar, Sonia  
 Kumaran, Uma  
 Kyle, rh Peter  
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lamb, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Noah  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Leishman, Brian  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewin, Andrew  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Lockhart, Carla  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 MacAlister, Josh  
 MacCleary, James  
 Macdonald, Alice  
 MacDonald, Mr Angus  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Maguire, Ben  
 Maguire, Helen  
 Mahmood, rh Shabana  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Martin, Mike  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mathew, Brian  
 Mayer, Alex  
 Maynard, Charlie  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McCluskey, Martin  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Chris  
 McDonnell, rh John

McEvoy, Lola  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McKenna, Kevin  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 McNally, Frank  
 McNeill, Kirsty  
 Medi, Llinos  
 Midgley, Anneliese  
 van Mierlo, Freddie  
 Miller, Calum  
 Milne, John  
 Minns, Ms Julie  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Iqbal  
 Moon, Perran  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Helen  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Morrison, Mr Tom (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Forster*)  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Murphy, Luke  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, James  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Murray, Susan  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Pakes, Andrew  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Payne, Michael  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pearce, Jon  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Perteghella, Manuela  
 Pinkerton, Dr Al  
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David  
 Pitcher, Lee  
 Platt, Jo  
 Powell, Joe  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Race, Steve  
 Ramsay, Adrian  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Rayner, rh Angela  
 Reader, Mike

Reed, rh Steve  
 Reid, Joani  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Robinson, rh Gavin  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Roome, Ian  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Russell, Mrs Sarah  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Ryan, Oliver  
 Sabine, Anna  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Savage, Dr Roz  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Scrogam, Michelle  
 Sewards, Mr Mark  
 Shanker, Baggy  
 Shanks, Michael  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slade, Vikki  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Slinger, John  
 Smart, Lisa  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Sarah  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Sollom, Ian  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevens, rh Jo  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Stone, Will  
 Strathern, Alistair  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sullivan, Kirsteen  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Sultana, Zarah

Swallow, Peter  
 Swann, Robin  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Luke  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Cameron  
 Thomas, Fred (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Tomlinson, Dan  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Tufnell, Henry  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Karl  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 Western, Andrew  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 Whitby, John  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Wilkinson, Max  
 Williams, David  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrigley, Martin  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Yemm, Steve  
 Young, Claire  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Keir Mather and**  
**Anna Turley**

**NOES**

Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote cast by Gagan Mohindra*)  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Argar, rh Edward  
 Atkins, rh Victoria  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi  
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett  
 Barclay, rh Steve  
 Bedford, Mr Peter  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Bool, Sarah

Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen  
 Braverman, rh Suella  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cleverly, rh Mr James  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Cocking, Lewis  
 Cooper, John  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)  
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey

Cross, Harriet  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh David  
 Dewhurst, Charlie  
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline  
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Evans, Dr Luke  
 Fortune, Peter  
 Fox, Sir Ashley  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Freeman, George  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Glen, rh John  
 Grant, Helen  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Griffiths, Alison  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hunt, rh Jeremy  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Jopp, Lincoln  
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast  
 by Joy Morrissey*)  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lam, Katie  
 Lamont, John  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lowe, Rupert  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 McMurdock, James  
 McVey, rh Esther

Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Morton, rh Wendy  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
 Norman, rh Jesse  
 Obese-Jecty, Ben  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paul, Rebecca  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Raja, Shivani  
 Rankin, Jack  
 Reed, David  
 Robertson, Joe  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil  
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec  
 Simmonds, David  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, rh Sir Julian  
 Snowden, Mr Andrew  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, Patrick  
 Stafford, Gregory  
 Stephenson, Blake  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Thomas, Bradley  
 Tice, Richard  
 Timothy, Nick  
 Trott, rh Laura  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wild, James  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Mr Richard Holden and  
 Rebecca Smith**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read the Third time and passed.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### RETAINED EU LAW REFORM

That the draft Official Controls (Amendment) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 19 November 2024, be approved.—(*Kate Dearden.*)

*Question put.*

*The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until tomorrow (Standing Order No. 41A).*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Combined Authorities (Borrowing) and East Midlands Combined County Authority (Borrowing and Functions) (Amendment) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 19 November 2024, be approved.

### NATIONAL SECURITY

That the draft National Security Act 2023 (Consequential Amendment of Primary Legislation) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 29 October 2024, be approved.

### POLICE

That the draft Police Act 1997 (Authorisations to Interfere with Property: Relevant Offence) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 29 October 2024, be approved.

### COMPANIES

That the draft Registrar (Identity Verification and Authorised Corporate Service Providers) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 22 May 2024, in the last Parliament, be approved

That the draft Unique Identifiers (Application of Company Law) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 31 October 2024, be approved.—(*Kate Dearden.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

### ENERGY

That the draft Clean Heat Market Mechanism Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 21 November 2024, be approved.—(*Kate Dearden.*)

*The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until tomorrow (Standing Order No. 41A).*

## SCRUTINY OF EUROPEAN STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

*Motion made,*

That the following Standing Order shall be made:

1. For the purposes of paragraph 17 of Schedule 7 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 and paragraph 6 of Schedule 5 to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 the committee charged with considering draft instruments and related documents shall be the committee appointed under Standing Order No. 152 to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department laying the draft instrument or, in respect of an instrument or document laid by a Minister in the Cabinet Office, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

2. A committee considering such a draft instrument or related document shall have the assistance of the Counsel to the Speaker.

3. In its consideration of an instrument referred to in paragraph (1) the committee shall consider, in addition to such other matters as it deems appropriate, whether the draft instrument—

- (a) contains any provision of the type specified in paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 7 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 in relation to which the Act requires that a draft of the instrument must be laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament (the affirmative procedure);
- (b) contains any provision of the type specified in paragraph 5(2) of Schedule 5 to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 in relation to which the Act requires that a draft of the instrument must be laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament (the affirmative procedure);
- (c) otherwise appears to make an inappropriate use of the negative procedure;

and shall report to the House if it is of the opinion that the negative procedure should not apply.

4. This Standing Order shall lapse—
- (a) in so far as it relates to documents laid in accordance with paragraph 17(3)(b) of Schedule 7 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 (and matters arising from the consideration of such documents), at the end of the period after which no more regulations may be made under section 23(1) of that Act;
  - (b) in so far as it relates to documents laid in accordance with paragraph 6(3)(b) of Schedule 5 to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 (and matters arising from the consideration of such documents), at the end of the period after which no more regulations may be made under Sections 11, 12, or 14 of that Act.—(*Kate Dearden.*)

**Hon. Members:** Object.

## Education Provision: South Buckinghamshire

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Kate Dearden.)*

7.16 pm

**Joy Morrissey** (Beaconsfield) (Con): I am grateful to have secured this debate on this important topic for my constituents, and to the Minister for her attendance. I am also delighted to see the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) in his place. As constituency neighbours, albeit from different parties, we have come together to work closely on this issue for the good of our constituents. I want to talk about the lack of secondary school educational provision available to my constituents in south Buckinghamshire, particularly in the beautiful village of Burnham and the surrounding area. Burnham is a growing and thriving village that is part of both Buckinghamshire and Slough. It is a unique place, which is why the debate will focus on this topic.

Burnham is a place where families like to settle for its beauty, community and wonderful transport links. It is also place where children must travel long distances, at huge cost to their families, to attend a comprehensive secondary school. Burnham is the only community in Buckinghamshire that lacks a nearby secondary school alongside its grammar school. That situation is becoming increasingly intolerable, and I hope the Minister will join me and the hon. Member for Slough in our joint efforts to bring about change.

Let me start with a short history of the lack of school provision. In 2019, before I became the Member of Parliament for Beaconsfield, the Department for Education closed the Burnham E-Act Academy, a co-educational non-selective school for 11 to 18-year-olds. That followed several changes and challenging Ofsted reports. At one time, the school had served more than 600 pupils. As the school was failing, parents were forced to find alternatives for the sake of their children, and roll numbers began to fall, making the school potentially unviable. Instead of serious efforts being made to turn the school around, it was allowed to fail. That closure was a serious mistake.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing this debate and thank her for her kind words. It was a pleasure to join her recently at Burnham grammar school to meet activists campaigning for a new school. As she has explained, it was a mistake for the Government and Buckinghamshire council in 2019 to close the non-selective, co-educational secondary school. Obviously the numbers must stack up, but does she agree that it is vital to recognise the importance of children receiving good-quality, local school education? Is it not unfair for my Slough constituents and hers to have to travel great distances at great expense, just to get that education? Due consideration should be given to that when determining whether a new school is required in Burnham.

**Joy Morrissey:** The way that the hon. Member and I have been working cross-party is an example of how to move forward past council boundaries. I just point out to the Minister that Burnham is a large town that historically was its own entity, but uniquely is now part

of two local authorities. The numbers are often looked at through the lens of one local authority or the other, but we need to combine those two, work together and submit a joint local authority bid to the Department for Education. That is the way to demonstrate the numbers and get the secondary school provision we need.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady on bringing forward this debate. Does she not agree that by putting secondary schools out of reach of local populations, we close the door to character-building, to skill-learning and to socially imperative after-school programmes? That must all be weighed when considering educational provision, because if you close a school, you lose a generation of young people.

**Joy Morrissey**: I thank the hon. Member for always making such excellent contributions to every Adjournment debate. He is a true champion for Back Benchers.

The people who lost out in the school closure are the young people of Burnham and the surrounding areas. Moving forward, we want to see that problem rectified. Since 2019, the young people of Burnham who are not in selective education find themselves caught in excessively long journeys to schools in Maidenhead and other parts of Buckinghamshire and Slough, as my friend the hon. Member for Slough so eloquently pointed out. It is unfair for our residents, and it is having a significant effect on their mental health, physical wellbeing and finances.

The situation is absurd and almost intolerable. We have a site that housed a secondary school up until 2019, and it is now hosting the occasional Netflix filming. Meanwhile, young people waste hours travelling to school. The situation needs to change. I was equally robust in challenging our previous Schools Minister, and I spent much time speaking to Nick Gibb in the Tea Room. I am sure that the hon. Member for Slough can follow in my footsteps and finding the current Minister in the Tea Room to continue to press the point, formally and informally. Will she consider meeting me and him jointly after the debate, so that we can take this issue forward?

I pay tribute to the campaign group for Burnham secondary school. Since my election in December 2019, I have been pleased to work alongside the group and local families to try to right this wrong. They are at the epicentre of what makes community campaign groups so inspiring. They are totally dedicated to making their community better. I thank the local councillors, parish councillors and the hon. Member for working together to put the needs of our residents first.

Let me set out why the case for a secondary school in Burnham is clear, compelling and urgent. We know that education is the single silver bullet that can determine the life chances of young people, but we are placing an enormous barrier in the way of the young people of Burnham and south Buckinghamshire. Long journeys are impacting their mental and physical health and placing them at higher risk of educational disengagement.

We also know that south Buckinghamshire is significantly underserved in special educational needs and disabilities provision. Just before the election, I was delighted by the Department for Education's announcement of a new SEND school for Buckinghamshire. I hope that the

Minister will recommit to that school tonight and support my calls for it to be placed in south Buckinghamshire—it would be for the whole county, but I would love to see it in south Buckinghamshire. A reopened Burnham secondary school would represent a perfect opportunity to provide not only 11 to 16-year-olds with non-selective education, but increased SEND provision and a thriving sixth form.

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech about educational need in her constituency. Does she know of the work done by the London borough of Hillingdon in the village of Harefield in my constituency, where, as part of a multi-academy trust, an under-utilised secondary school has slightly reduced in size and the site is now dual-use, with both secondary mainstream comprehensive education and a brand-new SEND school at the same location?

**Joy Morrissey**: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent intervention. That example is the gold standard of what we would like to do to ensure that there is SEND provision and comprehensive school provision in our area as we move forward. Finding dual use for those facilities really is the way forward. With volunteers, we are trying to look at every option, working across parties and across local authorities to ensure that we find a solution that works for all of our residents, hopefully following in the footsteps of Hillingdon.

One of the frustrations that I and the campaign group have faced is the loop of accountability avoidance. We are on the border of many local authorities and we border London. The provision for our students is different from London, but because we are just outside London, that endless accountability loop is often difficult to close. The Department says that it is for local authorities to make the case, but oftentimes it seems that they are not working together for the collective demand because of their individual legal accountabilities. That is despite the practical reality that Slough and Burnham—and all of Buckinghamshire—border each other, and the two local primary schools are in close proximity to the site.

At Burnham grammar school, this is proven by the fact that half the pupils are from Slough. Our campaign group received a reply from a freedom of information request, which said:

“Any projects to try to evidence demand to reopen a new school on the Burnham site should not include pupils attending in Slough (regardless of how close the schools may be to Buckinghamshire).”

That is bureaucracy triumphing over common sense.

The campaign group and I have taken it upon ourselves to look at the data and make the case, because it seems that no one else will. I thank the hon. Member for Slough for joining us in that and trying to work together proactively to bring forth evidence from both local authorities of the demand and need of pupils for the secondary school. Even before I turn to housing expansion, they can make the case for a minimum of five forms of entry from the local primary school.

We also know that Beeches learning and development trust, which delivers Burnham grammar school, could take on a Burnham secondary school within its umbrella trust. We have a site for a school, we have demand

[Joy Morrissey]

across both local authority boundaries and we have a trust able to take on the school; all we lack is the will of the educational establishment.

In south Buckinghamshire we now have significant housing targets on our way. As a separate point, if something is to be built on the green belt, be in no doubt that I will oppose it tooth and nail, but I support the case for more housing in the right location and with the right infrastructure. Burnham and the surrounding areas are growing, as is Slough. Many people want to move to both areas because of their excellent transport links and the ability to come into London. Our area's population is growing, and the housing demand means that the population will continue to increase. Buckinghamshire has one of the highest housing demands put on it—more so than any other local authority—so, to make the case, we will need more provision of places for students, because central Government demands mean that we will be building more houses in the county. That simply strengthens our argument for increased educational provision—we will not have the infrastructure in place to support the new housing that central Government will ask us to build.

We also have the Elizabeth line, which is attracting commuter families to the area. We face more housing coming, but without the infrastructure of a new school to support the area. It is time to make sure that the secondary schools are there and ready to support demand from our residents. It is time for the education system to come together to solve this problem. In the same way that the hon. Member for Slough and I have put aside party political differences in order to work together for the good of our communities, so the education system needs to put aside artificial boundaries and work together. It needs leadership from Ministers and the Department for Education to bring local authorities together to support the proper analysis of data across local authority boundaries.

I urge the Minister to join me, the hon. Member for Slough and the local community to help make a new secondary school for Burnham, south Buckinghamshire and Slough a reality.

7.30 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) on securing this important debate. She has been a champion for children in south Buckinghamshire and for every child to secure a school place that allows them to achieve and thrive. This Government recognise how important it is that every child gets a great education at a good school in their area. We work closely with our local authority colleagues to achieve that, including in Buckinghamshire.

Local authorities, including in Buckinghamshire, have a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places for children in their area, as the hon. Lady referenced. To support local authorities to deliver on that statutory duty, the Department provides capital funding through the basic need grant for mainstream school places. Funding is based on local authorities' own pupil forecasts and school capacity data. They also receive the high needs provision capital allocation to

invest in places for children and young people with special educational needs or who require alternative provision—the hon. Lady mentioned that specifically and I will come to it shortly.

The Department engages with local authorities on a regular basis to review their plans for creating additional primary and pre-16 secondary school places, and to consider alternatives where necessary. When local authorities experience difficulties, the Department offers support and advice, including through the pupil place planning adviser. I hope the hon. Lady finds it reassuring that all that support is in place.

At local authority level, Buckinghamshire is forecast to have an increasing surplus of primary places, especially in the year of entry—reception—and in key stage 1. There are, however, some areas of primary place pressure, including at Gerrards Cross and the Chalfonts in the south of the county. At secondary phase, Buckinghamshire is forecast to have a small, slightly declining surplus. However, in common with the primary phase, underlying the local authority-wide picture there are variations in place pressure. The academically selective element of secondary education in Buckinghamshire adds an additional element of complexity in place planning, as does cross-border movement into schools in neighbouring local authorities, which the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) referenced.

Nearly £1.5 billion has been announced to support local authorities to create the mainstream school places needed over the current and next two academic years, up to and including the academic year beginning September 2026. The funding is not ringfenced, subject to the conditions set out in the published grant determination letter, and nor is it time-bound, meaning that local authorities are free to use it to best meet their local priorities. They can use it to fund places in new schools or through expansions of existing schools, and they can work with any school in their local area, including academies and free schools.

**Mr Dhesi:** We have a hugely increasing population in Slough and south Bucks, as well as a high need for SEND provision. I just want to ascertain whether the Minister and her Department will factor those considerations into their determination over a new school in Burnham, on the boundary of Slough and south Bucks, to ensure that the right decision is reached for a new school.

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend raises some important points, both of which are factors that the Buckinghamshire and Slough local authorities, where relevant, will have to take into consideration when determining how to use their allocation.

Buckinghamshire council has been allocated just below £11.3 million to support the provision of the new mainstream school places that it feels it will need over the current and next two academic years, up to and including September 2026. We have also announced £740 million in high needs capital for 2025-26 to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, or who require alternative provision, and we will confirm the specific local authority allocations later in the spring. The important point is that this new funding can be used to adapt classrooms to make them more accessible for children with special educational

needs. It can be used to create specialist facilities within mainstream schools that could deliver more intensive support, to adapt them to meet pupils needs, alongside continuing to provide places to support the pupils in special schools with the most complex needs.

**David Simmonds:** Will the Minister commit to working with colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to review the impact of home-to-school transport rules on the situation? In Hillingdon, there is around a 20% vacancy rate due to falling pupil numbers. All London boroughs contribute to Transport for London, and therefore transport to school on London public transport is free. However, if Buckinghamshire wished to take advantage of those vacancies, bringing those children to schools in Hillingdon would be a general fund cost to council tax payers. Clearly, in efficiently providing those places, it may well be that by looking at those cross-border transport issues we could produce a beneficial outcome for my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey), and for the schools that would thereby benefit from additional pupils.

**Catherine McKinnell:** The hon. Gentleman raises an import point, which is something the Department is very focused on. Indeed, we need to work with local authorities to deliver on that. The aim of the Department's home-to-school travel policy is to ensure that no child is prevented from accessing education because of a lack of transport. Local authorities are required to arrange free travel for children of compulsory school age who attend their nearest school but cannot walk there because of the distance or because of a special educational need, disability or mobility problem, or because the route is not safe. There are also additional rights to free travel for low-income households, to ensure that they can exercise school choice.

However, I recognise the challenge that the hon. Gentleman raises. It relates to the investment that we would like to see in mainstream provision—indeed, it is why he jumped up as I was talking about this—to make it more suitable and to adapt it where necessary, in order to have much greater inclusion of children with special educational needs and disabilities, so that they can be educated in their local area, wherever possible, with their peers. That will ensure better outcomes for those children, but it will also tackle some of the growing challenges that he quite rightly identifies with school transport.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield mentioned a specific request for confirmation on a local special school application—she tempts me to get ahead of announcements that will be made in due course. They are under consideration. Where children have highly complex needs, it is obviously important that we have those specialist school places available in the right place for the children who need them.

We are committed to ensuring that all schools co-operate with their local authority on school admissions and place planning to ensure there are sufficient school

places where they are needed. Schools and academy trusts are expected to work collaboratively and constructively with local authorities and other key partners on place planning. We recently reinforced that expectation through the revised “Making significant changes to an academy” guidance. To strengthen it further, we are legislating to require all schools and local authorities to co-operate on admissions and place planning. This new duty will aim to foster greater co-operation between schools and local authorities in these important areas, as well as providing a backstop for addressing serious failures when co-operation is simply not happening.

We are also legislating to make changes to the legal framework for opening new schools. We will end the legal presumption that they should be academies in favour of prioritising any local offer that meets the needs of children and families, allowing proposals for other types of schools to be put forward where a new school is needed, including proposals from local authorities themselves. These changes better align local authorities' responsibility to secure sufficient school places with their ability to open new schools.

The Government are entirely focused on the quality of education and experience that children are receiving at school, rather than the name above the door. All schools have an important role to play in driving high and rising standards so that every child can thrive, and, indeed, that will help local authorities to make the decisions that are right for the children in their areas. We want all children to be able to attend a high-quality school of their parents' choice whenever possible. In 2024, 98.5% of children in Buckinghamshire were offered a place at one of their parents' or carers' top three preferred primary schools, and just over nine out of 10—91.1%—received an offer of their first preference. At the secondary phase, 91.2% of pupils in Buckinghamshire received an offer at one of their parents' or carers' top three preferred schools, with about three quarters—75.8%—receiving an offer of their first preference.

