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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 18 June 2025

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Banning Conversion Practices

1. **David Burton-Sampson** (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): What steps she is taking to ban conversion practices. [904702]

14. **Jessica Toale** (Bournemouth West) (Lab): What steps she is taking to ban conversion practices. [904715]

15. **John Milne** (Horsham) (LD): When she plans to bring forward legislative proposals to ban conversion therapy. [904716]

The Minister for Equalities (Dame Nia Griffith): Let me be clear: conversion practices have no place in today's society, and this Government are committed to bringing forward trans-inclusive legislation to ban these outdated and abusive acts. This is a complex issue that we want to get absolutely right. We are working hard to publish later in this Session draft legislation that offers protection from these harmful practices while also preserving individuals' freedom to explore their identity with appropriate support.

David Burton-Sampson: Since the Supreme Court ruling, many trans people have felt discrimination and a loss of their rights despite still being protected under the Equality Act 2010. I am pleased to hear that the Government are bringing forward a trans-inclusive conversion therapy ban, but what else will the Minister do to ensure that trans people know they belong in our society and are valued?

Dame Nia Griffith: I can indeed assure my hon. Friend that our draft legislation on conversion practices will be trans-inclusive. It is crucial that trans people are safe, included, and protected from harm and discrimination. More widely, this Government are actively working on other manifesto commitments to strengthen services and protections for trans people, including ensuring that all trans people receive appropriate and high-quality healthcare, and equalising all strands of hate crime.

Jessica Toale: I recently met representatives of Trans Liberation Bournemouth, who shared with me their anxiety about the Supreme Court ruling—a ruling that has caused not only confusion in their otherwise supportive workplaces, but distressing incidents for biological women who do not conform to traditional gender norms. What

assurances can the Minister give my constituents that this Government are committed to ensuring that Bournemouth remains an open and welcoming place for our LGBT+ community?

Dame Nia Griffith: I will indeed give that assurance. Rightly, laws are in place to protect trans people from discrimination and harassment—that remains the case. To be clear, I am absolutely committed to delivering on our key manifesto commitments aimed at protecting LGBT+ individuals: a full, trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices, and our commitment to equalise all existing strands of hate crime. Dignity and respect for everyone runs through every sinew of this Government.

John Milne: Previous Governments have promised to bring forward legislation to ban conversion therapy, but it has not happened yet. Eris, one of my constituents in Horsham, tells me that recent headlines have created fear and uncertainty within the trans community, increasing their sense of isolation. Will the Minister show the LGBTQ community that they are not ill or something to be converted, and commit to action within the next 12 months?

Dame Nia Griffith: As we know, the previous Government repeatedly broke their promises to deliver on the issue of conversion practices and allowed the debate to become ever more toxic and divided. We are committed to bringing forward legislation to ban these abusive practices—that is a key manifesto commitment. We will be publishing our draft Bill later in this Session, and we want to work with Parliament to ensure that our legislation is robust and does not negatively impact legitimate support for those exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson. [*Interruption.*] Oh, sorry—I call Jim Shannon! How could I forget him?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Absolutely right, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister very much for her answers, but can she outline what support is in place for people of all faiths and none to receive counselling that is right and appropriate, helping them to find the answers that they all seek?

Dame Nia Griffith: As I have explained, we are absolutely committed to going forward with a ban on conversion practices, but we want to make sure that when we legislate, that legislation does not inhibit proper, genuine, supportive counselling and guidance as people explore their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): As Liberal Democrats, we have been concerned about the lack of a draft Bill on conversion practices, so I am relieved to hear what the Minister has said today. However, given the amount of fear and anxiety that there is among the trans community in this country, can she reassure the House that when the Bill comes forward, it will be UK-wide to overcome the Scottish Government's withdrawal of their proposals? Further, will the Government consider whether we need fresh legislation to deal with

all the issues in the Equality Act that have been raised by the Equality and Human Rights Commission's interim guidance and the Supreme Court judgment?

Dame Nia Griffith: There was a real range of questions there. We are bringing forward legislation that affects England and Wales, but I can assure the hon. Member that we are in talks with officials in the Scottish Parliament on that very issue. I also assure her that we will be bringing this legislation forward very soon, and that there will be a proper opportunity for that pre-legislative scrutiny, which I know she will want to take part in.

Educational Outcomes for Boys

2. **Lincoln Jopp** (Spelthorne) (Con): Whether she plans to take steps with Cabinet colleagues to develop a strategy to improve educational outcomes for boys.

[904703]

9. **Dr Luke Evans** (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): Whether she plans to take steps with Cabinet colleagues to develop a strategy to improve educational outcomes for boys.