I thank the hon. Member for Beaconsfield for bringing this matter to the House's attention, and I thank the other Members who contributed to the debate. It is obviously important for children to be able to gain access to school places—ideally in their local communities—that will enable them to achieve and thrive. I appreciate the case that the hon. Lady has made, but it is clearly to Buckinghamshire council that the case must be made. The Government will continue to work with our local authority colleagues, who have a statutory duty to ensure that enough mainstream school places are available. That includes providing funds through the basic need grant and continued support through our pupil place planning advisers, and introducing new legislation requiring all schools and local authorities to co-operate on admissions and place planning, so that every child in every community can have a good local school.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.42 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

Tuesday 14 January 2025

[DR ROSENA ALLIN-KHAN *in the Chair*]

## Railway Services: South-West

9.30 am

**Martin Wrigley** (Newton Abbot) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered railway services in the South West.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. The south-west is hugely reliant on the mainline railway—it is an economic lifeline. As I am the MP for Newton Abbot, which includes Dawlish, Teignmouth and Kingsteignton—all towns with strong railway heritage—the railway is a fundamental part of my life and community.

Devon and Cornwall are notoriously underserved by transport: there is one motorway and just two national roads. The road network in Devon is largely minor roads full of potholes. The mainline railway is the key economic lifeline for the entire region. Getting from Exeter to Paddington in a couple of hours makes a huge difference and enables many people to work part in London and part in Devon—including myself, even before I was an MP.

The value of the railway to the economy was demonstrated during the 2014 Dawlish storm incident. From a Transport Committee record, we know that the storms on 4 February and 14 February 2014 caused a 100 metre breach in the sea wall at Dawlish and a 25,000 tonne landslip between Dawlish and Teignmouth, which was exacerbated by a further landslip on 5 March. The incident closed the line for eight weeks. An immediate repair cost of £35 million, including 300 engineers—the much-lauded “orange army”—got the line running again, but the interruption cost the local economy an estimated £1.2 billion. It is estimated that the Plymouth economy alone lost £600,000 each day the line was shut.

Since 2014 a lot has changed, but the dependence on the railway has, if anything, increased. Please do not think of tourism as the only industry in Devon: remote working has blossomed, and it is clear from Office of Road and Rail statistics that the overwhelming majority of rail journeys from Exeter and the other main stations are to and from London.

Why do we need a debate on the topic? The answer is that this vital railway link is again under threat from a number of different sources. After the 2014 storm, the then Prime Minister promised that money was no object and that the line would be made resilient. A five-phase plan was drawn up and work began. The new sea wall was built, and Dawlish railway station had a rebuilt sea defence as well. The first four phases of that plan have been done and are now in place. One massive benefit was the new bridge at Dawlish, which made both platforms accessible without steps—something that we still need in too many other stations, including Teignmouth.

**Adam Dance** (Yeovil) (LD): Many railway stations across the south-west remain inaccessible. Disabled people, unable to get support, have had serious accidents at railway stations in constituencies such as Yeovil. Will my

hon. Friend join me in urging the Government to improve the Access for All programme, as well as holding operations such as Great Western Railway to account when proper support is not in place for disabled railway passengers?

**Martin Wrigley:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. Accessible, step-free stations are vitally important across Devon.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate. He is right to highlight the contact between the south-west and London in particular. It is disappointing that, even in London, almost two thirds of tube and other stations have no access for disabled people. If the Government are going to make improvements to railway movement for passengers, then accessibility for disabled people—and access to work for them—is key to that moving forward.

**Martin Wrigley:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

When I met Network Rail in the autumn, it said that the design team for the fifth and final phase of the work would be reassigned if the funding was not forthcoming soon. That would put the project back, and significant extra funds would be required to get it back up to speed.

A few months ago, I asked the then Transport Secretary about the funding for the critical final phase of the Dawlish rail resilience programme, which is the largest piece of work. It deals with the landslips that caused the line to be closed long beyond the short time it took to repair the sea wall breach. She looked shocked to learn that the funding was not already there. Although she did not promise the funds, she indicated that the project would be a high priority.

The line has been closed on a number of occasions over the past years. The previous large cliff collapse was in the winter of 2000-01, according to the “West of Exeter Route Resilience Study”. I ask the Minister to reassure Network Rail and my constituents that that vital project will not be quietly forgotten, but will be completed to protect the economic wellbeing of the south-west and my constituents’ access to rail services.

However, there are other threats too. The Great Western main line not only runs from Paddington to Exeter, Plymouth, Penzance and the far west of Cornwall, but covers Swindon, Bristol, Cheltenham and Gloucester, to name but a few, not forgetting Cardiff, Swansea and south Wales.

**David Chadwick** (Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. He is well aware that the south-west and Wales are connected by the Severn tunnel, which is often closed—it is likely that the closures are in his region. Does he agree that that is impacting economic growth in south Wales, and is all the more reason for Wales to receive the consequential from HS2 funding to invest in our own railways in Wales, including the Heart of Wales line in my constituency?

**Martin Wrigley:** I thank my hon. Friend for that valuable point. He is absolutely right that Wales has been seen off, in terms of funding.

**Danny Kruger** (East Wiltshire) (Con): I sympathise with hon. Members speaking on behalf of Wales. I represent commuters using Bedwyn station, and I want to point out on behalf of Wiltshire that in 2022 we lost three of our inter-city express trains in order to support the Cardiff to Penzance line. Commuters using Bedwyn no longer have the same off-peak service into London that we had before. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as the Government look to commission a new fleet of inter-city trains for Great Western, it would be good to see the rightful return of a proper off-peak service that supports commuters in Wiltshire?

**Martin Wrigley:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we need more services on all these lines to support our constituents.

However, everything I have outlined will be interrupted by the creation of the HS2 link to Old Oak Common. High-speed rail is a welcome improvement to our nation's infrastructure, but the implementation of that project has been handled poorly in the past. It has ignored the largest benefit—connections within the northern powerhouse—and the focus on delivering faster rail between London and Birmingham has delivered unwanted side effects. The decision to terminate the HS2 services at Old Oak Common, three miles west of Paddington, was quickly overturned by the incoming Government. Their announcement of a resumption of the project to tunnel to Euston is to be welcomed, but the 14-platform station at Old Oak Common—eight platforms on the surface and six for HS2 underground—will impact south-west rail services for another six or seven years as it is constructed.

**Anna Sabine** (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): My constituents in Frome and East Somerset are still shocked to learn about the implications of Old Oak Common. Does my hon. Friend agree that the consultation on that huge change, which will have a major impact on the south-west, was insufficient, and that we still need to have some kind of impact survey or study of the potential impact on tourism and business and the other effects of the works at Old Oak Common?

**Martin Wrigley:** I agree entirely that the impact of Old Oak Common is immense, and will not be just during the construction phase.

The six or seven years of delays and cancellations at weekends and Christmases have been covered in this Chamber before, so I will not repeat the list of weeks and weeks of diversions to Euston and significantly reduced services.

I have already started to receive complaints from my constituents about the inability of Euston station to cope with the volume of passengers when the trains cannot complete their journeys to Paddington. But the piece of the plan that adds insult to injury for the millions of passengers from the south-west, is the idea that every Great Western Railway train will stop at Old Oak Common, even after construction is completed. It has been somewhat unclear—some misleading averages have been quoted—but having met with GWR and Network Rail, I understand that stopping at Old Oak Common will add some five to 15 minutes to every single journey. Adding 15 minutes on to the fast train—of around two hours—from Exeter to London is significant, and even more so on the quicker trains from Cheltenham or Bristol.

Travel to Birmingham is already available via Bristol. Looking at journey times, it will usually be faster to go to Birmingham via Bristol, unless users are further east than Swindon or Westbury. Stopping at Old Oak Common will bring little or no benefit to the majority of the long-distance rail users of the west, south-west and Wales.

Can the Minister confirm that fast trains from the south-west should be able to go through Old Oak Common without stopping?

**Andrew George** (St Ives) (LD): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case. Penzance, west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are all in my constituency, so I know that if there are problems on the link at Dawlish, that can multiply the impact of those disruptions for people in the far west of Cornwall. Does he share my concern that it seems that with this multi-billion pound HS2 project, people in Penzance, in west Cornwall, and no doubt in his constituency as well, will experience all the pain but none of the gain? If it is two hours to Exeter, it is another three hours down to Penzance. It needs to be considered that we want to avoid the unnecessary disruption to people's lives for the next seven years.

**Martin Wrigley:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is even harder for those down in Cornwall than it is for those in Devon.

Both of these significant impacts are examples of the historic lack of investment in the railways in the south-west. In the south-west, we can often feel like second-class travellers—watching our services get worse so that other services can be made better. Local rail services in Devon are few and far between. Rather than a few minutes between services—as we enjoy here in London—we are lucky if we have one or two trains an hour.

Trains are often made up of fewer carriages than planned due to faults or breakdowns. Schoolchildren travelling locally between towns have been unable to get on to services because they are too full, due to their having only half the expected number of carriages. A constituent told me that her young daughter was left in tears, having been denied access to a train with her group, which triggered an anxiety attack. On the London services, mobile phone coverage is barely useable for much of the journey. While for some that may be a blessed relief, it means that wi-fi connections are not reliable—a huge issue in a world where so many people rely on good connections to usefully work on the train.

I consider myself fortunate, going to Devon. If I were to continue the journey in Cornwall, the train speed would slow down considerably—as my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) just mentioned. Journey times could be significantly reduced by even partial electrification, as hybrid trains on the line could speed up faster and climb some of the hills quicker. I am sure my Cornish colleagues could elaborate.

I ask the Minister to consider what might be done to show my constituents, and the population of the wider south-west, that they have not been ignored. I am asking for us to receive some benefits from new investment, not just delays to accommodate fast access for others to the midlands and the north. I am specifically asking for more train carriages for more local services; full metro services with no greater than half an hour between scheduled trains; monitoring and accelerating the roll-out of the Access for All programme; reliable wifi across the

entire route; electrification to improve journey times to Cornwall; fast trains from Wales to the west to the south-west not stopping at Old Oak Common; and commitment to complete the Dawlish rail resilience programme.

9.45 am

**Rachel Gilmour** (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Allin-Khan. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Martin Wrigley) on securing this important debate. We all know the importance of strong and effective railway services in the south-west.

I will give a bit of background on my constituency. As I mentioned in my maiden speech in the House—and continue to mention at every opportunity—improving the transport links in my constituency of Tiverton and Minehead is one of my top priorities. We are served by only one major train station: Tiverton Parkway, which sits on the Great Western Railway and CrossCountry lines, as well as the charming and historic West Somerset Railway—a heritage line that runs up through the shoulder of my constituency and along the coast, terminating at Minehead.

Those services provide the totality of rail connections in my constituency, but there is still no way to get from Tiverton to Minehead. Minehead desperately needs linking to the main line at Taunton, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Gideon Amos) would agree, but there are much wider issues at play for rail travel in Tiverton and Minehead.

The latest available data from July to September '24 lays bare the inadequacy of railway services across the south-west. The punctuality of CrossCountry trains is pitiful—more often tardy than not, just 46.4% of the time did the service run as scheduled. That is shocking, as the figure is over 20 percentage points below the national average for punctuality on the rail network over the same period. Meanwhile, the Great Western Railway service is understood to have operated in accordance with the timetable 60.2% of the time—still over 7 percentage points lower than the national figure. That is better, but hardly an advert for timeliness.

Not knowing whether a scheduled service will appear on time is far from the only issue for my constituents. Even when the service is scheduled, and appears to be all-functioning, there is always the risk of cancellation. Both of the major carriers for Tiverton and Minehead had cancellation rates above the national average from July to September '24, and in both cases, the majority of those trains were cancelled as a result of not Network Rail, but the operator itself. That is not what the people of Tiverton and Minehead expect when they buy their tickets, and they deserve better.

As is also the case across the length and breadth of the country, passengers in the south-west are forced to grapple with exorbitant train fares. Even with the Government's rail fare discounts, which are in place for the next few months, the price of standard regulated tickets in England will go up by 4.6% on 2 March, climbing higher than the retail prices index inflation and hitting passengers hard.

The Liberal Democrats have previously called on the Government to do the decent thing and freeze rail fares immediately to help families struggling under the cost

of living crisis, instead of hiking ticket prices. We will continue to fight for a fair deal for commuters and families who will be left forking out more and more for the privilege of using Britain's rail systems. I am not sure how many people in the south-west would call it a "privilege".

Just 1% of my constituents use rail as their means of travelling to work, according to data from the House of Commons Library. That is well below the national average, but not at all surprising, given the sorry picture for rail travellers in my constituency that I have painted. Members might assume that the proportion of my constituents travelling to work by bus would be higher, but I am afraid to report that that percentage sits at just 2%. I am also an avid campaigner for improving the bus routes in Tiverton and Minehead, but we are talking about railways today.

The state of railway services in not just Tiverton and Minehead, but the whole south-west, adds strain on the road network, because the lack of transport connectivity and the unreliable, overcrowded and overcharged public transport links leave people with no other choice but to travel by car. The environmental implications of that reality cannot be ignored.

Before closing, I must briefly draw attention to the looming Old Oak Common HS2 project and the inevitable disruption to travel that it will cause. Pressing ahead with the project will condemn the south-west to inter-city services that are among the slowest anywhere in the country and greatly reduce the number of direct trains to London. To accommodate the new role of Old Oak Common, trains originating in the south-west will be diverted from the traditional London Paddington route to London Euston, which will add an hour, on average, to train journeys.

The current provision of rail services is already well below a level that could be deemed satisfactory, so the new interchange at Old Oak Common comes at great expense to the west country and our friends in south Wales. Immediately freezing fares and introducing discounts for passengers in the south-west seem reasonable and fair first steps towards correcting that glaring disservice to the people of Tiverton and Minehead, and beyond. Beyond the short term, we ought to simplify the fragmented ticketing system to provide passengers with more affordable fares if we are serious about making public transport public.

The Government have an opportunity to look seriously at the issues of the south-west and its rail network, and I sincerely hope that they do so. For far too long, transport links have been overlooked and under-resourced. I appreciate that the pressures on the public purse are heavy at the moment, but so are the pressures on ordinary people in Tiverton and Minehead, and across the south-west. I urge the Government to look closely at what they can do to better support the rail, bus and road network so that the people of the south-west do not have to settle for the sort of service that is, far too often, currently on offer.

9.51 am

**Noah Law** (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): I thank you for your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan, and I thank the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Martin Wrigley) for securing the debate.

[Noah Law]

The need to improve rail services across the south-west—particularly in Cornwall, which is at the sharp end of our problems—cannot be overstated. Connectivity is the backbone of our economy and our communities, yet our transport infrastructure still lags far behind what is needed to unleash their full potential. This summer, the Mid Cornwall metro will launch in my constituency, offering improved rail links between Newquay and other parts of Cornwall. Although that is a very welcome development that goes some way to undoing the damage inflicted on the line in 1987 by the then Prime Minister, for people outside of Newquay, the Mid Cornwall metro, despite its lofty name, will fall somewhat short of being the transformational project that the duchy needs.

That brings me to the wider issue of transport in my constituency. The road between our two major towns, St Austell and Newquay, is winding and unsafe. Given the absence of a direct train linking the towns—despite a track that runs relatively directly from St Austell, through Burngullow and up to St Dennis, falling short of rejoining the main Newquay line at Goss Moor by just a mile or so—large-scale capital investment in a transformative project is desperately needed.

We have a stunning stretch of line running from my hometown down into another town served by treacherous roads: Fowey, a town that has long shipped our white gold, china clay, to the world. I urge the Minister to explore the feasibility of such transformative projects in Cornwall—particularly on those magnificent branch lines, which have been ravaged over the years—to provide clarity on our clean transport plans and to make public transport in Cornwall a no-brainer rather than a chore, ensuring that our communities have the infrastructure that they need to thrive. If we are to build more homes, people in Cornwall must see that commensurate services and infrastructure are put in place.

In the west, we need a fair deal for the Isles of Scilly—well represented by the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George)—and we need improved rail links down to our fine harbour in Falmouth, a contender for a floating offshore wind hub. In the east, we also face significant challenges with the Tamar bridge and Torpoint ferry services, which are vital lifelines for local residents. We need a deal that prioritises their needs and alleviates the financial burden on commuters and families.

Finally, I stress the need for dramatically improved internet connectivity on trains. In today's connected world, reliable onboard connectivity is a necessity, not a luxury. Although some rail services in the UK benefit from electrification and high-speed, dependable internet access, such advances are far from universal and passengers across the south-west are too often excluded from them. Equal access to modern amenities such as those is essential to ensuring that rail travel is both productive and comfortable for everyone. It would be a small grace to mitigate some of the chaos caused by the Old Oak Common HS2 project—a supposed England and Wales project, and even an England and Cornwall project, but I will believe it when I see it.

As the hon. Member for Newton Abbot pointed out, the south-west, including Cornwall, deserves a transport strategy that addresses our real needs and delivers transformative change. I look forward to hearing how

the Minister intends to prioritise our region, close the gap in infrastructure investment, and provide Cornwall and the wider south-west with the tools we need to thrive in the years ahead.

9.55 am

**Carla Denyer** (Bristol Central) (Green): It is pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. I thank the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Martin Wrigley) for opening this debate. I am grateful to be able to speak in this debate to represent my many constituents who rely on these services every day, and as somebody who spends a lot of time—often more than intended—on trains.

Unfortunately, my Bristol Central constituents often contact me about their poor experiences with trains in and around Bristol. Complaints over services, particularly between Bristol and London, are frequent, as the journey entails extortionate, prohibitive costs with disappointing services, cancellations and delays featuring all too often. That unreliability is incredibly frustrating for many constituents, but particularly for disabled constituents and those with long-term health conditions, who raise with me that they often go to huge lengths to carefully plan their journeys, only to have them upturned at the last minute.

I reinforce the point made by several Members on the importance of disabled accessible train stations. Does the Minister have any updates about progress to make Lawrence Hill station in Bristol, which is just outside my constituency but used by many of constituents, disabled accessible? I know that my predecessor Thangam Debbonaire campaigned on that issue for many years.

Accessibility and unreliability issues affect so many of my constituents, who are left unable to make their trips or are forced to choose transport that is more expensive and often much more damaging to the environment, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) pointed out. Train journeys produce only around 32% of the emissions of a car journey per person; to avoid unnecessary emissions, we need to make the greenest option the easiest option, and that requires, above all, reliability.

I am very pleased to see the railways coming back into public ownership; the Green party has been a long-standing advocate of renationalisation, and I am looking forward to seeing the implementation of that essential transition. On that point, can the Minister give any further indications of when Great Western Railway will come back into public ownership? I understand that the core term expiry date is in June this year, but the full expiry date is not until June 2028, leaving some uncertainty over when exactly the Government will end the contract. I would be grateful if the Minister could give any clarification to constituents. Hopefully the answer is sooner rather than later, but if my constituents are facing a wait of three or more years, will the Minister tell us what steps he plans to take to make the train services in the south-west more reliable and affordable in the meantime?

I have also been contacted about the reopening of the Portishead branch line which, though not quite in my constituency, is also used by many of my constituents, so I would be grateful if the Minister could provide an update on that too. I will end my remarks there, but I would be grateful if the Minister could respond to my

questions and give some clarity to my constituents on the steps being taken to provide a modern, affordable and reliable rail service.

9.59 am

**Mr Paul Kohler** (Wimbledon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Allin-Khan. First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Martin Wrigley) for his work securing this debate, the Backbench Business Committee for granting it, and hon. Members from across the House for agreeing to speak.

As we have heard from everyone here today, it is clear that the railway network in the south-west needs urgent improvement. The failure of successive Conservative Governments has left the network in a terrible state. Ticket prices are too high and services too unreliable. Infrastructure is too old and capacity too meagre. That is true across the country, but nowhere more so than in the south-west. As we have heard from Members from across the House, businesses and individuals are highly reliant on the railways and Labour needs to take urgent action. If the Government are hoping to meet their targets on economic growth and housing, ensuring that that key region has a fully functioning rail system is vital. That requires action. The Government must ensure that the challenges faced by the railways in the south-west are met.

We have heard today about a number of the challenges. As my hon. Friends the Members for Newton Abbot and for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) eloquently explained, the rail services of those in the further reaches of our isles are uniquely vulnerable. As we saw when the sea wall fell at Dawlish, this can have catastrophic consequences for those further down the line, cutting them off from the rest of the country. We heard the figures earlier. We cannot afford for that to happen again, so it is vital that the new Government back the fifth stage of the project, to ensure that the line is protected from further disruption.

Members today have again raised a number of concerns about the building works at Old Oak Common. As has been said, there will be six years of disruption. As my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) said, residents and constituents in the south-west will get all the pain but none of the gain. Anyone living west of Swindon and Westbury will simply get no real benefit from these connections. We need to compensate them by doing other things for the rail system and other transport in the south-west. We have had doubts about the current capacity of Euston and the overcrowding there during the building works, and we have the other issue about the trains stopping at Old Oak Common—the five to 15-minute delay. It sounds like a small thing, but it is important when we are talking about a fast train. Previously, the Minister's colleague said that no decision had been made on whether every train would stop at Old Oak Common. May we have an update on that, please?

Although my party and I are highly supportive of the HS2 project, there are understandable concerns. We appreciate that Old Oak Common is a vital part of HS2 and will bring benefits to many. We must also accept, though, that the benefits of Old Oak Common and HS2 will be less keenly felt by those in the south-west. We will keep reiterating that, and we need to do something

for them. The constituents of the south-west, including those represented today, must receive reassurances that the Government are listening and they are not being ignored. Their voice must be heard, and I hope that their patience will be rewarded by their finally receiving the oft-promised investment in the region that it so desperately needs and deserves. We heard about some of that today from colleagues, from my party and others.

The Access for All programme appeared to die under the Tories. We need access for all, not just in the south-west, of course, but across all regions and particularly in London, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said. The Severn Tunnel closure is causing real problems for transport into the west and into Wales. I asked this question of the Secretary of State last Thursday in Transport questions: will Wales get more investment to compensate for the money going to HS2? HS2 is being treated as an England and Wales project. It is giving no great benefit to Wales. Wales needs some money in the same way as Scotland did, and it needs investment in the Welsh rail system.

We need proper services for Wiltshire. We need to address the fact that there are short trains; more train carriages need to be introduced. There are problems with mobile phone access. We hear that time and time again. We have to bring the rail system into the 21st century. The need to electrify sections of the line to speed up the trains is also important, and punctuality is a real issue, not to mention the exorbitant cost of rail travel to the south-west.

**Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): My hon. Friend is making some important points. Does he agree that the decision to renationalise South Western Railway a year before the Government have set up GB Rail will inevitably mean that investment in the kind of upgrades he is talking about will stagnate completely?

**Mr Kohler:** There is a real issue here, and I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. GB Rail exists as an idea, but we do not yet know what it will do, and we have real problems. The idea that nationalising rail will suddenly solve the problem is too simplistic. We are agnostic about ownership; we need to actually invest in our rail system. On that point, my party has been supportive of open access, which is why we supported the Go-Op co-operative and its ideas to bring rail systems to the south-west.

We are worried by what the Secretary of State said in a letter last week—she seems to be going cold on open access—so we would like more clarity on that. We are supportive of the Go-Op co-operative idea, and we want to see such ideas working. In fact, open access is the only bit of the rail system that is working quite well at the moment. Hull Trains, for example, has far better customer satisfaction than any other part of the rail system. The idea that we are now backing out of open access worries us, and Go-Op was a perfect idea to help a particular section of the south-west. I once again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot for securing this debate; we would love some answers from the Minister.

10.6 am

**Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Allin-Khan. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Newton Abbot

[Rebecca Smith]

(Martin Wrigley) on securing this debate, and I thank all the Members who have contributed. We are very familiar with this issue; I have taken part in many such debates myself.

Let me respond to a couple of comments. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) alerted us to West Somerset Railway, which is an illustration of how, oftentimes, the south-west is seen as a holiday destination rather than somewhere where the railway line is needed as an economic driver. Having been on West Somerset Railway, I am particularly fond of it, but it is not good enough that it is all she has access to, in addition to Tiverton Parkway railway station.

The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Noah Law) highlighted the upcoming opening of the Mid Cornwall Metro, which we should acknowledge came from the previous Government's levelling up funding, and was delivered by Conservative-led Cornwall council. It is a clear illustration of how smaller metros can be delivered, and it would be great to see more of them across the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger) raised challenges around Bedwyn station in his constituency, and we have also had contributions from the hon. Members for St Ives (Andrew George), for Yeovil (Adam Dance), for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer) and for Wimbledon (Mr Kohler). It is really good to hear perspectives from across all their constituencies.

It is important that I begin by recognising the dedicated workforce we have across the railway industry. Obviously, in the last few months, there has been a huge amount of noise about railways, particularly around increases in salaries and so on. I do not know about other Members, but I have had at least one constituent highlight the fact that, if we are not careful, we could demonise the valuable workers who we need in our train system, so I want to acknowledge on the record the fact that the whole train system is vital to our country. We have to acknowledge that, but we still need to have this debate and represent other voices across our constituencies.

We have had three debates on the railways in recent months—or, at least, I have taken part in three debates. This includes my maiden speech, which took place in the passenger railway Bill debate—it would be remiss of me, having spoken to the Minister earlier, not to mention “The Loco-Motion”, which, if hon. Members are interested, I referred to in my maiden speech. In the last two months, we have also had debates on both the railway in Devon and Old Oak Common, so it should be really clear to the Minister and his team that this is something that the south-west is particularly passionate about.

I have to admit that I have two hats on—not only am I representing the official Opposition today, but I am a Member from Devon, so I feel a lot of what has been said this morning very deeply. We must also acknowledge the meetings that Ministers have had, and have been very open-handed in. There have been open conversations on this issue, but there is still some way to go, as has been clear today. The hon. Member for Newton Abbot summarised some of those key challenges particularly well in his speech, and he spoke strongly about the funding we need for the fifth phase of Dawlish. Otherwise,

it would ultimately be a waste of money; we have done everything that can be achieved without completing that work.

Old Oak Common needs no further explanation—it has been covered widely, as has the challenge of wi-fi accessibility, and the wider context of roads and buses in the south-west.

Let us not forget, though, that between 2010 and 2024, the Conservatives increased investment by £100 billion, so it is not fair to say that nothing has happened. The railway system is something that we have all been working on over the last few decades. Included in that total was £165 million on the south-west rail resilience programme, which has already been mentioned. It was a bold decision to reallocate HS2 phase 2 funds towards restoring our railways. We would have seen some real benefits from that in the south-west. It has been cancelled because the new Government have said that there is no funding for it. However, I note that they have managed to reinstate phase 2 between Crewe and Manchester, which I assume uses the money that would ultimately have been used for projects such as the TavyRail between Tavistock and Plymouth. I am interested in hearing the Minister comment on that. How can the Government say that the Restoring your Railway was unfunded if they have been able to bring the Crewe to Manchester line back into play?

We have also seen the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024 come through. It has been mentioned this morning, and I will not speak much about it, other than to say that we believe it is an ideological piece of legislation. We were disappointed that the Government rejected our reasoned amendment, which would have ensured that, when terminating existing franchise agreements, the Government would have at least considered operating performance. Instead, we have had inflation-busting pay rises without productivity agreements being secured. Most recently, on 12 December, the latest Office of Rail and Road figures, from July to September, showed that since the increase in those salaries, we have seen decreased performance, decreased punctuality, increased cancellations and decreased public performance measures. I do not want to cast aspersions, but they do seem to be slightly linked.

As I draw to a close, I want to lay out some questions for the Minister. Some of them have been touched on before, but it is a perfect opportunity to reiterate them. On 11 November, in the Chamber, I raised the issue of the lack of Sundays in the Great Western Railway contracts, which has a massive impact on rail services across the south-west. It was raised again in the Westminster Hall debate in December, and in November the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Sheffield Heeley (Louise Haigh), said that she would return to the House with an update. I would be interested to know if there has been any progress in those negotiations.

Is the Minister convinced that the spending decisions for the £30 million Old Oak Common mitigations, which have also been mentioned today, are best for passengers in the south-west? Although many hon. Members have argued today that that £30 million may need to be paid to make Old Oak Common happen, I do not believe that residents across the south-west are necessarily seeing the benefits. Will the Minister commit to ensuring that not all south-west services will have to stop at Old Oak Common? I ask that to reiterate the points that have been made already. Will the Minister

also confirm that the HS2 phase 2, Crewe to Manchester route is fully funded? That announcement was made earlier on in this Parliament.

Finally, if I may—and if the room will humour me—I have one question that remains unanswered about my constituency. CrossCountry trains do not stop at Ivybridge train station in my constituency, which is fully ready as a park and ride. Currently, only Great Western Railway is committed to doing that, and serves it with 16 trains a day. My constituency has the new and growing town of Sherford, plus the suburbs of Plympton and Plymstock, all of which would benefit from Ivybridge having up to 45 trains stopping a day. Will the Minister commit to looking further into that, and could we work together on pressuring CrossCountry to deliver that for my constituents?

I thank everybody who has taken part in this debate today. I do not think that the issue of railways in the south-west is going anywhere fast. *[Laughter]* That was totally unintended—turns out I am naturally funny after all. Ultimately, I think the Minister will be hearing more from us. I know I speak on behalf of Members from across the south-west when I say that I want to know that the Government are listening. I hope the Government appreciate that we are not going to go away, because the issue is incredibly important to the entire region, which has so much potential for the economy of the United Kingdom.

10.14 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Simon Lightwood):** It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair for the very first time, Dr Allin-Khan. I also welcome the hon. Member for South West Devon (Rebecca Smith) in her first outing on the Front Bench as the Opposition spokesman.

I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Martin Wrigley) for securing this debate on railway services in the south-west. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions.

On 11 December, I attended a debate on the future of rail services in Devon, and on 17 December, the Minister for the Future of Roads, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), attended a debate on the impact of Old Oak Common on rail services. The frequency of these debates demonstrates the importance that hon. Members and their constituents place on the rail network, and the crucial role it plays in supporting economic development, housing, employment growth and tourism. This Government recognise that too. That is why we have made fixing Britain's railway our top transport priority. We need to improve services for passengers and deliver better value for money for the taxpayer.

As I said in a previous debate, the south-west has seen a strong recovery in rail passenger numbers since the pandemic. Many services are now very busy indeed, particularly towards the end of the week and at weekends—including Thursdays. *[Laughter.]* To reduce crowding, funding has been authorised for 12 additional CrossCountry trains. Three are already in service; the rest are due to enter service in May.

Local services around Devon are also experiencing some capacity issues, particularly on the Barnstaple line and on school services from Paignton and Exmouth, all

of which run into Exeter. Officials and GWR are working on options to increase capacity on some local and regional services, but that will of course be subject to affordability.

The Government continue to focus on restoring rail performance. We have been clear that rail services have been failing passengers, and the Rail Minister has now met GWR and CrossCountry, as well as Network Rail, to ensure they are delivering on their plans to address poor performance.

A resilient railway is crucial to the economy, not just in the south-west but right across the country. That is why £165 million has been invested to date in the south-west resilience programme at Dawlish, delivering better journey reliability for rail travellers in the south-west and providing greater resilience for the coastal railway during several named storms, alluded to earlier, that have affected the south-west in recent years. We continue to work closely with Network Rail as it develops proposals for the fifth phase of the programme, between Parsons tunnel and Teignmouth.

Hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Noah Law), have shown strong support for a number of potential rail projects across the region and the country. Ministers have been clear, however, that it will not be possible in the context of the financial situation the Government have inherited to afford to deliver all the proposed projects. The Secretary of State is conducting a thorough review of the previous Government's plans, to ensure that our transport infrastructure portfolio drives economic growth and delivers value for taxpayers.

Many Members have referenced Old Oak Common and the impact it will have on rail services to and from the south-west. The station will enable HS2 services to start operating, by providing a new interchange with the Elizabeth line. Without it, HS2 cannot open. As Members will appreciate, a project of the scale and significance of Old Oak Common cannot be delivered without some disruption to existing services. Our challenge to HS2 Ltd is to keep that disruption to a minimum and to support Network Rail and train operators to keep passengers moving.

The most recent phase of the work took place over Christmas, and was delivered successfully. It required a three-day closure of Paddington station, in addition to Christmas day and Boxing day. The rail industry worked hard to prepare for that. Some long-distance Great Western services were diverted into Euston station to maintain a direct link into a London terminus, while others terminated at Ealing Broadway and Reading. We expect that to provide a model for any future closures of the railway into Paddington. As has been said, the next significant block of work had been due to take place in December 2026, but that has now been replanned to a later date by HS2 Ltd. Further details about the timings of future works will be shared as soon as they become available in the spring.

The Rail Minister and I have heard from many colleagues about their constituents' concerns about the future timetable and the potential impact on journey times. That was addressed in detail on 17 December by my hon. Friend the Minister for Future of Roads, and I refer hon. Members to *Hansard* for more information.

As has been noted previously, the future timetable will be under development for many years to come. Officials are working with the industry to assess the

[Simon Lightwood]

options for calling patterns at Old Oak Common. Ministers are committed to ensuring that passenger interests are considered and that disruption is minimised for passengers, both during and after construction. I will close this part of my speech by confirming that the Government will continue to put passengers at the heart of what we do in delivering our railway, which we can be proud of once again in its 200th year.

The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for South West Devon, talked about GWR Sunday services. The Government of course recognise that performance is not where it needs to be. That is due to a range of issues, including infrastructure and fleet reliability, as well as train crew availability, which has resulted in high levels of cancellations on Sundays in recent months. Officials and GWR are actively working to address this issue.

A number of Members raised wi-fi connectivity. Free wi-fi is available on GWR services, but it is particularly poor on parts of the network. Ministers have asked officials to explore the feasibility of a range of technology options to improve passenger connectivity on the rail network. The Department is also conducting research to measure the strength of mobile signals along the network, to fully understand where interventions are needed and any potential impacts.

Electrification was also mentioned. The most used part of the Great Western network—between London Paddington and Cardiff—has been electrified, and there are currently no plans to electrify further parts of it.

A number of Members mentioned accessibility. Following the election, we are carefully considering the best approach to the Access for All programme. Department for Transport Ministers are not yet able to comment on the next steps regarding the project at specific stations, but hon. Members should be assured that we are committed to improving the accessibility of the railway and that we recognise the valuable social and economic benefits that that brings to our communities.

The south west rail resilience programme was mentioned, and the Government recognise the importance of the rail route through Dawlish and the south-west region. To date, as I mentioned, £165 million has been invested through the programme to deliver improved resilience across the route. I would also echo again that no decision has been taken on which services will call at Old Oak Common and when; the future timetable is under development, and will be for many years to come.

Members raised the issue of rail fares. We are committed to the biggest overhaul of our railways in a generation and to ensuring that people receive better services and have simpler ticketing. Our aim is to keep the price of rail travel at a point that is good for passengers and taxpayers. We are also committed to reviewing the overly complicated fares system.

Many Members mentioned general performance. SWR performance on the west of England line has been challenging, and falls way below our expectations for passengers. The mostly single-line section between Salisbury and Exeter has suffered multiple failures and has little resilience in the event of disruption. SWR and Network Rail have therefore dedicated a specific working group to looking at minimising the impact of delay and

cancellation going forward. As regards CrossCountry, Members will be aware that, as a result of poor performance, it is subject to a remedial agreement that runs until March 2025. The Department will monitor outputs closely to ensure that CrossCountry is making sufficient progress.

I welcome the comments by the hon. Member for Bristol Central (Carla Denyer) about the renationalisation of our rail. The Government are committed to ending years of poor service and fragmentation on our railways by creating a unified and simplified system through public ownership and the establishment of Great British Railways. All currently franchised services are expected to be in public ownership within the next three years. With that, I thank Members once again for their contributions.

10.25 am

**Martin Wrigley:** I thank the Backbench Business Committee for giving me the opportunity to have this debate, and I thank colleagues from across the House for participating. We have heard some fairly clear messages, and I thank the Minister for responding to some of them. There is certainly some hope in some of the responses that have been given.

It is clear that the south-west and Wales have been disadvantaged over a long period through lack of investment in the railways. Although large sums have been talked about, they have clearly not been used down in the south-west. I thank the Minister for recognising the importance of the rail network and for the news about increasing some of the capacity on local services, which is most welcome.

The Minister said that a resilient railway is crucial, and that is exactly right. Parsons tunnel to Teignmouth—I am afraid it is pronounced “Tinmuth”, and not like Tynemouth, which is somewhere else; it is very confusing because Teignbridge is pronounced “Teenbridge”, so the pronunciation is most unique—is absolutely vital. It was the collapse of that section that closed the railway for eight weeks; it was not the breach of the sea wall that closed it. It had happened 15 years before, and it will happen again; those cliffs are not protected. Without the fifth phase, the resilience work that has been done to date will be wasted.

What Network Rail needs is not funding today but the promise of funding in the future, to ensure that the design team is there and ready to go when funding is available. We all understand that we cannot fund everything at once—I do not think that anyone is asking for that—so I understand it when the Minister says he cannot fund everything now. What I want is a promise that this work will be funded in the future, when money is available, so that we can make sure that it is progressed and not forgotten. That is absolutely vital.

On HS2 disruption, it was interesting to hear that the purpose of Old Oak Common is to transfer passengers from HS2 to the Elizabeth line. That is a clear focus, and it shows that no real interaction is intended with GWR’s south-west and Wales services.

On the idea of stopping trains, again, I do not think we expect a complete timetable at this stage; we would just like the confirmed option that some trains will not stop. That option has been ruled out in some of the conversations I have had, and I like the fact that it is



now open. Having that as a commitment, even without the full timetable, will reassure my constituents that fast trains will still be able to go through to London.

The £165 million Dawlish investment is also very much welcomed. I refer back to the £1.2 billion cost of the closure. So it is £165 million versus £1.2 billion. To me, it is obvious that that investment needs to be continued.

I end by thanking you, Dr Allin-Khan, and congratulating you on chairing your first Westminster Hall debate. I also thank everybody else who was present for the debate, and I look forward to having more conversations with Rail Ministers about the future of railways in the south-west, because we are only just beginning this journey.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered railway services in the South West.

10.29 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Agricultural and Business Property Relief

11 am

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (in the Chair):** I will call Graham Stuart to move the motion and then the Minister to respond. There will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up, as is the convention for 30-minute debates.

**Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the impact of planned changes to agricultural property relief and business property relief on small businesses.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Allin-Khan, and to see so many colleagues from across the House here today. Perhaps it is not surprising that we have a redoubtable Minister, who picks up the poisoned chalice on so many occasions. He will do so today, no doubt both well informed and with good humour, as he has done previously.

I refer to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a recipient of campaign donations from businesses and farmers across Beverley and Holderness. Given the rural nature of my seat, I will start by focusing on the twin impacts of the changes to agricultural property relief and business property relief on family farms, followed by the impact of changes to BPR on family businesses. We have just a half-hour debate, and a colleague asked the good question of why it was so short for something so big. That means I will probably be the sole speaker, but I am happy to take as many interventions as I can, because I know that concern is widespread.

In her autumn Budget, the Chancellor announced a significant change to APR and BPR, set to take effect from April 2026. She is imposing a 20% tax on the value of land and machinery exceeding £1 million. That is known by many of us as a family farm tax. By the Government's own estimate, it could result in one farm closing in every rural constituency every year.

**Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con):** I thank my right hon. Friend for securing this debate. I also draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. When a small farm has been in a family for generations, that family knows the local watercourses better than anybody else. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that as those small farms disappear and move towards development, flooding issues may result because the local knowledge that would prevent flooding will be lost?

**Graham Stuart:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. On Friday, I visited Ian and Rebecca at Bygott farm just outside Beverley, which is about 220 acres. Their profits would be wiped out by the expected inheritance tax for 10 full years, with 10 years to pay it. The expected annual payment for 10 years would be greater than their profit last year. They also play that vital role, which my right hon. Friend mentioned, of looking after the watercourses. The villagers nearby do not know what a critical part they play in maintaining those watercourses.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Gentleman for bringing this forward. All my neighbours in Northern Ireland are small farmers. Everyone will be impacted, because the threshold of £1 million is too low. The threshold should be between £4 million and £5 million, which would give a chance to retain the family farm. Has the right hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to talk to the National Farmers Union or the Ulster Farmers Union to ascertain their legal opinion, which is against what the Government are introducing?

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. If the measure was about hitting huge investors, they are the ones least likely to be affected. The richest and most sophisticated will find it easiest to avoid the impact. Small farmers, such as the ones I visited on Friday, will be most seriously affected. It is a bit like the winter fuel payment cut. If the Government took that away from people who had an income of more than £25,000, it would be infinitely less controversial. The point is, it hits people on very low incomes and hurts them the most.

**Jim Allister** (North Antrim) (TUV): Does the right hon. Gentleman also accept that the measure has an inequitable application across the United Kingdom? In some parts, land values are higher than others. In Northern Ireland they are the highest, therefore one will reach the £1 million threshold sooner with less acreage there than elsewhere. Where we have a concentration of family farms, that will have a crippling effect on future generations.

**Graham Stuart:** Once that farmland is lost, it is gone forever. It is certainly gone forever from the families who, generation after generation, have been prepared to invest their all—their time and their money—into an asset which they never seek to realise, but merely use for a very low return on capital employed, in order to feed the nation.

As somebody said to me, of all the groups that one might possibly target, of all the profit-maximising people it could be assumed might have the broad shoulders to pay more, why pick people who sit on a multimillion-pound asset, take a derisory income from it, and get up at four in the morning to feed us? Of all the groups to target, this is the most absurd. I hope the Minister, who has until 2026, can start to realise this.

**Martin Vickers** (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): I met a farmer a couple of weeks ago in my constituency who is 80 years old and has made arrangements for passing his farm on to the next generation. However, the seven-year rule is unlikely to affect someone of that age. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a modest compromise could be made by the Government to allow for those sorts of situations?