[904710]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Bridget Phillipson): Attainment for boys is, on average, lower than for girls. This Government are determined to understand and address the drivers behind that. We are focused on driving educational excellence everywhere, for every child in every school, and my schools White Paper in the autumn will set out our vision for a system that delivers on excellence for everyone.

Lincoln Jopp: Recent research by the Centre for Social Justice showed that at key stage 1, key stage 2, GCSEs, A-levels and T-levels, boys are underperforming girls. We simply cannot allow half a generation not to be allowed to reach their full potential. As part of her approach, will the Secretary of State consider looking at whether boys might need to be taught somewhat differently from girls?

Bridget Phillipson: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's interest in this area and the constructive way in which he is approaching an important topic. I, too, have looked at the research from the Centre for Social Justice, which provides some important pointers. Through the schools White Paper, we will consider all the ways we can better support boys and young men as one group. We know that the performance of free school meals-eligible white British boys is particularly low; that is something we inherited from the Conservatives.

Dr Evans: The logic behind having a Women's Minister was the idea that women present and have different problems in society. By that logic, men and boys do, too; we know about suicide, and we have just heard about educational attainment. We hear about help-seeking opportunities, and I welcome the men's health strategy, but is it not time we had a Minister for men and boys to look across Government and deal with education, unemployment, suicide and health, and really get to grips with the problems facing young men and boys?

Bridget Phillipson: The hon. Gentleman raises some important areas of concern, including health outcomes, suicide, educational outcomes and the need to better support boys, young men and men throughout their lives. He will appreciate that ministerial appointments

are for the Prime Minister, so I will not get ahead of myself and make any announcements from the Dispatch Box today.

Josh Simons (Makerfield) (Lab): As a boy, Billy Boston dreamed of playing rugby union for Wales and for Cardiff, but he was never selected because he was black. Wigan and rugby league welcomed him with open arms. Rugby league has always been a sport that champions equality; it was created by working-class men who wanted to be paid a fair wage, and now Wigan Warriors women's team have won the Challenge cup. Will the Secretary of State join me and millions across the north in celebrating rugby league as a sport that has always judged people by the content of their character and not their race, class or sex, and in congratulating Billy and his family on his becoming Sir Billy Boston?

Bridget Phillipson: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Billy and his family. Right across sport, we want to make sure that no one is held back by outdated stereotypes, whether they relate to their sex, their race or their background. This Government are committed to ensuring that all young people have access to high-quality sport and other opportunities.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): As a former A-level teacher, one of my concerns—in addition to the disparities between boys and girls in educational outcomes—was the disparity in educational choice. Physics and maths classes were dominated by boys, and English literature and psychology classes were dominated by girls. Those are different subjects that develop different skills. Does the Secretary of State share my concern about that disparity, and does she have any plans to address it?

Bridget Phillipson: My hon. Friend brings real expertise, and I listened carefully to what he had to say. We will consider those issues through the schools White Paper later this autumn. The curriculum and assessment review is also under way, and it is considering all aspects of how we can make sure that young people have access to a broad and rich curriculum. In addition, we know that poverty is a real barrier for so many children, and that is why I am delighted that this Labour Government are expanding free school meals eligibility, lifting 100,000 children out of poverty.

Digital Exclusion

3. **Zöe Franklin** (Guildford) (LD): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help reduce digital exclusion for people with communication disabilities.

[904704]

The Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms): The digital inclusion action plan, published in February, sets out plans to widen access to devices, drive digital upskilling, break down barriers to participation and support people in their own communities. The plan highlights disabled people as one of five priority groups more likely to be digitally excluded, and the focus is therefore on them in particular.

Zöe Franklin: A constituent contacted me specifically about the digital inclusion action plan, explaining that because of his voice disability, spasmodic dysphonia, he struggles to access essential services such as banking,

because automated phone systems could not understand his voice. There is often no clear way of bypassing those systems, and alternatives like webchat are slow and ineffective. This is a growing issue for many people with communication disabilities. What steps is the Minister taking, with Cabinet colleagues, to ensure that services remain accessible, and will the issue be addressed through the action plan?

Sir Stephen Timms: The hon. Lady has raised some interesting points. The action plan outlines five initial actions, including the establishment of an ambitious digital inclusion innovation fund. I do not know whether some of those ideas could be used to address the concern that the hon. Lady has raised, but we do want to be ambitious in all this. In the “Pathways to Work” Green Paper, published a couple of months ago, we talked about assistive tech and the possibility of making it more widely available; maybe there are solutions there that could be taken forward. I would be interested to talk to the hon. Lady about what more we might do.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): Three weeks ago, I had an opportunity to visit Harlow jobcentre, meet the fantastic work coaches there, and see the important work that they are doing to help people in Harlow get back into employment. Digital inclusion was one of the issues that they raised. Does the Minister agree that we need to look at how we can support people to get back to work, give them more face-to-face appointments, and help to provide training and digital skills when they need them?