**Graham Stuart:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I spoke to another farmer in my constituency and his farm is owned by three people, one of whom is his father—who has a third of it—and who has been in ill health lately, is in his early 80s and is highly unlikely to live for the next seven years. All the planning that they responsibly put into ensuring that that farm continues to contribute to waterways, the environment, and the nation's food security has been cast aside and turned over by this Government's ill thought-out plans.

**Manuela Perteghella** (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): In my constituency, many family farms exceed the threshold due to the high value of the land and machinery. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that these changes threaten to push family-run farms into the hands of large corporations and therefore both erode rural communities and jeopardise our domestic food security?

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right: that is exactly what they will do. I am sure that it is not the Government's intent to bolster the big international corporations and hurt the small player who is an embedded part of the community.

So many people I speak to genuinely try and run their farms to be supportive of nature and of local business. Once major corporations are involved, these will not care where they get their supplies from. They will not be focused on that.

**Esther McVey** (Tatton) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this brutal change to inheritance tax—let us call it what it is, a family farm tax—will destroy family farms and farming in the UK as we know it? Does it not make nonsense of Labour's claim to believe in food security for the UK? We need a U-turn straightaway.

The question I am now being asked by my farmers is: did this policy come about because the Government did not know what they were doing and through a lack of knowledge by the Labour party of the farming community? Or will we look back at this and see it for what it is: theft by the state of land from private owners?

**Graham Stuart:** I will come to that point later in my speech.

When that farmland is gone, it will take with it the livelihoods of families who have devoted generations to feeding our nation and will have a permanent negative impact on the nation's food security.

**Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con): Before my right hon. Friend goes on too much further, I wonder whether he agrees that another effect of this is that, at a time when we need to unlock growth and productivity, it will discourage and disincentivise the investment in our family farms that is so badly needed?

**Graham Stuart:** My right hon. Friend is right. That is why I appeal to the Minister: if the Government do not care at all—in fact, if the Government see farmers as some sort of class enemy—it still does not make sense to do this, because it will weaken our food security. Go and talk to farmers—as I do in my area all the time—and it is obvious that their personal commitment to things like flood protection, understanding of the land, and thinking in the long term, is not just words.

People think in the long term when there is no thought in their minds of selling. Why would anyone not put their money back in? Farmers put all their money back in because they are happy to do so, and they have a lifestyle as part of that. All that is put under threat if the investment in a piece of machinery or infrastructure that could help them to green their land will be subject to a 20% tax. Suddenly the economics do not add up and the bank will not want to lend.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman will know, as all of us in this room do, that in GB we enjoy some of the most competitively priced fresh produce available anywhere in Europe and that is precisely because of the investments in production technology that family farms have made over generations. Is he concerned that at a stroke this Government, myopic about the workings of agriculture, have made them immediately—overnight—stop that investment, and consumers will feel that in food prices?

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point that has not been made so far: we have among the lowest food costs in the world. In fact, all my local farmers are forever moaning at me about how outrageous it is that food is so low in price. As I say to them, the system has allowed them to continue farming, providing first-class food at a very low cost to consumers. It is that carefully balanced ecosystem that will be impacted by this juggernaut creation of the Government, which will raise, if it raises anything at all, very little. That is why it is great to have someone as thoughtful, insightful and empathetic as the Minister on the Government Bench, because we have time to change path away from this ridiculous policy.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a very clear case. Of course, there is massive agreement in the room. Does he recognise that with the uncertainty about the land use framework and the Government's interventions and intentions on development of the work that we did on ELMS—the environmental land management scheme—farmers face massive uncertainty? Does he agree that it would be far better if the Government paused, as the NFU is asking, to look at this matter in the round, alongside the other policy decisions that they need to make—there is plenty of time before next spring—and, in particular, to address the issue about the age distribution of farmers? For younger farmers there will be ways of mitigating this matter and for older ones there simply are not. Overall, they lack clarity on what the future looks like, and that is a real concern.

**Graham Stuart:** At the very least, as my right hon. Friend says and as a colleague touched on earlier, tweaks could be made to this policy to stop the most egregious negative impact of it on people who have planned in good faith all their lives for a position and are now in no position whatever to change things. It is not just the elderly—everyone looks for the elderly person in their 80s or 90s to pass on, but I met another constituent whose mother died aged 41. These things happen, sadly, and what does that do to a farm? Is it holding hundreds of thousands of pounds in the bank when there are 200 and something acres?

**Seamus Logan** (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): The right hon. Member will possibly be familiar with my constituency—one of the richest farming areas in the UK. The Treasury continues to insist that only about 520 estates a year will claim APR in the way that it is describing, and it has set the threshold at £1 million. Does the right hon. Member agree that the Minister needs to provide clear evidence for this threshold, and is he aware that at the evidence session in December, the NFU claimed that the actual figure, rather than 520, is 2,000 estates involved?

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman is right. The expert valuers who do this for a living have come out with different numbers, but they are all violently different from the Government's assumptions. Even on the basis of the Government's own figures, if I take Beverley and Holderness—as a rural constituency—it would be a farm a year. And of course, everyone is affected. They are all having to spend and bring advisers into the room. They are sitting there, as a small business that might be making less than £25,000 a year, and having to pay £1,000 an hour to get the expertise in the room to advise them on something that, sure, depending on the longevity of family members, may not have an impact for 15, 20 or—hopefully—30 years, but none the less they are spending that money now because of the uncertainty of this policy, which is very ill advised.

**Harriet Cross** (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for bringing forward this debate, which is so important. Just this morning, I was at the meeting on food security, speaking to poultry farmers there, and they said that they are already taking decisions not to invest in new buildings, directly because they are now thinking of how they need to save for an APR bill. Of course, that has a knock-on effect on other businesses that will be the suppliers, and therefore we come into the BPR argument as well. Does he share my concerns that, if farmers cannot invest in their holdings, they will not be as profitable in future? It is a huge cycle—a self-fulfilling prophecy that will mean that more farms will be impacted down the line.

**Graham Stuart:** My hon. Friend is right. I say to the Minister that rather than looking at the issue through a fairness lens or an “attack wealth” lens, it must be in terms of incentives. Incentives are what drives behaviour, and behaviour is what drives wealth creation and security. If we come at it with some sort of A-level politics student's approach, rather than one grounded in human behaviour and incentive, and get it wrong, we will see reduced investment from farm to farm and business to business.

If someone is not buying that new piece of planting machinery, they will not be investing in the training of their staff or they will not take on that extra employee who would have been brought on, because to justify expenditure they needed to invest in them, pay them more, and bring on more staff. All of that goes into reverse. I hope that as they come face to face with the realities of being responsible for the economy, Ministers will take that onboard and start to have a different philosophical approach in the way they do policy.

**Freddie van Mierlo** (Henley and Thame) (LD): Does the right hon. Member share the concerns that my farmers have about their mental health, who are already in an industry where mental health issues are very high? They are concerned about the deadline of April 2026 and what impact that could have on their wellbeing.

**Graham Stuart:** I do. Someone only has to meet farmers to know that farming is already quite a lonely profession, with a high level of suicide anyway and high rates of depression. Combining that with this figure, it sounds hyperbolic to suggest that people will kill themselves ahead of this deadline, but knowing the farmers as I do

[Graham Stuart]

in my area, I do not find it that hyperbolic. I hope it proves not to be the case, but it is a serious issue to be considered.

The impact of changes to BPR extends beyond farming communities. When asked about the changes, 85% of family businesses surveyed by the Confederation of British Industry said they would reduce investment by an average of 17%, an issue which colleagues are rightly raising. That will stifle long-term growth and harm the broader network of businesses that depend on them. They say that trust takes years to build, seconds to break and forever to repair. As I walked down Whitehall, shoulder to shoulder with farmers, their anger was palpable because they had believed the Prime Minister's promises yet were betrayed. To Labour's credit, it won the trust of rural Britain, through every door knocked, leaflet printed and promise made. It went from representing two rural seats in 2019 to 40 today.

The Prime Minister pledged to form a new relationship with farmers based on respect. My right hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) questioned where those proud rural Labour MPs are today; they are certainly not here facing the music. As usual, they are leaving the Minister to do it on his own. He asked us to judge his Government on their actions and not their words, so that is what we will do. In November 2023, the current Environment Secretary, in a room full of farmers, looked them straight in the eye and told them "We have no intention of changing APR."

By November 2024, that promise meant nothing. Labour waited 14 years to deliver its Budget, and it made a choice not just to change APR, but halve it. One constituent shared their shock as they calculated the impact, realising it would cost their family £300,000. Another constituent, William Hodgson, who runs a 600-acre farm near Withernsea with his mother, faces an inheritance tax bill of £1.5 million, with a post-tax profit of £150,000 a year. That means he would have to dedicate an entire decade of profits just to cover the cost of that tax. It was at that moment that the most valuable currency in politics—trust—was lost.

In February 2024, the Prime Minister told the NFU that it deserves a Government that listens and heeds early warnings. The planned changes to APR are not due until 2026, leaving the Prime Minister with one year, two fiscal events and ample parliamentary sitting days, with many colleagues all too happy to constructively work with him, to come to this House and tell us that he has listened and will change course. The question is whether he has the courage to do so.

It will have been hard to hear all of us and our chants while he was in Rio and we were in Whitehall; farmers at his north London surgeries will be few and far between. However, I hope he will listen to the hon. Member for Penrith and Solway (Markus Campbell-Savours), on his own side, who spoke bravely against the policy during the debate in the Chamber last month.

**Vikki Slade** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Graham Stuart:** I had better make some progress. The hon. Member for Penrith and Solway may have been scolded behind closed doors for doing that, but he will

have regained the trust of voters who put their trust in him. As devastating as the proposed changes to APR and BPR could be on our farmers, the impact of the changes on family-owned businesses more widely could be even greater, and perhaps that deserves more attention.

A recent report by Adriana Curca at the CBI laid bare the potential fallout. Far from raising £1.4 billion, as forecast by the Treasury, the Chancellor can expect a £1.2 billion decrease in tax revenue from family-owned businesses. Instead of helping the Government to fulfil their pledge to be pro-business and pro-worker, it could lead to the loss of more than 125,000 jobs over the next four years.

Rachel from accounts obviously never got a new abacus for Christmas. Maple Garage, Beverley Travel, Beverley Camera Centre, Oh My Dog—great place—Flowerstyle, Vivienne Rose Wallpaper and Interiors, the Beverley Card Company, Islay Bloom, the Monkey Tree Café, Trent Galleries, Hull Aero Club—those are all businesses that I have spoken to since the Budget. The overwhelming sentiment was exactly the same, regardless of the type of business: disappointment in a Government who do not understand business. None of the Cabinet has ever run one, and it shows.

When the Prime Minister promised that wealth creation would be his party's No. 1 priority—do hon. Members remember that?—more than 120 business leaders believed him, from the founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales, to Andrew Higginson, the chair of JD Sports. The Prime Minister convinced them that he had a plan to kick-start our economy. Now, six months into the reality of a Labour Government, they are lacing up their trainers and running for the hills.

It does not have to be that way. Instead of tinkering with who is and who is not eligible for inheritance tax relief, we could consider following Sweden's example, where, having tried heavy inheritance tax charges—

**Mr Angus MacDonald** (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Graham Stuart:** I will have to press on. Sweden ended up with even, I think, the communists voting to abolish it entirely. Since Sweden scrapped inheritance tax in 2004, entrepreneurship has flourished. Some 8,000 wealthy individuals moved their assets back to the country. Its tax revenues increased by £19.5 billion in a decade.

The planned changes to APR and BPR hurt everyone and help no one. Scrapping inheritance tax may not be a silver bullet, but the evidence suggests it is a policy worth examining.

I return to the saying that trust takes forever to repair. The Prime Minister will not take my word for it, but he should listen to his voters, and recent polls show that 66% of voters believe that Labour does not respect rural communities, and 77% do not trust Labour to manage the economy effectively, or remain unconvinced.

Newer MPs may grandstand and say that it will all blow over—although their appetite to do so seems to be diminishing by the day—and that by 2029, it will be a bad memory for farmers and entrepreneurs. Perhaps they could ask some of their colleagues in the Liberal Democrats how that story ends. After all, in 2010, it took them less than six months to break their promise

to students not to raise tuition fees, and it still came up in last summer's TV debates. Farmers and businessmen, like students, have long memories.

I am a firm believer that we reap what we sow. In the past six months, the Government have sown a dangerous thing—seeds of doubt, and an idea that they cannot be trusted. I had better let the Minister have a short period to respond. However, on behalf of colleagues right across this side of the House—and I think, by their absence, quite a number of colleagues on that side of the House—we ask the Minister, who is a thoughtful and decent man, to go back to the Chancellor and the Prime Minister, and persuade them to change course.

11.23 am

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray):**

It is a pleasure to speak in this debate with you as Chair, Dr Allin-Khan. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) on securing this debate. Likewise, he is always thoughtful in his contributions, so I am always glad to hear from him and indeed the interventions that he allowed during his speech.

I know hon. Members have raised questions about the reforms that we are making, and I will try to address as many of them as I can. However, let me start by briefly reminding hon. Members of the economic context in which the decisions were taken. At the autumn Budget, we took difficult but necessary decisions on tax, welfare and spending to restore economic stability, fix the public finances and support public services, as a result of the situation that we inherited from the previous Administration. We took those tough decisions in a way that will make the tax system fairer and more sustainable. The decision to reform agricultural property relief and business property relief was not taken lightly. The reforms mean that, despite the tough fiscal context, the Government will maintain significant levels of relief from inheritance tax, beyond what is available to others.

**Richard Foord** (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

**James Murray:** I will give way maybe once or twice, but I do not have much time.

**Richard Foord:** I do not question the Minister's difficult inheritance, but the Labour party adviser Dan Neidle suggests that the plan to slap inheritance tax on farms worth more than £1 million should be replaced with a much higher threshold with a clawback mechanism, perhaps for land over £20 million that is sold. That would tackle the Dysons of the world without affecting small family farms. What does the Minister think of that proposal?

**James Murray:** I am just about to come on to the details of the reforms that we have made to agricultural property relief and business property relief. If the hon. Gentleman waits a moment, he will see some of the reasoning behind the decisions that we took.

The Government recognise the role that the reliefs play, particularly in supporting farms and small businesses, and under our reforms that will continue. The case for reform is underlined by the fact that the full unlimited exemption, which was introduced in 1992, had become unsustainable. Under the current system, the benefit of

the 100% relief on business and agricultural assets has become heavily skewed towards the wealthiest estates. According to the latest data from HMRC, 40% of agricultural property relief benefits the top 7% of estates making claims. That is 117 estates claiming £219 million of relief.

It is a similar picture for business property relief. More than 50% of business property relief is claimed by just 4% of estates making claims. That equates to 158 estates claiming £558 million in tax relief.

**Mr Angus MacDonald:** Will the Minister give way?

**James Murray:** I have only a few moments, so I will make progress.

The Leader of the Opposition has made it clear that she would prioritise that tax break within the public finances, but we do not believe it is fair or sustainable to maintain such a large tax break for such a small number of the wealthiest claimants, given the wider pressures on the public finances. It is for those reasons that the Government are changing how we target agricultural property relief and business property relief from April 2026. We are doing so in a way that maintains a significant tax relief for estates, including for small farms and businesses, while repairing the public finances fairly.

Let me be clear that individuals will still benefit from 100% relief for the first £1 million of combined business and agricultural assets. On top of that, as we know, there will be a 50% relief, which means that inheritance tax will be paid at a reduced effective rate of up to 20%, rather than the standard 40%. Importantly, those reliefs sit on top of the existing spousal exemptions and nil-rate bands. Depending on individual circumstances, a couple can pass on up to £3 million to their children or grandchildren free of inheritance tax.

**Harriet Cross:** At the Oxford farming conference, the Secretary of State suggested that farms should diversify to be more profitable, but diversification has become a lot less incentivised because that all gets wrapped up into the BPR, as well as the APR. Does that not completely negate the Secretary of State's argument for diversification if it will all be taken away in tax?

**James Murray:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made an important point about diversification, but whatever category the assets fall into, a couple can pass on up to £3 million to their children or grandchildren free of inheritance tax; that applies across agricultural and business property relief. The point I was making is that the agricultural and business property relief sit on top of the existing transfers and nil-rate bands, so when considering individual circumstances, we must look at the details of the situation that an individual or couple face.

I have a minute left, so I will be brief. Some hon. Members questioned the statistics about how many estates will be affected. We are very clear—we have published the data, and the Chancellor has written to the Treasury Committee about it—that up to 520 estates claiming agricultural property relief, including those claiming business property relief too, will be affected by these reforms to some degree. That means that about three quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief, including those also claiming business property

[James Murray]

relief, will not pay any more tax as a result of these changes in the year they are introduced. All estates making claims through these reliefs will continue to receive generous support at a total cost of £1.1 billion to the Exchequer. The Office for Budget Responsibility has been clear that it does not expect this measure to have any significant macroeconomic impacts.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed today, and I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness for securing this debate.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

11.30 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Coastguard Helicopter Services

[GILL FURNISS *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD):  
I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of coastguard search and rescue helicopter services.

It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Furniss. I am delighted to see the Minister in his place for a reprise of an issue I have raised a number of times over the years. The execution of the duties of the search and rescue helicopter base in Sumburgh, which is in Shetland in my constituency, has over the years been relatively unproblematic. The service, and those who provide it, are held in enormously high regard—and for good reason. There have been, over the years, a number of heroic incidents where the quality of the service, and the bravery of those who provide it, have been there for all to see. It has been quite exceptional, and that is the standard that local people have come to expect and will almost certainly continue to expect; but that does mean that, if there is ever any concern about the provision of these sorts of services, the response from the community will be much more trenchant.

I will start by raising an issue that has its roots back in 2023. It was a matter I raised in this House—in fact in this Chamber—on 22 November 2023. At that time, following the reletting of the contract for a second 10-year period to Bristow Helicopters, a memo was sent out to all Bristow staff indicating, amongst other things, that the response time for helicopters stationed at Sumburgh and at Stornoway—in the Northern and Western Isles—was to be increased from 15 minutes to 60 minutes. That is obviously concerning; for any coastal or island community, the search and rescue helicopter is another blue light service. It is a blue light service that any of us who rely on the sea for a living, or even just for transportation, may have to rely on at any time.

That memo only came into the public domain because a member of Bristow staff copied two pages of it and gave it to BBC Radio Shetland. It went into the public domain from there. As soon as it was in the public domain, there was a mass stampede for the hills by anybody who might be accountable for it. The Department for Transport and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency denied all knowledge of it, saying, “No, this was nothing to do with us.” It was all left firmly at the door of Bristow, which, it has to be said, was less than forthcoming at that point.

That led me, after some discussion and joint working with the then hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar, to the Chamber on 22 November 2023. I say parenthetically that the current hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Torcuil Crichton) has since contacted me to say that he cannot be here with us, but I know that he is engaged with this issue. I have spoken and corresponded with him about it on a number of occasions, and I know he shares my concerns about the handling of this.

I will not rehearse the arguments that were made in November 2023, but it will benefit the House and the Minister, when he responds, if I remind the House of what then Minister Guy Opperman said when responding to my half-hour debate. He said,

“I want to address the key point raised by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland in respect of the situation going from 15 to 60 minutes. That was supposed to be the situation going

forward, but I can confirm that the Department for Transport has been informed by His Majesty's Coastguard that it has begun an analysis of the SAR incident data compiled after the UKSAR2G procurement commenced. That work has begun and is ongoing, and obviously the results will be conveyed in the future to all Members who are particularly concerned by it—the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland and the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), who have raised this particular point in correspondence.

The analysis is in recognition of the fact that the UKSAR2G procurement was undertaken at a time of considerable societal and economic upheaval during the pandemic”.

So—surprise, surprise—the number of callouts had fallen during the pandemic and it was on that basis that the decision to raise the response time from 15 minutes to 60 minutes was made.

Let me say at this stage, before I go any further, that even if that data was reliable, I do not think that in itself is a legitimate basis on which to increase the call-out time. This issue is not all about the number of times the service is used; it is also about the circumstances and the conditions in which it is used. So, if this is some sort of calculation that says, “If we are only using it 10 times instead of 100, we don't need to be out there quite as quickly,” I would say in response that for those 10 times that the service is needed to be out there, my goodness—the need is as great as it possibly can be.

In November 2023, the then Minister went on to say:

“There is no doubt, if one looks at the statistics—and I have the statistics—that on occasions, over the last few years, the numbers have clearly been potentially lower than they may be going forward.” — [Official Report, 22 November 2023; Vol. 741, c. 126WH.]

He continued:

“I want to assure the House and the right hon. Gentleman that the UKSAR2G contract terms allow for a review of any area of the service against changes in demand, technical developments or innovations, which will be done periodically. The point is that that would have been done in any event. Should the analysis in this instance indicate that amendments to the new service are required in light of changes to the demand profile, then the Department for Transport can pursue those via the appropriate contractual mechanisms and approval processes.

The review will be undertaken at the end of this year going into next year”—

that was in 2023, going into 2024—

“at which time we will be happy to share the outcome with hon. Members. It will take many months, so it will not happen in the short term. I make the simple point that there will be no change to this service, in any event, for many years to come;”—

in fact, until the end of November 2026—

“as the title of the right hon. Gentleman's debate on the Order Paper suggests, we are talking about the future provision. I can advise that all four current helicopter bases in Scotland will remain open, with additional fixed-wing capabilities and a seasonal base in north-west Scotland to provide additional enhancements on an ongoing basis.” — [Official Report, 22 November 2023; Vol. 741, c. 127WH.]

Essentially, therefore, we have come here today to hear from the current Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane)—the outcome of that review. There were a number of occasions when we had video calls and telephone calls, with Bristow assuring us by saying, “Really, we understand now that maybe we did look at incomplete or inappropriate data. This is not going to be a problem.” I was greatly assured by that,

but I am slightly less assured by the fact that we are now in January 2025 and we still do not know what the outcome of that review is.

If the Minister can tell us today that the review has been completed and that a 15-minute response time will continue to be provided, I will have nothing more to say on this matter for the moment. However, if we have to undertake a campaign in our community to save a service that is as important to us as this one, I would like to hear that now, rather than having to wait until November 2026 to hear it.

However, the issues around the response time are not the totality of my concerns about the SAR service; indeed, I fear that they are a symptom, rather than the disease. By that, I refer to the fact that this only came into the public domain because of a leak. It is something which clearly, as a provider of service under contract for the Government, should have had an element of public consultation before any decision of that sort was made.

The Minister will be aware that earlier this year pilots working for Bristow, which provides the service under the SAR contract, went on strike. They did so in the most responsible way possible, in a way designed to minimise the risk to life. The cover, though, it must be said, was still patchy and we were fortunate that the situation came to a head in the summer months rather than in the winter. Those pilots' feeling that it was necessary to go on strike should be a major concern for the Department and for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. A few years ago it would have been unthinkable; earlier this year it felt inevitable.

The Minister knows that in recent years, Bristow was bought by a large American operator headquartered in Texas. What I have heard from those working for the company since then suggests that the purchase was the catalyst for a significant change of culture for the company and, more specifically, of concern for us as taxpayers, of the operation of the SAR contract. I have spoken with pilots and other staff at bases around the country, who tell me of a culture within the company that is now very different from the one that I first encountered and engaged with as a newly elected MP around 20 years ago. I hear of a management culture driven constantly by cost and efficiency, and some working within the company are concerned that it is at the expense of the highest possible standards of safety.

In years gone by, when I visited the base at Sumburgh I was generally able, with some notice, to go on to the base and meet and speak to more or less anybody that was on shift there. My most recent visit to the base was handled rather differently; senior management travelled from the south to “manage” my visit and the contact that I had with the crew at the base was very carefully managed. I was not oblivious to that; quite apart from anything else, I was fairly confident that, with Shetland being Shetland, I would hear any concerns there were by some other means, and so it has turned out.

The concerns were not just from Shetland. As a consequence of comments that I made that were reported at the time, I have heard concerns from bases, pilots and crews right around the coastline at other stations too. In Shetland and the Western Isles, I am told that the relocation of staff to the Isles is no longer to be expected or even encouraged. Consequently, crews are drawn in from elsewhere and the continuity of service is diminished. That must inevitably affect the way the service works—

[*Mr Alistair Carmichael*]

the familiarity of a crew with one another, when working in some of the most taxing conditions imaginable, is an important factor in how the service is delivered when it is most needed.

Shetland and the Western Isles are now regarded as spokes, rather than as hubs or standalone operations. Staff are expected to leave and work elsewhere in the country, providing different services. I am pleased to see that a more substantial amount will be provided for rescue services, going forward. I am sure that will be appreciated by the communities affected, but it must not come at the expense of the core service, which is search and rescue at sea.

Regarding core services, I sound a note of caution about the extended use of the SAR helicopter to supplement the air ambulance service on the islands. That use is not new, and in the moments of necessity it makes absolute sense for the SAR helicopter to get people to hospital on the Scottish mainland. However, I am increasingly concerned that the use is increasing in a significant way. In 2020, the number of call-outs—for the search and rescue helicopter to be provided effectively to the air ambulance service—was 25. But by the end of November 2024, it was 53. The concern must surely be that one day there will come a point where an ambulance flight is needed but the helicopter is deployed on a SAR mission, and the expectation of the ambulance provision and its availability will simply not be met. If this is to be something that is done—and I make no argument with it—surely it has to be done in a structured and strategic way. It cannot be allowed to develop in an ad hoc way.

I have spoken to one pilot who told me of his concern that crews are being put on station before, in his view—and he is a very experienced pilot—they are properly ready to be there. I have heard tell of winch operators undertaking live winch operations to decks after only five training operations. Previously, the number would have been at least twice that, with further training being done on the job under the supervision of more experienced crew.

The service also faces challenges that are not entirely within its control. For example, the availability of spare parts for the AgustaWestland AW189 is a potential source of difficulty. The move to the AW189 as it was explained to me made some sense, and I could see the inevitability of it, although reliance on a single aircraft model still raises concern about the resilience of the service should that single model be taken out of commission, as we all know happens from time to time.

These are all things that cause me concern but, candidly, I am not really qualified to judge their seriousness. What seriously concerns me and I do feel qualified to judge, however, is the fact that pilots and crew come to me to tell me what is happening. I know for a fact that, in years gone by, any concerns of that sort would have been addressed comfortably within the company—the culture of the company allowed that to happen. It should concern us all to hear concerns of that sort, on top of crews taking industrial action, as they did earlier this year, on top of the hardball tactics deployed by the company in response to the strikes, and on top of the way in which changes to the response time for the SAR service in Sumburgh and Stornoway were made known. The blue-chip blue light service that we have enjoyed hitherto is under threat.

**Dave Doogan** (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is giving a comprehensive analysis of his concerns regarding this most vital of services to many parts of Scotland, including as far south-east as my constituency, and the people who make their living on the sea there.

As the right hon. Gentleman says, this debate is about the future service. Would he like to see the Department and the MCA specify in the contract that a successful bidder will make certain cultural undertakings, if he thinks that is preferable to be prescribed? Does he agree that if the cost of providing a 15-minute response time seems expensive, the cost of failing to rescue lives will seem very much more expensive?

**Mr Carmichael:** The hon. Gentleman's final point is absolutely on the money. He is spot on. We are back to the old contest between price and value. The value of the service is understood by my constituents, and I suspect probably by his and other Member's constituents; the price is for others to determine.

On specifying culture in a contract, I am now 23 years away from legal practice, and I was never much of a contract lawyer when I was in legal practice, so I would hesitate to get too involved in that. I question whether that is something that can be specified in a contract, but it is absolutely something that the MCA, as the contracting party, should, by proper management of the contract, be able to instil. If the MCA, at the point where the contract is let, made it clear that its expectations as the party letting the contract include the proper cultural management of the service, we would be in a much stronger position than we are in today.

**Jim Allister** (North Antrim) (TUV): On the point about the necessity to retain flexibility in the service, my North Antrim constituency has, of course, the glorious north Antrim coast, which is not only beautiful but dangerous at times. We have had the necessity and benefit, from time to time, of the assistance of the rescue helicopter from Prestwick, and no later than 15 December when, sadly, my constituent Nigel Gordon lost his life at Torr head. Does the right hon. Member agree that it is imperative that there is maximum flexibility going forward, for the benefit of not just those in the immediate vicinity of a base but those who can draw on the services in emergencies?

**Mr Carmichael:** That is absolutely correct. I am very familiar with the north Antrim coast: I was born and brought up on a farm 12 miles north of it, in the south-east corner of Islay, that looked across to Rathlin and then to the Antrim coast. I know exactly the stretch of water and the circumstances that the hon. and learned Gentleman speaks of. To go back to the way in which we view contracts of this sort, my concern is always that things can become pretty process driven. The issue of whether it is a 15 or 60-minute response time could become a box to be ticked, rather than something that we have to understand has a very direct bearing on the outcome—the quality of the service provided for our constituents and others.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Carmichael:** Yes. I have got about another three paragraphs; I will get to them eventually.



**Jamie Stone:** Further to the point made by the hon. and learned Member for North Antrim (Jim Allister), if there is an accident at a cliff and somebody falls, we want to get help to them as quickly as possible, while the chopper is making its way there. I know of instances when the rope gear has been removed altogether; there might be a lifesaving opportunity to get somebody down to that person before the chopper gets there. It seems to me that this attitude of measuring it by money, instead of an overall approach about preventing a death, is really what we should be thinking about.

**Mr Carmichael:** Yes, indeed. As I said to my hon. Friend earlier, my father, who is now 93, worked for many years as what was then called a coastguard auxiliary—we would now call them a volunteer—and would go over the cliffs in breeches buoys to bring people off boats that had gone aground. Having come to the point where we have got this helicopter service, which is infinitely better than what we knew in years gone by, it is important to understand that the quality of the service—the quality of the output—really has to be the focus, not the process.

My hon. Friend prompts me to highlight the fact that many of those who work in tandem with the search and rescue helicopter are volunteers. These people are volunteer coastguards and volunteers on the lifeboat. On occasion, their commitment and bravery is absolutely outstanding. It really behoves Governments of any stripe to ensure that the quality of the commitment they make is matched by the quality of the service provided by the state.

Essentially, we need to get back to the provision of a service that is rooted in the communities that it is there to serve and that is driven by the highest standards of service. Where we, as parliamentarians, have concerns that that is changing, we have not only the right but the duty to speak up, because we do not want to leave this until we realise that it is too late and the damage has already been done.

2.53 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Furniss. Is this your first time chairing?

**Gill Furniss (in the Chair):** Yes.

**Jim Shannon:** Then I wish you well in your new role. I am sure that you and I and others will meet on a number of occasions—

**Jim Allister:** Will the hon. Member give way?

**Jim Shannon:** I am happy to give way.

**Jim Allister:** While we are on statistics, can the hon. Member tell us how many times he has spoken in this Chamber?

**Jim Shannon:** I am unable to answer that. I say only that I make sure that the constituency of Strangford is named every time I am here. That is the important point, because it is the people who put me here.

It is a real pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael). In all honesty, there probably is not a debate where I do not find

myself alongside the right hon. Gentleman, whether it is on fishing issues, coastguard issues, farming or whatever it may be. These are all things that he and I, along with others, have a deep interest in, and we come to Westminster Hall to put forward the case on behalf of our constituents.

**Mr Carmichael:** I do not know whether this is really necessary, but given that I mentioned the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Torcuil Crichton), I should put on the record, in case there were any doubt about it, that when we last debated this issue in November 2023, the hon. Member for Strangford was in the Chamber too.

**Jim Shannon:** It is the subject matter that motivates us, of course—that is why we are here.

I am really pleased to see the Minister in his place, and I wish him well in his role. He and I have been friends for many years, and I am very pleased to see him in that position. I know he will give the job the necessary energy and commitment. It is also good to see the shadow Minister in his place. I wish him well in his new role.

The core responsibility of His Majesty's Coastguard and the helicopter service is to search, rescue and save. Those services are of major importance to society and take steps every single day to protect us; it is great to be here to discuss how we can preserve and protect them for the future. I know the Minister will reassure us and give us confidence that what we have, we can hold, and that they will continue to save lives. All Members who have intervened have mentioned saving lives—that is the thrust of what we are trying to achieve.

In my Strangford constituency, lifeboats and the coastguard, including lifeboats from Portaferry and Donaghadee, are called out almost every other week, and they do a massive good job in saving lives.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the by-products of this magnificent and timely debate is that it allows us to pay tribute to the volunteers, as he is doing? They include the likes of Air Ambulance Northern Ireland and onshore charitable organisations such as Community Rescue Service in Coleraine and Foyle Search and Rescue in Londonderry. We pay tribute to those people, and hopefully we can get them an additional revenue stream to ensure they can do the job of saving lives.

**Jim Shannon:** I think my hon. Friend may have been at the debate that I attended. He is on the record praising the good work of those volunteers. Every one of us knows the contribution that they make in saving lives. First and foremost, they are volunteers who have a commitment to do well.

Thinking about the helicopter search and rescue made me remember a story. It happened a long time ago, but it has always stuck in my mind. One Boxing day, I was out duck hunting on the pond on my farm, but out across Strangford lough a real tragedy was taking place. Six young men from Kircubbin—I live between Greyabbey and Kircubbin—went across to Daft Eddy's, the pub on the far side, and on the way back they got into difficulties and were all drowned. I remember visiting all the families to express my deep sympathy to them. The point I want to make is that the helicopters were out—we could see their lights all over Strangford lough, going side to side

[*Jim Shannon*]

everywhere as they tried to find the bodies and to reassure the families. The work that they did that night was incredible.

**Dave Doogan:** The hon. Gentleman is laying bare the sentiment and bravery of the crews that operate these helicopters. They do whatever they can hopefully to bring safety and security, if not comfort, to people in coastal communities right around the British Isles.

I may be the only rotary wing aircraft engineer in Parliament—I certainly like to think I am, anyway. Helicopters are inherently expensive, and it is incumbent on the Government to acknowledge that. That expense brings with it tremendous value. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) said, this is about the future? We are where we are, and relatively content we are too, but in future negotiations with contractors for this service the Government have to understand that, in their pursuit of value for money in Government services, there are many, many places to look before they look here.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank my hon. Friend—he is a friend—for that intervention. That is my feeling, enshrined in those few paragraphs. He is right that when it comes to saving money, there are some things that we cannot scrimp and save on. Unfortunately, that night helicopters were not successful in saving lives, but they were successful in retrieving bodies and giving them to their families, so that they could suitably grieve with the loved ones they had a great fondness for.

HM Coastguard was formally brought into existence almost 203 years ago, and has been working to keep people safe by the coast and at sea ever since. It is a world-class leader in maritime safety, available to be called 24/7, to help anyone in difficulty around the coast. It is similar to our helicopter service, which goes above and beyond to provide care and help those who require it. I do not often get the chance to watch telly, but Sunday afternoon is the one time I do. I enjoy the westerns that are on then, which shows how old I am. In the breaks there are adverts for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, showing examples of its work and seeking donations of £2 a week. On occasions, it is not able to do the total job and helicopters will be part of the rescue.

Back home, HM Coastguard oversees maritime search and rescue operations, including helicopter services to ensure safety. Those operations are co-ordinated through a network of maritime rescue centres across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with a joint rescue co-ordination centre in Hampshire serving as a central hub. HM Coastguard's helicopter fleet operates from 10 strategically located bases throughout the United Kingdom, providing rapid response capabilities at sea, along the coast and in certain inland areas.

In Northern Ireland, those services are supported by local teams, such as Bangor Coastguard Rescue Team in the neighbouring constituency of North Down, which specialises in water rescue, mud rescue and missing person searches. The hon. and learned Member for North Antrim (Jim Allister) told us about the north coast. Many will be aware that I represent an even better and more beautiful constituency in Strangford, which is part coastal.

The Newtownards peninsula consists of numerous villages and hamlets along the coastline. In addition, the Bangor Coastguard Rescue Team lies in the constituency of North Down, our neighbouring area, so knowing that extra support is there for residents is always reassuring. It is always a team effort, with councillors working together with MPs and other bodies to ensure that everything happens.

In July 2022, Robert Courts, then Minister for Maritime and Aviation, announced a new contract that would be awarded to secure helicopter fleets for the next 10 years to serve HM Coastguard and helicopter search. The new contract means that the UK search and rescue region will benefit from innovation and advances in technology. It is important that all those involved in the work have those advances in technology to reach people more quickly and save their lives. That provides an opportunity to build a future coastguard aviation capability that can keep pace with the growing demand on coastguard and aviation services across the United Kingdom.

I met the then Minister two or three years ago to discuss provision for Northern Ireland. The commitment I got at that time was that it would be covered by Prestwick, which I appreciated, but we need to continue. There have been extreme circumstances when we have had to call on the Republic of Ireland, which also makes its helicopters available for the search. That is all part of doing a good job.

Living on the edge of Strangford lough, we are aware of night-time searches, some of which have been successful in saving lives. On other occasions, they have unfortunately not been successful. Sometimes, despite their best efforts, all those involved, such as the helicopters, police, ambulance and fire services and hundreds of volunteers, have not been able to find those missing people—often troubled youngsters. Thankfully, they are successful sometimes.

In conclusion, I believe that it is of the utmost importance that we do all we can, as parliamentarians, to properly fund, protect and preserve our coastguard and aviation teams. For example, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) said, Air Ambulance Northern Ireland is funded through charitable donations. There is not a week, back in my constituency—and probably in everybody else's, to be honest—when some group is not doing some fundraising for the Air Ambulance NI, or the air ambulance wherever they may be. Whether it be road traffic accidents, saving people in emergencies or helping people who just take ill, the air ambulance can be there in a few minutes, and those people can be taken to hospital.

Busy roads on the Ards peninsula, where I live, are usually narrow with lots of corners, and that restricts the ambulance service's ability to get to places in time. That is a fact of life. However, the air ambulance makes that situation better. I thank all those who have made ongoing fundraising efforts to maintain and enhance its operations. The community support and contributions are essential to sustain lifesaving services. There is a responsibility in Government to ensure that those services do not falter for mainland England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

This great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is always better together—my friend, the hon. Member for Angus and Perthshire Glens (Dave Doogan), knows that.

**Dave Doogan:** I doubt that!

**Jim Shannon:** I say that as personal opinion, of course. The point I am making is that we can be better together, and we can do it better together. Our people deserve that.

3.6 pm

**Mr Angus MacDonald** (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD): Thank you for allowing me to speak, Ms Furniss. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate. He has long campaigned on this issue and that has won him a lot of gratitude from people in Northern Ireland and across Scotland and, indeed, the UK as a whole.

I have considerable personal gratitude to the search and rescue helicopter service. Ten years ago, my wife fell off a hill while wearing crampons and using an ice axe, and broke everything in her body. I was in London and got a call from somebody to say, “Your wife is lying on the rocks, a few hundred feet down.” I was so concerned that I ran a situations vacant ad in *The Oban Times*, but luckily it was not needed because of the rescue of my wife by the search and rescue helicopter. My father was involved in Glencoe Mountain Rescue. He always says that the advent of search and rescue helicopters was probably the biggest change in the history of saving people in the mountains.

I am pleased to speak in this debate as my constituency includes Inverness, home to one of the top 10 search and rescue helicopter operations in the UK. Those centres, and the incredible teams who staff them, are an essential part of our emergency service infrastructure. Their stability and effectiveness are not only important but essential, as I know to my benefit. Some people in the Chamber might not be aware of the scale of it. It is a £1.6 billion, 10-year programme, so it is a big contract. The UK search and rescue service provides 18 helicopters and six fixed-wing planes, based in 10 locations, from Newquay up to Sumburgh. There are two aircraft in each base.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland mentioned, when the leaked plans to increase the emergency response time for rescue helicopters based at Sumburgh emerged, back in 2023, he acted swiftly and decisively. His efforts paid off as the then Minister, Guy Opperman, stated that the changes would not happen for many years to come, and that

“all four current helicopter bases in Scotland will remain open.”  
—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2023; Vol. 741, c. 127.]

Hopefully, the new Government will ensure that we continue to hold on firm on that.

Quick responses to immediate problems are vital, but what is even more important is addressing the long-term decline in the services before they reach a crisis point. We need to ensure that the service level commitments do not slip. We have been made aware that there is potential for slippage in the contract. Most people will never need a search and rescue service. However, if they do need one, nothing else will do.

**Jamie Stone:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) will remember an incident in 1999 when a chemical-laden vessel called the *Ascania* broke free in the Pentland Firth. It was loaded with over 1,000 tonnes of potentially

explosive chemicals. The search and rescue helicopters were absolutely instrumental in getting the crew of 14 off the *Ascania*. Luckily, the situation did not prove disastrous; it could have been. Without those helicopters, there could have been a considerable loss of life.

**Mr MacDonald:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention.

In the year ending March 2024, coastguard search and rescue helicopters rescued 1,425 people. That figure highlights the sheer scale of their contribution to public safety. From the Inverness base in my constituency alone, there were 321 operations—almost one a day—making it the third busiest in the UK.

As a party, the Liberal Democrats are keeping a firm eye on this issue. One of the things we are concerned about is progress on extending the helipad safe zones at hospitals, which I know has become quite a big issue; I hope the Minister will mention that when he addresses us. Before I conclude, I reiterate the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland. In May 2024, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport stated that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency’s analysis of search and rescue demand would be published by the end of 2024. Clearly, we are well past that now. I hope the Minister will address that in his closing remarks and keep an eagle eye on the search and rescue contract and its performance. It matters a great deal to people who live in the maritime and rural areas of Great Britain.

3.11 pm

**Mr Andrew Snowden** (Fylde) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Furniss, particularly given that this is my first time at the Dispatch Box in Westminster Hall. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate on the future of coastguard helicopter rescue services. I thank all the Members who have contributed so far. It is clear that His Majesty’s Coastguard has strong and passionate advocates in Parliament, who care deeply about the services provided to their constituents.

I am part of the shadow Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office team, so normally a search and rescue helicopter would normally have to have travelled quite a way and caused a diplomatic incident before I would respond, but I am particularly pleased to be responding on behalf of His Majesty’s loyal Opposition, as I represent a coastal community in Fylde in Lancashire. I also served as Lancashire police and crime commissioner, and have therefore seen first hand the multi-agency work that goes into preventing the loss of life on our coastlines.

His Majesty’s Coastguard is an integral part of coastal communities, with over 300 coastguard rescue teams around the UK. The coastguard search and rescue helicopter services play a vital role in protecting the public, and I pay tribute to the bravery and commitment of all those involved in delivering these lifesaving services, as has been mentioned by Members. Many people are alive today because a coastguard helicopter came to their rescue.

In July 2022, the previous Conservative Government announced that the contract for the UK’s second-generation search and rescue aviation programme would be awarded to Bristow Helicopters to provide both rotary and fixed-wing services for the next 10 years—representing a

[Mr Andrew Snowden]

significant allocation of budgets and resources. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, that contract will see UK search and rescue benefit from the latest innovations and advances in technology, to save more lives. As part of the contract, Bristow Helicopters launched two new seasonal bases in Fort William and Carlisle to serve these areas, which are two of the busiest locations for summer demand on services. Under the agreement, Bristow Helicopters will operate 18 helicopters, including the introduction of Leonardo AW139 helicopters and a drone system that has the capability to transmit real-time data. I am sure the Minister has heard from Members in this debate some concerns for the operationalisation of that contract.

The previous Conservative Government also recognised the importance of all coastguard centres being equipped to receive, respond, and co-ordinate all distress, urgency and alert situations. For that reason, the then Government allocated £175 million to deliver a communications network connecting 163 remote radio sites across 11,000 miles. The project, part of the radio network infrastructure replacement programme, ensures that the coastguard can maintain effective emergency response operations for thousands of distress calls.

I am pleased that the network is now operational and am confident that the improved resilience provided by the new network will aid the coastguard's helicopter service and its lifesaving search and rescue operations for years to come. As part of the contract agreed by the previous Government, Telent, His Majesty's Coastguard's technology partner, will continue to manage and maintain the system.

An effective radio network is integral in supporting the mission of preventing the loss of life on the coast and sea. Ministers must remain vigilant to ensure that the network and the services that support it remain operational at full capacity. The Minister will know that at the end of 2023 the Maritime and Coastguard Agency launched an analysis of recent data to determine whether the demand for the search and rescue helicopter services had changed since the launch of the UK's second-generation search and rescue aviation programme—a point made by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. However, the report was due out by the end of 2024 and has not yet been published.

I seek assurance from the Minister that the new Government will continue the investment into His Majesty's Coastguard and treat it with the same priority. As a demonstration of that, will they ensure that the report is published as soon as possible, so that the Government can continue the work of ensuring that the right resources are in the right place at the right time to keep the public safe?

3.16 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Kane):** It is a pleasure and an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Furniss, as we have become great friends over our time in Parliament. I welcome the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr Snowden), to the House and the Front Bench—even if it is only in a temporary capacity. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on bringing this debate to the House again—I think I was on the Opposition Benches on the last occasion.

As the right hon. Member eloquently said, His Majesty's Coastguard and our dedicated search and rescue services have continued to provide a superb response to save lives at sea and around our coast. It is great to hear that reflected by all Members in the Chamber today. Recently, we have seen all our emergency services working together to respond to the recent storms that have affected millions of people. Whether rescuing people from flooding or helping them find shelter from the snow and ice, our search and rescue teams have continued to respond both day and night in often the most atrocious weather. I formally thank all the members of our search and rescue teams for their continuing commitment and dedication to helping any person in need of rescue or assistance.

I am delighted to announce that, following the review commissioned by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency into the proposed changes to the readiness states of the search and rescue helicopters based in Sumburgh and Stornoway, agreement for their readiness states to be maintained at 15 minutes by day and 45 minutes by night has been reached. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland and my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Torcuil Crichton) will be delighted.

**Mr Carmichael:** I can only thank the Minister; that is exceptionally welcome news, and is exactly what we would have expected of him. I expected no less.

**Mike Kane:** The chief executive of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency will write to the relevant right hon. and hon. Members this month to advise them of the maintenance of the readiness states of those bases. I appreciate that it has taken some time for the final approvals to be granted; that is due to the complexities of the service provision.

In a previous debate, in November 2023, the intent and scope of the review was advised to the House. That included new data modelling to look at changes in operational requirements since the original contract was let. It also acknowledged that service demand may have been impacted by the recent pandemic, and reflected the demand on the coastguard services associated with the increased accessibility of the coastline and remote areas, which include the beautiful Shetland Islands and Outer Hebrides. The hon. and learned Member for North Antrim (Jim Allister) is not in his place, but he raised the case of his constituent, Nigel Gordon. As the Minister, I extend my sympathies to Nigel's family.

Notification of the intent to maintain the current readiness states was sent to the aircraft operators, Bristow Helicopters Ltd, in December 2024 and will be enacted under the conditions agreed in the second-generation search and rescue aviation contract. The MCA and Bristow Helicopters continue to work closely together to implement the new service, which will make the most of technological advances, ensure that we retain a world-class search and rescue service, and align the readiness states of all UK search and rescue helicopter bases. The revised readiness states will be implemented as part of the transition timeline, which is expected to take place in October 2026 in Sumburgh and in January 2027 in Stornoway.

I am sure that the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland will appreciate the ongoing work of the MCA and my Department to implement these changes, which

include significant additional investment achieved by my Department to support our vital maritime and coastal services during these challenging financial times. The changes demonstrate the continuing commitment of His Majesty's Coastguard and my Department to continue to provide this vital lifesaving service, which builds on more than 40 years of experience in providing a search and rescue helicopter service in the Scottish islands.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland has reminded the House of the work of this vital service to support our seafarers and the wider UK economy. We have seen some notable rescues over the years, which included the tragic loss of one of the aircrew during the successful rescue of the crew of the *Green Lily* in 1997. The ultimate sacrifice of Billy Deacon, the winchman of the Sumburgh-based coastguard search and rescue helicopter, will always be remembered across the service. The Billy Deacon search and rescue memorial trophy was established to commemorate his sacrifice. The award, which was presented this year on the 27th anniversary of his loss, recognises the unique bravery of our winch paramedics and winch operators.

I am immensely proud of the work of all our search and rescue teams and, as has been mentioned, both our full-time officers and volunteers continue to support the service. I ask the House to pay tribute to all the crews of search and rescue teams and their vital work, and to remember those who have been lost while trying to save others.

The second-generation search and rescue aviation contract is a £1.6 billion investment by my Department to ensure the continued provision of a world-leading fleet of advanced search and rescue aircraft. No bases have been closed, and all current helicopter bases will continue to provide a 24-hour search and rescue service. Additionally, two seasonal bases will be constructed—one in Scotland and one in northern England, which will operate for 12 hours a day from April to September.

The additional seasonal bases enhance the UK-wide service, providing additional cover in the busier summer months. Their introduction will not impact the tasking of current bases: the search and rescue aircraft will continue to be tasked with aeronautical rescue by the joint rescue co-ordination centre, as they are today, to meet the requirements to prioritise saving life. We have invested in enhanced, innovative technologies to improve our search and rescue response to help to reduce the time taken to search for missing persons. The technologies will be rolled out during the transition of the current bases to meet new service provisions under the contract.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland raised the issue of helicopter support for the movement of patients. Search and rescue helicopters may be asked to support our ambulance services to assist in moving critically ill patients to higher levels of care. These requests will be considered where capacity exists and no other means of transport are available and only if the request meets the legal requirement to be appropriate, compliant and achievable within the air operations certification. In accepting these requests, there must be no impact on the provision of primary search and rescue operations. However, the support is not guaranteed and should not be relied on by the health service; the movement of patients remains the responsibility of ambulance services.

**Dave Doogan:** The Minister rightly acknowledges the point made by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) about the use of search and rescue helicopters for ambulance services, which is a perfectly reasonable thing to do in extremis; it is not their job but they can do it. That happens in Scotland despite NHS Scotland funding two air ambulances and two fixed-wing aircraft, which is not the case in England. Is the Minister aware of any Government plans to introduce NHS-owned and operated airborne ambulance services to protect coastguard services in England?

**Mike Kane:** Speaking of what Scotland provides for its NHS, I recently visited the CAELUS project in Aberdeen. Drone technology has been enhanced to carry blood supplies very quickly in order to help patients right across that great nation. I will come back to the hon. Gentleman with a more detailed answer to his question in a moment.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland mentioned that he was managed on a recent visit to a helicopter base. In my time of knowing him, I have always personally found him unmanageable, as I am sure the crew did on his visit. I am glad to say that the dispute with Bristow was successfully settled in the summer. I have kept in close contact with the British Airline Pilots' Association on the matter, both in opposition and in government. It is not for a Minister to intervene in disputes of that nature, but I am glad that the parties reached a settlement.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland also mentioned logistics. Logistics is a growing worry within my brief, particularly across aviation and somewhat in maritime. Since the pandemic, we just do not have enough parts being produced. Airlines in Scotland are having to buy planes only to mothball them to get parts for their existing stock. I keep a watching brief on logistics and I talk to the MCA director about it. My advice is that the AW189 is a proven, tested and capable aircraft for search and rescue across the world, and there are more of them in service than the old S-92s, so there are fewer supply chain issues with the newer helicopters.

I thank the hon. Member for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire (Mr MacDonald) for his contribution. There are some statistics that I would have liked to read out, but I do not have the time in my speech. That was powerful personal testimony about his wife. I know it was some time ago, but I wish her all the best. He asked about NHS helicopter landing pads. We had something called the Derriford incident recently. The Air Accidents Investigation Branch sent some advice, and we are currently reviewing all those pads across the nation to ensure that they are safe for the future of all services.

I will turn back to the point made by the hon. Member for Angus and Perthshire Glens (Dave Doogan) on air ambulance provision by NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government. The sector has made an incredible contribution. I am led to understand that there are no current plans for officials to work with the Department of Health and Social Care or the NHS.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, I will turn to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I am glad that he called me a close friend. I now know that he relaxes—I never knew that was the case. He watches westerns on a Sunday; I now know when to disturb him with a phone call. I see him

1.[*Official Report*, 11 February 2025; Vol. 762, c. 4WC.](Correction)

[Mike Kane]

as some latter-day John Wayne, climbing into his saddle and going out into the tundra of cacti deserts. The way he approaches his politics in this House always shows “True Grit”. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ohh!”] Come on, it was a belter! I pay tribute to his service in Northern Ireland, and thank him for his personal testimony about the young men that were lost at sea. My heartfelt condolences go to their families. He will know, as I do, that burying our dead is a corporal act of mercy. Finding the dead and bringing their bodies back to their families is, in my opinion, an essential element of search and rescue. The hon. Member is right to raise that and it shows his character that he, as the constituency MP, personally went to visit those families.

In closing, I thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland for securing this debate. I again pay tribute to all our search and rescue services, across the UK, for their selfless dedication to saving lives 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

3.30 pm

**Mr Carmichael:** I thank everybody who has contributed, by speech or intervention, to the debate and I particularly thank the Minister—that is exceptionally good news, which will be very welcome. This was one of those cases that I, personally, never doubted that we would win eventually, but we could never give up, or rest easy, until hearing that it had been accepted.

To the Minister’s point about the search element of search and rescue, finding the bodies of those who have been lost at sea is enormously important for their families. I recall that, before I was elected to this place, I was instructed, in Lerwick sheriff court in Shetland, in a fatal accident inquiry in which the body had not been found. In such circumstances, it is almost impossible for the families to get proper closure. That is why there is a genuine community understanding of the importance of search and rescue. If that extra 45 minutes’ response time makes a difference, I do not care what the cost is; I think it is worth every penny.

In closing, let me say to the Minister, since I know that we are coming into the CSR round, that the other service matter for which I have been on my feet many times over the years is the continuation of the contract for the emergency towing vessel. It seems that every time there is a comprehensive spending review we have to see off an attempt from Treasury to take that contract away. The Minister might tell Treasury that if it tries again, it will find the same resistance in the future as it has found in the past, and if he wants to have a look at it when he is next in Orkney then I would be more than happy to facilitate that. Even if that meant taking a little time out of his holidays, I am sure I can find a way of making it worth it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the future of coastguard search and rescue helicopter services.

3.32 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Parking: Town Centres

4 pm

**Gill Furniss (in the Chair):** I will call Sonia Kumar, and then I will call the Minister to respond. There will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up, as is the convention for 30-minute debates.

**Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of parking in town centres.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Furniss. I rise to voice concerns about increased parking fees. Local authorities across the country are trying to claw their way out of financial difficulties by increasing parking fees and in my constituency, Dudley council has implemented such changes, which have been subject to much debate.

Our high streets and leisure centres are the heart of our communities. They provide social and economic value for residents in Dudley and across the UK, but in recent years we have seen too many once-thriving high streets fail. Successive Governments have attempted to reverse the trend by introducing grant funding for high street improvements, business improvement districts, empty shop strategies and business rate relief—the list goes on—but many of those measures were required only because of mistakes in development policy over the past 14 years. Council budgets have been eroded, forcing councils to make impossible decisions, and the previous Government’s levelling-up funding seems contradictory in hindsight. Ultimately, it is local people who are suffering.

Luckily, many councils have learned from those mistakes and proactively avoided developments that undermine the viability of high streets, but the rise of internet shopping has continued to drive shoppers from our historic towns, and long-standing traders in Dudley have suffered.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I commend the hon. Lady for raising this incredibly important issue for my constituency and those of all Members here. Footfall is the lifeblood of the local high street, and there is a need to balance car parking and accessibility. My council has implemented discounts for five-hour parking and is considering discounts for two to three-hour parking to allow people to spend more money in a reasonable timeframe. Does she agree that if what Ards and North Down borough council has done is implemented across the United Kingdom, it would increase footfall and help town centres and high streets?

**Sonia Kumar:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman—I will call him my hon. Friend. Extending parking discounts beyond an hour would mean that people who want to get a coffee are not charged £1.80 for one hour’s parking, which is what has been implemented in my constituency. They would spend more time in the town centre, and that would increase footfall.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese (Slough) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate on parking in town centres. The recent decision by the Conservative and Lib Dem-controlled Slough borough council to foist controlled parking zones on the whole town, rather than just in the town centre, has left many

of my residents feeling completely sidelined and angry, because the views they submitted to consultations have been ignored. Does she agree that although we need parking measures, it is important to respect the views of residents about these excessive cash cow schemes?

**Sonia Kumar:** I agree 100% with my hon. Friend, whose opinions I really respect. Parking charges have become a cash cow. It is absolutely absurd that councils across the country, including Dudley council, have implemented them.

We need to think about how to drive footfall, not reduce it, in our town centres. I feel like we are robbing Peter so Paul can cut a ribbon. Clearly, there is a fair balance to be struck between generating revenue through parking charges and ensuring the vibrancy and accessibility of town centres, but too many authorities are not getting that balance right.

**Daniel Francis** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate. In the Northumberland Heath ward in my constituency, Councillors Baljeet Gill and Wendy Perfect have been working tirelessly to support local traders who would like to introduce free parking for a very short period for the small range of independent shops in Northumberland Heath. Does she agree that councils should investigate measures to reduce parking charges and also consider free short-term parking arrangements to support, as she put it, the viability of such small independent traders?

**Sonia Kumar:** Yes, I do, and a long-standing trader in my constituency, Christine Bosworth, also agrees. She has been operating for the last 13 years in a craft shop and she shared with me some really poignant points that I would like to share. Christine said that there has been a really big drop in footfall in the constituency and in the town centre, and that it is an “eye-opener” that there now is a lack of accessibility to the town centre. The nearest car park is unusable and too expensive, while cheaper options are too far away for elderly and disabled people to use. Traders tied into long leases face mounting pressures to ensure that people can access the town centre.

Changes have been made without proper consultation and risk further eroding the vibrancy of our historic town centre. Bruno Coppola, manager of the Churchill shopping centre in Dudley, has shared concerns with me about the impact that the charges have on local businesses. Many traders have faced challenges for many years, including with covid-19.

**Jas Athwal** (Ilford South) (Lab): In the borough of Redbridge, where I was the leader of the council for the last 10 years, we brought in one-hour free parking, which increased footfall and the churn of cars, and brought local people back to local shops. Of course, it also created more business rates, because our local shopping centres are absolutely thriving. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is more than one way to make money, and that sometimes we have to be a little bit more imaginative and give local people what they want? Give them free parking and they will spend their money locally.

**Sonia Kumar:** An hour’s free parking is one of the proposals that I have put forward to the leader of my local council. If somebody wants to grab a coffee in the

town centre, they do not want to pay a parking charge, then get their coffee and leave. That is only driving business out.

As I was saying, Bruno and a number of traders around the town centre told me that it is not just Dudley town centre that is being affected; the same thing is happening in many other town centres across the country. The additional problem with my town centre is disruption from the ongoing construction work around the main transport area, which is affecting the bus service and the tram line, so more people are being forced to use their cars.

**Dr Lauren Sullivan** (Gravesham) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this very important debate. Of course, parking is a problem that does not exist in isolation; as she just mentioned, it is linked to public transport. In many areas, including in my local area of Gravesham, there is a large rural network, but of course such networks are not served by buses, which is why people are forced into their cars. Does she agree that we need to work with our local authorities to improve rural infrastructure, thereby alleviating issues, including parking, in our town centres?

**Sonia Kumar:** I agree with my hon. Friend, because town centre accessibility is really quite difficult. We do not have a tram system or any local trains; we only have a bus service, which can be ad hoc at times. Consequently, I welcome the new consultation period that Richard Parker, our Labour mayor, has suggested.

This is not the time to increase parking charges, because, as has been said before, parking remains a critical lifeline for many high streets, especially for those customers on low incomes in Dudley and elsewhere. Rising parking charges are pushing customers away from Dudley town centre and into out-of-town retail parks such as Merry Hill, which have free parking, and encouraging them to shop online.

It is crucial that we consider the long-term impact of these charges for traders and local small and medium-sized enterprises; they are the backbone of the economy. On a recent walk around Dudley town centre, I counted up to 35 empty shops. A staggering amount of those shops struggled due to austerity measures, the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

**Mr Bayo Alaba** (Southend East and Rochford) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate. Just outside my constituency of Southend East and Rochford, we have an issue in one of the main market towns, which, let us say, does not have the friendliest parking. People visit the local library for its services but also to apply for blue badges. Parking enforcement is quite opportune and the fees people are paying are astronomical, and the local community is being caught out by that. People have mentioned how important parking is for the community and how we can get our town centres back. I have been talking to the British Parking Association. When we have contractors managing our local assets, they must be seen to be doing more to support the local community. People need to visit their local high streets and regenerate their local community. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that those contractors do more to help our communities reimagine themselves?

**Sonia Kumar:** I agree with my hon. Friend. The contractors need to look at what they are doing in the town centres and where that money is going—back into the economy, local businesses and to residents.

The future of the high street relies on the ability to adapt and offer a range of experiences that draw people in—not just through retail but through leisure and community activities such as health, alongside the accessibility of services. I asked my council to reconsider its approach to parking charges. It is important that we strike the right balance that allows for continued access and vibrancy of our towns, which underpin our businesses.

In Dudley, the proposed increase in parking charges hurts not just traders but local residents who rely on car access due to the lack of alternative public transport options. For instance, students from low-income backgrounds who rely on their cars to get to the a learning or development centre will be forced to reconsider studies if the cost of parking becomes too burdensome. Those are students who want to upskill and contribute to the local economy, yet they face the prospect of being priced out of an education by those parking charges. In addition, the students and local residents who visit the leisure centre for their health and wellbeing will also feel the pinch. Many use the facilities regularly; I spoke to an 80-year-old member of the leisure centre who said it was a vital lifeline for socialising and community connection. The proposed charges would essentially double the cost of membership for every daily user, impacting the very fabric of our community.

If the parking charges are to continue, they should be reinvested into the community and businesses alike, providing a sustainable model for traders where businesses and residents reap the benefits. Each town will need its own unique solution depending on its size and needs. The implementation of those solutions must be relative to the scale of the problem of each town, and the voice of the community should be at the heart of all decisions. A thorough consultation should be conducted prior to the implementation of any charges made to a town centre. Let us treat car parking not as a peripheral issue, but as an integral component of a broader strategy for future town planning and revitalising our town centres.

4.14 pm

**Kirith Entwistle** (Bolton North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Furniss. I thank my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Dudley (Sonia Kumar) for tabling such an important debate on a topic that affects us all in so many different ways in daily life. I declare an interest as a member of the Women and Equalities Committee and I want to touch on a slightly different aspect of this issue of accessibility and public spaces.

As a long-time advocate for working families, this debate is personal for me. Across Britain—from Dudley and Sheffield to my own hometown of Bolton—we face a troubling problem. We are building more flats and homes, and encouraging people to move, without building the parking that is so needed alongside that. We are building family homes in town centres such as mine in Bolton, but we are failing to provide family friendly infrastructure that parents desperately need.

Parking in town centres is a prime example. Shopping centres, workplaces, and even hospitals all fall short of providing sufficient parent and child parking spaces

with wider bays and convenient short walks to entrances. The problem is threefold. Parent and child spaces are too few, enforcement is lax and unclear regulations harm those who need them most. At my local supermarket, the scene is all too familiar: the few parent and child spaces are taken by large vans or two-door convertibles, vehicles with no sign of families in tow. The result is parents like me facing an almost impossible task—trying to load a toddler into a car seat in a standard space without bumping the car next door. The solution is not complex. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley mentioned, we need to design town centres with “public” in mind. Starting with public parking, let us expand family friendly spaces and curb rule breaking by enforcing the strict regulations used to safeguard blue badge holders. Once public places set the standard, private car parks will follow.

Even worse, town centre parking completely overlooks pregnant women. Imagine being eight or nine months pregnant—swollen feet, aching back, every step a marathon—yet being expected to walk in and queue at customer support to request case-by-case permission for parent and child parking at supermarkets. The irony is glaring. Spaces intended to make life easier are instead placing an even greater strain on pregnant women.

So why is progress on family-friendly parking moving so slowly? Why are pregnant women still being overlooked? When former Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg was working at Google and became pregnant, the company’s car park lacked any spaces for pregnant women. Drawing on her lived experience, she raised the issue with Google’s male co-founders, and the policy was changed soon after. The problem: Google’s male leadership had never even considered the needs of pregnant women in the first place. That happens all too often. Similarly, in Westminster, it is often left to women Members of Parliament to draw attention to the problems that cause daily frustrations to women. I am confident that the Minister agrees that we must move to prioritise town centre parking for families and pregnant women, and accessibility for all.

Beyond that, I sincerely hope that the Minister agrees that we must also move towards a Parliament that proactively addresses these problems, rather than relying on us women to highlight them. Parking should be accessible to all—it provides a lifeline to our town centres, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley again for bringing this issue to the House.

4.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Furniss, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley (Sonia Kumar) for securing this important debate and for the powerful case that she made.

It is one of the great joys of being the Minister responsible for high streets and town centres that I get to attend these debates where people talk about their communities. It is always interesting to hear the commonalities, differences, and challenges they are facing, though I might say with a degree of mischief that it is not often that such debates inspire such coverage of all the nations and regions of the UK as we have today. That is a sign that my hon. Friend is in exactly the right space.



**Melanie Ward** (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I wonder whether the Minister recognises that as our shopping habits have changed so has the need for parking in town centres. In my biggest town of Kirkcaldy, we are blessed to be right on the coast: we could have beautiful sea views, housing, workspaces, and facilities to attract tourists, but instead we have dilapidated, unused car parks which are a true blight on our town centre and on our seafront. Redevelopment funding is badly needed so that our town can fulfil its potential and meet the needs of its residents today.

**Alex Norris:** That is a really important challenge. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley finished by saying that the issue is not peripheral, and that we need to address broader matters in terms of parking, town centre vibrancy and having a more planned approach to what the future could look like. Doubtless, there would need to be support from the Government of the day, and that message was heard very clearly.

My hon. Friend made an important point, similar to the one that my hon. Friend the Member for Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy (Melanie Ward) just made, about the reasons for the decline in our high streets and town centres—those obvious changing patterns of behaviour. Colleagues could easily order a book, probably several, in the time I am speaking—I am sure they would not—and that is different and is not going to go away.

Times have been hard for people. Austerity has been a really difficult period for our communities and people are still struggling with the money in their pockets. All that contributes to challenges, so it behoves us to try to drive footfall and to use any levers we have to do so. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley said, parking is an important one. In her contribution, the voices of her constituents, be they businesses, long-term residents, students or leisure centre users, came into this Chamber. I hope they see that their views are being echoed, expressed and taken seriously in this place.

I want to cover some of the points that my hon. Friend made, and I do not want to miss out the final contribution, from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle). Like others, I have seen the coverage of Dudley council's decision to scrap two hours of free parking, and I recognise the pain, the impact on motorists and the disappointment for residents and visitors that that has caused. I have seen the rally and I was sad to hear from my hon. Friend that there is a sense that the consultation was not done properly because that is an important part of conducting a process properly, even if the results are disappointing.

Parking, together with effective public transport and decent active travel, is essential to the resilience of our towns and cities. However, as has been said, the provision of accessible and affordable parking is particularly important outside the major metropolitan cities and in rural communities. Where public transport is limited, people need their cars—as my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Dr Sullivan) said.

**Victoria Collins** (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): In one of my major towns, Harpenden, I have had a lot of businesses, such as Threads and Oui, which have said that parking charges are changing and they are worried. The Minister mentioned services such as parking and transport. Is it not sad that after 14 years of Conservative

Government, and cuts and cuts to local councils, local authorities have been forced to make some of these difficult decisions? It is now time for us to empower local authorities to support businesses and high streets and to invest in our communities to ensure that they thrive.

**Alex Norris:** I absolutely agree. It is at the heart of this Government's approach to give communities tools to change places, and I will go through some of those at the end. There is a financial aspect to that, but there also a power aspect about shaping the things that shape the community. The debate gets to the heart of that, because parking is one of the major levers that a community has. The important point is that it is the community's lever. Yes, it is held by the local authority, but it is the community's lever.

Fundamentally, responsibility for parking provision in town centres rests with the relevant local authority under the Traffic Management Act 2004. The accompanying statutory guidance clearly sets out that parking policies have to be proportionate and have to support town centre prosperity, and that it is for local authorities to decide how parking should support that—whether it should be free, whether it should be tarified and for how long. Local authorities are best placed to do that, through their local transport plans and their local insight. They have to find a balance between residents, local businesses, those who live and work in an amenity and of course access for emergency services. Under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, local authorities can set their own parking tariffs. I think almost everybody will at some point set tariffs, certainly in a busy area, but they must be proportionate and should not be set at unreasonable levels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley emphasised that the point of local parking policies is not to be revenue raisers or indeed cash cows. How a surplus is spent is prescribed under section 55 of the 1984 Act, which requires any surplus raised from parking schemes to go back into local authority-funded transport or environmental schemes—back into communities, as my hon. Friend said. Colleagues need to keep a discerning eye on that to ensure that that is really taking place, and that, crucially, communities have a voice. I and other colleagues in the Chamber have been council members. I remember wrestling with the problem of how to create that convection in Nottingham. We do not want people to come to a town centre and park there all day for work and then go home again and not contribute to the local economy. We want a turnover, but we want incentivisation as well.

Colleagues have talked about the effectiveness of providing a free hour in pulling people through. There are very good examples of where that has worked. The challenge for me and for local authority colleagues who are listening to this debate is that, yes, this is a local authority function, but local authorities are their community. All our local authorities should ensure that their policies reflect the wishes and interests of the local community and that they are getting the public into the conversation—I was challenged to do this when I was a member of my local authority and I challenge mine to do so now.

Local authorities must also get business into that conversation. I was surprised to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley that local businesses clearly do not feel that that has happened.

**John Slinger** (Rugby) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for visiting Rugby and having a walk around. One bit of the town that we did not reach was Elliott's Field, which is an out-of-town shopping centre. Does he agree that those out-of-town shopping centres compete with town centres, not least because they can attract anchor clients, but also because they can offer free parking?

Rugby borough council—I must declare an interest as I am still a councillor—is thinking very carefully about innovative measures that it can take, whether that is free parking, which was offered in some car parks in December, or making rapid decisions on opening one particular council-owned car park when the theatre was showing a production. Is there anything else that central Government can do to help councils achieve this difficult balance?

**Alex Norris:** That is a really important intervention. I wonder whether, looking back on some of those decisions on out-of-town retail, communities would make the same decisions now as they did at the time. It is clear from my hon. Friend's intervention that parking is a driving factor in success. To some degree the public are telling us what they want to see and we really ought to listen to them. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley talked about broader support, particularly around vacancy. I encourage colleagues to support their local authorities in promoting the new high street rental auctions to bring those vacant units back into use.

I also point to our work on safety in town centres. If we are driving footfall, people will only come, or come a second time, if they feel that they are safe. Footfall alone promotes community safety because energy and people being present deter crime and antisocial behaviour. Nevertheless, our commitment to 13,000 more police and police community support officers will have town centres at its heart, so there is that visible presence and our town centres are places where people feel safe to park their cars and shop.

I want to address the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East about parent and child parking bays. There is no current legislative

requirement in this space. I am conscious that my hon. Friend has a ten-minute rule Bill designed to change this. In the interests, as she says, of challenging colleagues—particularly male colleagues—to come up with solutions, there is a possible workaround solution using the current legislative framework. Authorities can make parking provisions for specific road users, whether residents or blue badge users—we have many examples in our own communities. Under current rules, it would be feasible for a local authority to make specific on-street bays permit holder only, and to include a permanent identifier on that sign—again, we see those in our resident schemes and in our communities—but then issue those permits only to pregnant women or parents with children. Authorities would have to justify reserving those spaces—I think my hon. Friend probably did that for them—and find a decent way to publicise where those bays are located. I expect it would probably be about those being in the right place. That is something that colleagues can raise with local authorities. It is a bit of a workaround, but in the spirit of meeting her challenge to be being solutions focused, it would be one option. I thank her for her contribution.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley again for securing this important debate. She set out clearly some of the challenges that face our town centres. At the heart of it comes footfall, and at the heart of footfall is that lever of available and affordable parking facilities. Local authorities have leadership, responsibility and stewardship of local transport plans, but fundamentally that is for the community, and should be something that reflects the needs of local residents and local businesses. Clearly, that is not happening here, and that is why my hon. Friend had to take the significant step of bringing this from the high street in Dudley all the way to Parliament. She was right to do so. It is hugely important that the communities in Dudley, Kirkcaldy, Ilford, Bolton, Southend, and all the other places we have heard from today, are heard. The subject is clearly important throughout the country and I am grateful to colleagues for raising it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Adoptive Parents: Financial Support

4.30 pm

**Lisa Smart** (Hazel Grove) (LD): I beg to move,

That the House has considered the matter of financial support for adoptive parents.

It is a pleasure to lead this debate and to have you in the Chair, Ms Furniss. Adoption is one of the most selfless acts that a person or family can undertake. It provides children with the opportunity to thrive in a permanent loving home, often completing a family, as I have seen myself in my role as a proud auntie. Despite the immeasurable value that adoption offers to those children, their families and society, financial barriers prevent many prospective adopters from stepping forward. Today, I wish to highlight the case of Kirsty, a constituent of mine from Marple. Her case exposes a significant gap in the financial support system that discourages self-employed individuals from adopting.

Kirsty is a self-employed mother who dreamed of expanding her family. After a year of trying to conceive a second child, she and her husband decided to explore adoption. Their first son, Charlie, a bright-eyed four-year-old with an unshakeable love for trains, often talked about how much he wanted a little sibling to be his assistant train driver. For Kirsty and her family, opening their hearts and home to a child via adoption was the best option.

Just as Kirsty began to embrace that vision for her family's future, a close friend, also self-employed and in the process of adopting, informed her that she was not entitled to the same financial support as others through statutory adoption pay. Ever since, her plans have been thrown into doubt. Unlike biological parents, who qualify for maternity allowance, or employed adopters, who are eligible for statutory adoption pay, self-employed adopters like Kirsty fall into a financial support void.

Although statutory guidance allows local authorities to make discretionary means-tested payments equivalent to those allowances, such support is not guaranteed and local authorities have no legal duty to provide it. A freedom of information request by the charity Home for Good revealed that 34% of local authorities lack any policy for providing that financial support. Even worse, 90% of self-employed adopters surveyed in 2022 by the all-party parliamentary group on adoption and permanence reported that their social worker never advised them about the possibility of receiving the discretionary payments.

Many of those in Kirsty's situation cannot take the financial risk of adopting a child without assured support, and she is not alone. The gap creates a stark disparity between those who are employed and the self-employed—a barrier for many who might otherwise give a child a stable and loving home. The consequences of that lack of support are far-reaching. Having often faced abuse or neglect, adopted children need time and care to settle into their new families; as a result, adoptive parents are often advised to take up to a year off work to ensure proper bonding and support. Where does this leave those who are self-employed? Without financial support, they face impossible choices: continuing to work and sacrificing the vital time they need to build a relationship with their child; sacrificing their careers and their financial stability; or abandoning their adoption plans altogether. For many, the only realistic option is the latter.

Governments of different shades have often recognised the importance of building a relationship with an adopted child, but for too long they have insisted that self-employed adopters should have to rely on unreliable discretionary payments. In November, I asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to extend statutory adoption pay to the self-employed, or to introduce an equivalent benefit. Although the Minister's response expressed support for adoptive parents, it pointed yet again to a flawed system of discretionary payments.

In December, I called on the Government to allocate time to debate how we can support people like Kirsty, and to do that in Government time—sadly, so far, to no avail. Just before Christmas, I tabled an amendment to the Employment Rights Bill—new clause 46—which would allow the self-employed to claim statutory adoption pay. In a letter to me last week a Minister—not the Minister present—committed again to reviewing the parental leave system, agreeing that improvements need to be made. As the review begins, I urge Departments across Government to prioritise financial support for self-employed adopters.

The financial case for supporting adoptive parents is compelling. Research by the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies UK shows that in 2021 adoption saved the UK economy £4.2 billion through improvements in children's health, and in their education and employment prospects, compared with the outcomes for children who remained in care or other placements. Local councils saved £3.6 billion, while the NHS and wider economy benefited by £34 million and £541 million respectively.

The CVAA has also found that at least £1.3 million-worth of value is created when a child is adopted, underscoring the societal and economic benefits of increasing adoption numbers. Yet the number of adoptions has halved since a peak in 2015, even as the number of looked-after children has risen by 25%. Removing financial barriers and guaranteeing financial support, and empowering those who are self-employed to step forward for adoption, could reverse this troubling trend.

The case for further financial support for adoptive parents to address the distinct challenges they face is equally compelling. Rates of depression and anxiety are as high as 32% among those who adopt. Unlike biological parents, adoptive parents often have to contend with navigating their child's complex trauma or attachment issues, and with a long and arduous adoption process. These challenges can be compounded by the grief and loss that many adoptive parents can feel if they have experienced infertility or failed attempts to conceive.

Adoption can also place strain on relationships. While divorce rates among adoptive parents are not disproportionate, the difficulties of parenting children with complex needs, alongside the emotional toll of the adoption process, can push couples to their limits. Financial instability worsens those challenges, threatening the family cohesion of those who are brave and selfless enough to adopt.

Finally, the adoption process in the UK is long and complex, sometimes taking years from the initial application to the final court approval. Prospective parents are subject to background checks, references, intense assessment, and adoption panel scrutiny before they can even find a match. Although this journey is, of course, necessary to ensure the best outcomes for children, it places immense stress on prospective adopters. I urge the Minister and

[Lisa Smart]

the various Departments involved to explore ways to provide financial support that acknowledges and mitigates the unique pressures on adoptive parents, self-employed or otherwise. I hope that will play a significant part in the upcoming review of parental leave.

Adoptive parents deserve robust financial support. Addressing this issue is not only a matter of fairness but a means of unlocking the full potential of adoption. Ministers across Government, and the various Departments involved, have the opportunity to lead the way by extending statutory adoption pay to self-employed adopters, or by implementing an equivalent benefit. We should not allow financial barriers to stand in the way of creating loving families and providing children with the stability they so desperately need and undoubtedly deserve. The Government could and should act decisively to ensure that adoption remains a viable and supported choice for all prospective parents.

4.39 pm

**Robin Swann** (South Antrim) (UUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Furniss. I thank the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) for bringing a very important topic to the House's attention. It is important that we engage with adoptive parents, and prospective adoptive parents, to hear their experiences of adopting a child, because only through listening can we know the real-life challenges they face. The hon. Member gave a prime example in her opening comments regarding the financial pressures that deter couples and individuals from coming forward to adopt children.

As a Minister in Northern Ireland, I put through the Adoption and Children Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. Until that point, Northern Ireland had been bound by wholly inadequate and outdated legislation that had not been updated for three decades—it actually predated devolution. The 2022 Act updated the broad adoption frameworks and also had some tangible benefits, such as the introduction of a legal duty so that adopters in Northern Ireland can now access more support through our social services.

The issue raised in this debate is one step—and only one step—that the UK Government could take to bring forward immediate action to improve support for some of our adoptive parents: broadening statutory adoption leave and pay to self-employed parents in the same way that the maternity allowance is available for self-employed parents. This is important because the latest statistics show that, as at 31 March 2024, we had 3,999 children and young people in care in Northern Ireland. That is the highest number recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. Of those children in care, 28% had been looked after for less than a year but 29% had been looked after for more than five years.

I believe in anything we can do to increase the number of people who want to adopt children, take them out of our care systems and give them the loving, caring home that is often experienced by those who come out of care into adoption. Last year, only 97 children were adopted from care in Northern Ireland, and 48% of them were adopted by couples in their 40s. Taking this step could encourage a wider spectrum of people to come forward. I am not saying this in a derogatory way, but those

couples in their 40s may be more financially secure at that point in their life, and see that as the point at which they can adopt. Government support would allow younger couples, including those who are self-employed, and even those who work from home, to come forward and take up the gift that is the ability to adopt a child out of care. That is why I encourage the Government to do all they can to support the issue that has been brought to the House in this debate.

4.43 pm

**Steve Darling** (Torbay) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Furniss. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) on securing this really important debate.

I highlight to the Minister the adoption support fund; I would be grateful if he could talk about any long-term plans the Government may have to bake that into Government proposals, because currently it is a hand-to-mouth existence. A week after I got elected, a resident raised with me their concerns. I wrote to the Minister on this issue some months ago, but I wonder whether the Government's thoughts on the matter have changed.

I speak as somebody who was myself adopted into a very loving family in the 1970s, with Eric and Penny. Eric was self-employed. He was not a toolmaker; he was a lorry driver—a haulage contractor if we were trying to be social climbers. The reality is that it was a really loving family. Of course, as a self-employed haulage contractor, Eric would have benefited from the proposals we heard about from my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove.

The world of adoption and fostering has changed massively. The babe in arms is often not what one gets through adoption or fostering, but children who have had complex, challenging lives and will try to test parents. I have a good friend in Torquay whose child tests him regularly. The child believes that daddy is a monster because his previous daddy was, sadly, a monster to him. It is really challenging for that adoptive family to face that.

I also welcome the comments about Home for Good, which is a service that I brought in to Torbay when I was leader of the local authority. It looks at driving adoption through those with faith and using churches to support those with faith. There is a significant need out there.

Even for purely cynical reasons, I encourage the Minister to reflect on how important it is to support self-employed people so that we enhance the pool, as one only needs to look at the cost of social care to councils up and down the country when a foster placement or adoption—as quite often fostering does turn into adoption—cannot be found. The private sector is sadly making significant profits from that.

Although I am pleased that the Government are making progress in those areas, the best way to make progress is to look at places such as Leeds, which I visited once upon a time, and now also Torbay, becoming UNICEF child friendly communities. That will drive a positive culture of engagement and support for our young people throughout the United Kingdom. I hope that the Minister will look kindly on the proposals from my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove.

4.47 pm

**Danny Kruger** (East Wiltshire) (Con): This is a very important topic, as hon. Members have acknowledged. I was particularly struck by the specific impact of the financial regime that adopting parents face, as the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) described in the case of her constituent Kirsty. I was also struck by her general points, which were echoed by the hon. Member for Torbay (Steve Darling), about the challenges faced by adoptive parents, including the challenges that their children continue to endure having joined their family, as well as those of the adoptive family and their birth children.

As hon. Members spoke, I was reflecting on how much more we now know about the early development of children. I compare the experience of 50 years ago, when my parents adopted my sister, with the experience that my sister has had adopting her two young sons, and the difference is pretty stark. My sister simply arrived and that was that; the expectation was that all was now well and no further support was required. Indeed, I am glad to say that things did turn out very well for my sister. The support that has been offered to her as an adoptive parent, however, is far greater and more sympathetic, and shows much greater understanding of the challenges around child development than that of a generation or two ago.

I will briefly pay tribute to the former Government who, over the last 10 or 15 years, introduced some quite significant improvements to the system that adoptive parents face. David Cameron and Michael Gove both made it a priority to ensure that the regime around adoption was improved. I have just read a leader in *The Spectator* praising the last Government's performance on adoption—I cannot think that that was anything to do with the editor of that magazine—but Michael Gove does deserve credit for the work that was done, such as the introduction of adoption leave; the pupil premium and the additional pupil premium that are available for adopted children; and the priority in school admissions.

I pay tribute to my former colleague, David Johnston, the Children's Minister in the last Parliament, and those who introduced the adoption support fund that the hon. Member for Torbay mentioned. It is fair to ask why additional support is needed for adoptive families and adopted children. One could argue—and I think we should—that all families need support and help bringing up children.

As we have heard from hon. Members, however, a young child almost always reaches the destination of adoption after a long journey of disruption. It is wonderful that a settled life is now available to that child, but the challenge is not over when they arrive in their new family. We all know from experiences in our constituencies how much adoptive families have to work to ensure that their children are properly supported.

It is worth noting something that I am afraid still somewhat applies, despite the reforms I mentioned: while there is an expectation that fostering families will need ongoing support after the placement of the child, in the case of adoption, the expectation remains—as with a new child born into a family—that the child is almost exclusively the responsibility of the adoptive parents and support from the outside is not necessary. However, it is necessary.

I am grateful to be able to add my voice to what we have heard about the enormous benefits that adoptive parents bring to our society as a whole by, frankly, rescuing many children who faced years of potential neglect or abuse if they remained where they were, or simply faced inadequate care and upbringing if they remained in the care system. I think of former colleagues of mine who, 25 years ago, adopted quadruplet boys aged two who had been removed from a disgraceful, appallingly abusive family. Although it was very challenging for the family and the four boys over their childhood, they have all grown up well and are doing well. Their parents are rightly proud of them. I think of the likely trajectory that those children would have been on if that family had not stepped forward to look after them—four boys who experienced extreme abuse in their early years—and the cost that would have been imposed on our society, both financial and social.

A topic that is very much on our minds at the moment is the tragedy of grooming gangs. While it is complex and every case is different, what many of the cases had in common was the fact that the girls who were victims of those crimes had been in care. The clear obligation on us as a society—as the last Government and this one have both asserted—is to have more children leaving the care system and gaining the stability and support of a loving family. That means more fostering—we all need to do more to promote fostering opportunities and help people to become foster parents—and more adopting, as we have been discussing, as well as other ways we can support children to grow up in stable families. I support initiatives such as fostering for adoption, as well as Home for Good, which is a tremendous project.

I acknowledge the work of kinship carers, who are an important part of the economy of care. Thanks largely to David Johnston in the last Parliament, they can get significantly more support, but we need to go further to ensure that they too can access support around statutory pay and parental leave.

As the hon. Member for Hazel Grove said, there is clearly an anomaly for adoptive parents, and particularly for self-employed parents, who cannot get statutory adoption pay. Unlike self-employed birth parents, they do not get the equivalent of maternity pay. As she said, there are opportunities for local authorities to provide discretionary support, but most people are unaware of that, and it is, indeed, discretionary. I am not sure that it should not be discretionary—there is an important debate to be had about the degree to which we ringfence finance and impose obligations on local authorities—but there clearly needs to be far greater awareness among the public of the support available, and greater encouragement for local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities to adoptive parents.

We need a better funding arrangement for local government so that it can take on board and fulfil its social responsibilities. Most of all, we must recognise that families are the essential welfare system in our society. The more we can do to ensure that they can fulfil that responsibility and do that important work for children who desperately need the love of a supportive family, the better. I acknowledge that the Government want to do that, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister will do in the future.

4.56 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Andrew Western):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Furniss. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) on securing this important debate. I thank all who have taken part in the discussion for their thoughtful and insightful comments.

As the hon. Lady said, I recently received a written question from her about this issue, and I commend her for her continued support and campaigning in this crucial area. Becoming an adoptive parent is, of course, rewarding, but it is without doubt challenging too. It is admirable when anybody steps up to that role, let alone those who do so while in work. The Government do not underestimate the life-changing difference that adoptive parents up and down the country make every single day.

Breaking down barriers to opportunity is one of this Government's key missions for the country. That is why we are committed to doing everything we can to ensure employed parents can balance their work and home lives. Our plan to make work pay will ensure there is more flexibility and support for working families, and our reforms to get Britain working include transforming employment support so that people with specific barriers to work, such as parents, receive personalised help to overcome the particular hurdles they face. That not only supports our No. 1 mission—to drive growth in every corner of the country—but creates a cycle of opportunity. People cannot fulfil their potential if they are struggling to afford life's essentials, but good work brings security and dignity. That is why good work will always be the foundation of our approach to tackling poverty and supporting families.

Children cannot fulfil their potential if they grow up in poverty in any familial setting, and we cannot fulfil our potential as a country if the next generation is held back. That is why we have already started the urgent work needed to get the child poverty taskforce up and running. It is working to publish a comprehensive and ambitious child poverty strategy that will consider all children across the United Kingdom, whether in care, adopted or living with birth parents.

It is worth reiterating that maternity payments such as statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance are intended to help protect the health and wellbeing of women and their babies, rather than to assist with the costs associated with a new child. I appreciate that the hon. Lady is specifically raising the issue of adoptive parents. When a family welcomes a new child into their world, it is only right that they have the time to bond—a point that the hon. Lady made eloquently in introducing the debate, and that all hon. Members reiterated.

It was genuinely important to hear about Kirsty's experience of thinking about adopting a second child—an "assistant train driver". She is one of the many people who are having to make very difficult choices. I have constituents in a similar position, and it is incredibly important that we hear such testimony when considering these issues.

The hon. Lady also highlighted that there is no guarantee on the means-tested local authority payments, as was reiterated by the shadow Minister, and that many councils do not have policies for that, before going on to set out that adoption saves the economy £4.2 billion

a year. She, like myself, is a former senior local authority leader in Greater Manchester. Having been deputy leader of Stockport council, she knows not only of the benefits of adoption for education and health, but of the many pressures within the local authority care system and the fact that secure, permanent placements are the best thing for the child. That support is priceless, and I think we are all agreed on that today.

The hon. Lady went on to say that new adoptive parents need to take time off to enable a child to settle in their new home. I absolutely agree. There are many complex needs that adoptive parents may face in settling their new child in, and balancing that with their employment needs, whether they are self-employed or in mainstream employment, poses many issues. I agree that improvements need to be made to the parental system. If she will bear with me, I will make a specific promise to her on how we can best move this forward.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (Robin Swann) also highlighted his local government experience. It is important to draw that out because we have all been corporate parents. We understand the importance of the role played both by the care system and by foster carers, kinship carers, and especially adoptive parents making a decision to permanently offer a home, love and support to a young person. He set out some of the specific challenges faced in Northern Ireland, for which I am grateful. He is right to highlight the spiralling statistics for children in care. As I just mentioned, it is critical to anybody with local government experience that sustainability and feasibility of adoption for all is imperative. I am very much aware of the points coming out in this debate, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Steve Darling), the spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, asked a specific question on the adoption support fund. He is, as ever, entirely right to raise this very reasonable question because current funding is, I think, only set until April 2025. If I may, I will write to the Department for Education directly and share the response I receive. I do not want to speak on behalf of another Department today, in case the information I provide turns out to be inaccurate, but I will follow up with the hon. Gentleman directly on that.

The hon. Gentleman also rightly set out the challenge of addressing the stereotypical perception of adoption as receiving a babe in arms. More often than not, people could be opening up their home and family to older children, those with very complex needs, or those who have experienced significant trauma. That requires time off too. Time off is required not just for a newborn child who needs a parent with them for obvious reasons throughout the day, but potentially for an older child's significant, complex needs. The hon. Gentleman's point reflects the real-world circumstances that many adoptive parents face.

The shadow Minister set out many of the advances that have been made over the past 14 years in this space, and I fully acknowledge those; but that prompts the question how, despite those advances, we have ended up in this position. I accept that we moved forward by introducing, as he said, automatic pupil premium allocation, the adoption support fund, adoption leave and so on. The challenge we face is how we can collectively encourage people to come forward as adopters, kinship carers and foster carers. As a Government, we have a responsibility

to make that process as easy as possible. When we look at the outcomes of children who grow up in what one might consider traditional care settings—that is, a children’s home—versus the outcomes of children who grow up in a more traditional family unit, whether adoptive or foster care, or with birth parents, the statistics are stark. If we look at the number of care leavers in the prison system, for instance, or the level of qualifications, some of the figures are incredibly concerning. The shadow Minister’s point was very well made.

Turning back to my substantive comments, we want to ensure that parental leave is supporting all working families as well as possible, so the Government have committed to a review of the parental leave system and work is already under way on planning for that review.

Enabling parents to take time off work not only allows for bonding time but ensures that they are able to give a child the care that they need. In the case of adoption, that ability to connect and care, as we have just discussed, is essential in terms of securing the permanence of any adoption placement. For all those reasons, employed adoptive parents have broadly the same rights and protections as birth parents, in that statutory adoption leave is a day one right, but of course there is the anomaly that we are speaking about today.

I therefore want to give the hon. Member for Hazel Grove a clear assurance that I will write in to that parental leave review and make sure that what we have discussed today is fed into that process, because whatever our views on the rights and wrongs of this, I think that we can all accept that there is a gap, and that we all want as many people as possible to be able to come forward as carers. The gap is potentially a barrier to that for some people, not least because we have that means-tested, not especially well advertised, not-brilliant-levels-of-uptake current system, which I think we would all want looked at.

In the meantime, where adopters do not qualify for that statutory payment they have the local authority option, but I would like to highlight some of the wider support, as the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for East Wiltshire, did in his contribution. There is not only advice, information and counselling, but means-tested support. Potentially, on top of that, there is support for new parents—any new parents—in terms of potential eligibility for universal credit, child benefit, and the Sure Start maternity grant, all of which can help all families with the cost of raising children, especially those in need of extra support.

I think I will leave it there, Ms Furness, with just a final thank you to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove for calling this debate. We recognise the contributions of self-employed people, who are a key part of our economy, and we appreciate the valuable difference that adopters make. Therefore, it is only right that we have taken the time today—I am pleased to have had the chance—to consider how we support the remarkable people who take on both roles at the same time.

I reiterate that I will write to the Department for Business and Trade about the issues that have been raised in this debate, and about how the debate can feed into the review that I mentioned earlier, because it is crucial that we accept that there is an anomaly in the system. I will, obviously, send the hon. the hon. Member for Hazel Grove a copy of my correspondence.

5.7 pm

**Lisa Smart:** I am really grateful to all Members who have taken part in this debate. The hon. Member for South Antrim (Robin Swann) spoke about his experience as a Minister in Northern Ireland, and it is really good to have his support. He is absolutely right to point out the numbers of children that we are talking about in the different parts of the UK, and how we can enable more brilliant future parents to adopt, and drive up those adoption rates.

I want to thank Penny and Eric, the mum and dad of my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Steve Darling), who adopted him in the 1970s. My hon. Friend was absolutely right to talk about the adoption support fund, which I know is hugely valuable to many families—to ask about its future security, to ask for future clarity on what is coming down the track, and to talk about the different challenges faced by adopters and point out that adoption is not about a stereotypical “babe in arms” found under a bush somewhere.

A number of Members—including both the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger), and my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay—spoke about the role that local councils, and the funding of local councils, play in some of the decision making that can happen in this area. The Minister rightly mentioned my previous life as a member of a local authority. One of the jobs that a councillor takes most seriously is that corporate parenting role—that key role of keeping the most vulnerable children safe. On local authority finances, lots of people in this place talk about the importance of clarity and proper funding—indeed, the Opposition spokesperson talked about funding local authorities and doing that properly—and I think that, when we are talking about some of the most important jobs of councils, we are indeed talking about children in care, who are the most vulnerable in our society.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Steve Darling) talked about the cost to councils, and the cost of children’s waiting a very long time for their adoption to come through. The longer they wait, the more it costs both them as individuals and councils in terms of ongoing care. The Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger), talked about how our understanding of early childhood development has developed. He also talked about somebody who used to work in this place who knows quite a lot about adoption issues, and he was right to do so because we can work cross-party to fix such anomalies. I am grateful for his remarks.

The hon. Gentleman talked about a family of four boys, and that is exactly the sort of story we need to have in our minds. It was about the impact of a good, loving, warm and secure home for the boys, and how their lives might well have been different had they not had that. I am grateful to him for that, as well as for talking about kinship carers, which are being looked at in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill. My party looks forward to scrutinising and improving some of the Bill in that regard. I welcome the Minister’s comments, that he accepts that we are today talking about an anomaly, and especially his comments on the action he has undertaken to take. It is good that the Government

*[Lisa Smart]*

are committed to reviewing parental leave, and I hope that is the mechanism through which we can correct the anomaly.

We absolutely need to encourage more people into fostering, adoption and kinship care, and we need to remove any barriers that may stop people from being able to take up those opportunities. I am really grateful to everyone who has taken part today. It is really good to have Government support for looking at this subject,

and I really look forward to where this goes, because we need to enable as many brilliant future parents as we possibly can to take up this opportunity and complete their family.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the matter of financial support for adoptive parents.

5.12 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Tuesday 14 January 2025

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### UK Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty):** My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Dave Robertson MP) has been appointed as a full member of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in place of my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (John Slinger MP).

[HCWS364]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Legislative Proposals to Counter Ransomware

**The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis):** Today the Government are launching a public consultation on proposed legislative measures to combat the threat of ransomware. We want to protect UK businesses from the most harmful cyber-crime facing the UK and to facilitate growth.

These measures will hit ransomware criminals in their wallets, cutting off their funding; and improve reporting of these cyber incidents, to shine a light on this criminal world and provide law enforcement with the information they need to pursue criminals.

The National Crime Agency assesses ransomware as the greatest serious and organised cyber-crime threat, the largest cyber-security threat, and a risk to the UK's national security. Ransomware incidents are continuing an upward trend.

In 2023, incidents of ransomware attacks reported to the Information Commissioner's Office reached their highest level since 2019, and private sector reporting to the National Crime Agency indicates that the number of UK victims appearing on ransomware data leak sites has doubled since 2022. This is reflected globally, with 2023 resulting in the highest financial yield for ransomware criminals so far, with an industry estimate of over \$1 billion.

Ransomware criminals ruin lives, wreck businesses and damage the UK economy. The impacts of ransomware—financial, reputational, psychological and social—can be wide-ranging, as seen in recent incidents, such as those affecting Synnovis, the supplier of services to the NHS across London; the British Library; Capita; and Royal Mail.

It is this significant risk of harm that warrants focused and specific intervention to reduce the impact of ransomware across the UK.

We are seeking to build on existing resilience and disruption strategies, including sanctions, where the UK has already sanctioned 36 ransomware criminals, and our work with the international Counter Ransomware Initiative, where the UK led a commitment from 48 countries and two international organisations that their Governments would not pay ransoms.

The Home Office has developed three world-leading tailored legislative proposals for consultation—they reflect the seriousness of the threat and the need for transformative action. The measures will be consistent and align with the proposals in the forthcoming cyber-security and resilience Bill.

The three measures are:

A targeted ban on ransomware payments for the public sector and critical national infrastructure—making the essential services the country relies on the most unattractive targets for ransomware criminals;

A ransomware payment prevention regime—to increase transparency of criminal demands, and provide victims not covered by the ban with advice and guidance before they decide how to respond; and

A mandatory reporting regime for all ransomware incidents—bringing ransomware out of the shadows and maximising information for law enforcement on criminal activity.

The targeted ban will protect the systems that the UK relies on every day for our most critical and essential services. We are making a strong statement to these criminals that there is no financial gain in disrupting the core of our economy.

The consultation explores whether the payment prevention regime should be economy wide or operate via a threshold, with the potential exclusion of individuals and/or small businesses. Such a regime would provide the Government with the ability to block payments and allow law enforcement greater oversight of ransomware, supporting disruptive operations such as the recent success of Operation CRONOS, the NCA-led global collaboration to disrupt Lockbit, one of the most prolific ransomware groups in the world.

For those ransomware incidents that do not result in a payment, we are proposing to introduce a mandatory ransomware incident reporting regime. This could include a threshold-based mandatory reporting requirement for suspected victims of ransomware, with the potential exclusion of individuals and/or small businesses. Our aim is to build the Government and law enforcement's understanding of the threat landscape and allow us to provide greater levels of support and guidance to victims.

The consultation seeks public input on key issues, including: the extent to which supply chains should be captured in the targeted ban; what support the Government can provide to victims, such as improved guidance; the appropriateness of paying ransoms in any circumstances; and the extent to which information should be shared with authorities. These world-leading measures reflect the new Government's commitment to tackling ransomware and making the UK a less attractive target for such attacks globally.

The consultation will run for 12 weeks, and the Government will publish their response in due course. Copies of the consultation document and the related options assessment will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and made available on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

[HCWS365]

## TRANSPORT

### Changes to International Maritime Law

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Kane):** I am making this statement to record updates to maritime legislation as a result of changes to international law. This fulfils a commitment made to Parliament to make such a statement. The legislative changes came into force on 1 January 2025.

Some domestic maritime secondary legislation includes ambulatory reference provision to give direct effect in UK law to certain amendments to international obligations. This means that where the legislation refers to a requirement of an international instrument, this reference will be ambulatory; in other words, it is a reference to the most up to date version of that requirement. This approach ensures so far as possible that the UK keeps up to date with its international maritime obligations.

Amendments have been made to two maritime codes which are made mandatory by the international convention for the safety of life at sea, 1974 (SOLAS), which is the main international instrument governing maritime safety: the International Maritime Solid Bulk Cargoes (IMSBC) Code and the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code. Two sea areas identified in the international convention for the prevention of pollution from ships, 1973 (MARPOL), which are subject to enhanced pollution protection requirements, have been established under the agreed procedure in MARPOL.

The IMSBC code is made mandatory by chapter VI of SOLAS and is implemented in the UK by the Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Cargoes) Regulations 2024 (SI No. 2024/637) (the “Carriage of Cargoes Regulations”). The IMSBC code provides the international regulatory framework for the safe loading, stowage and shipment of solid bulk cargoes other than grain, and includes mandatory carriage requirements specific to each type of solid bulk cargo covered by the code.

To remain up to date and fit for purpose, the IMSBC code is amended in the International Maritime Organization and a new edition adopted every two years. Changes to the IMSBC code text are proposed to, and considered by, the IMO’s Sub-Committee on the Carriage of Cargoes and Containers with participants including member states and industry bodies. The latest edition of the code was adopted by IMO resolution MSC.539(107) and became mandatory internationally on 1 January 2025 when, by way of the ambulatory reference provision in the Carriage of Cargoes Regulations, it also became mandatory in the UK. It includes carriage requirements for a number of new solid bulk cargoes in order to permit and facilitate their safe transport by sea, and amendments to some existing cargo schedules.

The IMDG code is made mandatory at the international level by chapter VII of SOLAS, and also by annex III of MARPOL. The IMDG code is implemented in the UK

by the Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Harmful Substances) (Amendment) Regulations 2024 (SI No. 2024/636) (the “Dangerous Goods Regulations”). The IMDG code provides the international regulatory framework for the carriage of dangerous goods and marine pollutants by sea. It makes mandatory provision for the classification, notification, packaging, labelling, stowage and segregation of dangerous goods to enable their safe transport by sea.

In order to keep it up to date and harmonised with the requirements for the carriage of dangerous goods in other modes of transport, the IMDG code is updated in the IMO every two years. The latest edition of the code was adopted by IMO resolution MSC.556(108). It applies on a voluntary basis from 1 January 2025 and will become mandatory internationally on 1 January 2026 when, by way of the ambulatory reference provision in the Dangerous Goods Regulations, it will also become mandatory in the UK. It includes clarifications on the requirements for marine pollutants, new provisions for electric vehicles and provisions for cargo tracking devices.

Further amendments to MARPOL will come into force in the UK by way of the ambulatory reference provisions in the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Oil Pollution) Regulations 2019 (SI 2019/42) (“the Oil Pollution Regulations”) and the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/621) (“the Garbage Regulations”). MARPOL contains mandatory requirements for the prevention and control of pollution from ships and identifies geographical areas, known as special areas, where sea traffic and the sensitive nature of the marine environment mean that additional control measures are required for the protection of that environment. Annex I of MARPOL, which makes provision for the prevention of pollution by oil from ships, and annex V of MARPOL, which makes provision for the prevention of pollution by garbage from ships, both include provisions defining the Red Sea as a special area. Annex I further defines the Gulf of Aden as a special area. Until now, these special areas were identified in MARPOL but had not been established as such. MARPOL contains provision to allow the IMO to establish the special areas identified in MARPOL. By resolutions MEPC.381(80) and MEPC.382(80), the IMO has determined that both special areas were established internationally on 1 January 2025. By way of the ambulatory reference provision in the Garbage Regulations, and also by way of specific provision in the Oil Pollution Regulations which replicates the MARPOL procedure, these special areas were also established for the purposes of UK legislation on that date.

Further information and guidance on all amendments referred to in this statement has been published by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and is available on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

[HCWS363]

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