Sir Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is right. It is important to ensure that the tech that is available in jobcentres is appropriate for people’s needs. One element of the action plan is the launch this summer of an “IT reuse for good” charter, encouraging organisations to set up device donation schemes, because we think that they can play a helpful part as well.

Endometriosis

4. **Steve Yemm (Mansfield) (Lab):** What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to provide cross-Government support for women with endometriosis. [904705]

The Minister for Equalities (Seema Malhotra): Given that women are waiting up to 10 years for an endometriosis diagnosis, we are committed to improving diagnosis, treatment and ongoing care for women with gynaecological conditions. That includes approving two new pills to treat endometriosis this year, investing £5.6 million in much-needed research, and taking action to cut gynaecology waiting lists through our elective reform plan. This Government are committed to prioritising women’s health as we build an NHS that is fit for the future.

Steve Yemm: I know that my constituent Samantha, who asked me to ask this question, will be grateful for the Minister’s reply. Will she also work with colleagues across Government to ensure that once the Employment Rights Bill has been passed, the needs of those with menstrual health conditions, like endometriosis, are reflected properly in guidance and employer support, and that organisations such as Endometriosis UK are engaged in the process?

Seema Malhotra: Far too many women, like Samantha, are forced to leave work because they do not get the support that they need. That is why we are meeting the needs of women with endometriosis in the workplace through a number of measures in the Employment Rights Bill. Strengthening statutory sick pay arrangements, making flexible working available to more people, and opening up conversations about women’s health through employer action plans will benefit all employees managing the condition. We are turning the commitments in the women’s health strategy into tangible actions.

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): What commitment can the Minister give that the community diagnostic centres programme, which was started under the Conservative Government—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] I’ll start again. What commitment can the Minister give that the community diagnostic centres programme, which was started under the last Government, will be used effectively to treat and diagnose not just endometriosis, but all the conditions listed in the women’s health strategy?

Seema Malhotra: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are taking forward a number of measures as part of the women’s health strategy. He will also know that as a result of our pilot on women’s health hubs, which have been established in 41 of England’s 42 integrated care systems, we are working to make sure that we are supporting and tackling women’s health, including by shifting care out of hospitals, reducing waiting lists, and continuing to engage with local areas to use the learnings from women’s health hubs to improve the local delivery of services.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Women are waiting up to 10 years for a diagnosis of endometriosis or adenomyosis. Our Women and Equalities Committee report recommended a maximum wait of two years, which is still a long time to live with intense pain and fertility decline, but it would be an improvement. Given that reproductive health issues cost the UK economy £11 billion a year, the sooner conditions are treated, the sooner women can get on with their lives. Does the Minister agree that investing in women’s health is essential, and how is she raising the importance of the women’s health strategy with her colleagues, including the Health Secretary?

Seema Malhotra: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we need a focus on women’s health. Our priority is turning the commitments in the women’s health strategy into tangible actions, such as by setting out how we will eliminate cervical cancer by 2040 through the new cervical cancer plan. We have taken urgent action, through our elective reform plan, to support the nearly 600,000 women who are on gynaecology waiting lists.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): One in 10 women in Northern Ireland is thought to have endometriosis, and the average wait time for diagnosis is an unacceptable nine and a half years. Does the Minister agree that there needs to be a UK-wide strategy

that equips our NHS with endo-experienced surgeons, fertility experts, mental health support and pain specialists in order to aid those women, who are on the most horrifically painful journey?

Seema Malhotra: I thank the hon. Member for raising this issue. She is right: it is unacceptable that women can wait up to 10 years for an endometriosis diagnosis. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's updated guidelines on endometriosis make firmer recommendations on referral and investigations, which will help women receive a diagnosis and effective treatment faster. It is important that we continue to work as closely as we can on this issue across the whole UK.

Welfare Reforms: Impact on Disabled People

5. **Manuela Perteghella** (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Government's proposed welfare reforms on financial inequalities experienced by disabled people. [904706]

The Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms): The hon. Member is right to raise this issue; the current system does track too many people in financial inequality. We want disabled people to have chances in work, which others have always taken for granted. We will invest an additional £1 billion a year by the end of the decade in work, health and skills support.

Manuela Perteghella: I have spoken to several disabled constituents who are deeply fearful about the proposed cut to the limited capability for work and work-related activity element of universal credit. Research by Sense shows that one in four disabled people with complex needs could be pushed into debt if the changes go ahead. Will the Minister and his colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions review this damaging proposal?

Sir Stephen Timms: At the moment, there are 200,000 people out of work on health and disability grounds who would love to be in a job, and who say they could be in a job today if they had the support to make that possible for them. We are determined to provide them with that support.

Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab): As the Minister knows, the personal independence payment is a passport benefit for carer's allowance. The Government's impact assessment suggests that approximately 150,000 family carers will lose out due to the proposed changes to the eligibility criteria for PIP. What further analysis have the Government done of the financial impacts of welfare reform on family carers?

Sir Stephen Timms: We are consulting on the support that will be needed over the next few years for perhaps one in 10 of those currently claiming PIP. Support will be needed for those who lose their benefit, and that will include family carers who receive carer's allowance at the moment.

Violence against Women and Girls

6. **Irene Campbell** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help tackle violence against women and girls. [904707]

The Minister for Equalities (Seema Malhotra): We are taking firm action across Government to deliver our unprecedented ambition to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. That is underpinned by a new Government strategy, which is to be published this summer. Last year, we launched new domestic abuse protection orders and set out new measures to tackle stalking. Through the safe streets mission board and the VAWG ministerial group, Ministers across Government regularly meet to discuss and drive progress.

Irene Campbell: It saddened me to see an article in the *Glasgow Times* about the rise of sex crimes at Scottish train stations. Sexual Abuse Compensation Advice found that there has been a 45% increase in sex crimes at Scottish stations, with a total of 87 crimes reported in 2024. Does the Minister agree that women should be able to use public transport without fear of assault? Will she tell me what her Department is doing to tackle such issues?

Seema Malhotra: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. She is absolutely right: everyone should feel safe while on public transport. That is why we have developed an ambitious programme to help make the transport network safe for women and girls. The British Transport police use overt and covert policing techniques to target offenders who are using the network, promote the reporting of sexual offences, and have committed to tackling violence against women and girls in their 2025-to-27 policing plan, which, with her experience in this area, she may be interested to discuss with them.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): On Friday, my private Member's Bill is due for Second Reading. It calls for the Government to publish a strategy to tackle interpersonal abuse and violence against men and boys. The strategy would ensure that male survivors of crimes considered to be violence against women and girls, such as rape, sexual assault, domestic abuse, forced marriage and honour-based violence, are given dedicated support, and also prevent male survivors from having to be in spaces that should be for women. Currently, male survivors are to be included in the strategy for women and girls, due to be published this summer. Can the Minister reassure me, and male survivors in desperate need of support, that the Government will introduce a dedicated strategy for men and boys, and if they will not, why not?

Seema Malhotra: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. It does affect women and girls more, but I take the points that he raises, and it is important that all people get the support that they need. I look forward to looking closely at his private Member's Bill.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): Time and again, we Conservative Members asked the Government to hold a national statutory inquiry into the grooming gangs scandal. Time and again, Government Ministers insisted that the five local inquiries would be enough, despite a suspected 50 towns having grooming gangs operating in them, as reported by Charlie Peters from GB News. Now, after the Casey review and the announcement of the national commission, what reassurances can the Minister give victims that the 50 suspected towns will be investigated? If a town or

city where a grooming gang is suspected to operate refuses to have an inquiry, can the Minister compel the commission to investigate? In other words, do the Government have any accountability whatever?

Seema Malhotra: The shadow Minister may not have listened closely to the statement on Monday, because that was confirmed by the Home Secretary. He may want to know that earlier this year, the *Financial Times* told us the reality of what went on inside the previous Government after Alexis Jay's report. The *FT* said that No. 10 urged Home Office Ministers to

"do more to 'engage with Alexis' and draw up a...plan for her recommendations."

One veteran admitted that

"The report came out at an unfortunate time and was maybe to some extent forgotten or deprioritised."

"Forgotten or deprioritised"—yet now the Conservatives have the cheek to lecture this Government about the action we are taking to support and protect victims.

Topical Questions

T1. [904725] **Ian Sollom** (St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire) (LD): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Bridget Phillipson): I am proud to be driving our opportunity mission, as part of this Government's plan for change, to break the link between background and success. In our spending review, we announced that we are extending free school meals to all children with a parent on universal credit, lifting 100,000 children out of poverty by the end of the Parliament. That is the difference a Labour Government make.

Ian Sollom: My constituent Theo, who is blind and a Braillist, has not received a single useable Braille past paper, despite being nearly a year into his A-levels, and reports that his GCSE papers last year contained so many errors that they were nearly impossible to use. Will the Minister take immediate action to ensure that exam boards fulfil their legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to provide accessible examination materials, and urgently review Ofqual's monitoring?

Bridget Phillipson: I am concerned to hear of the experience of the hon. Gentleman's constituent. If he provides me with some information, I can make sure that this is properly investigated.

T2. [904726] **Irene Campbell** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): I was shocked to read recently that Ofsted found that 80% of teenage girls are being put under pressure to provide sexual images of themselves; they can be asked for these pictures multiple times a night. What consideration will there be of social media in the wider strategy to tackle violence against women and girls?

Bridget Phillipson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. I share her concern about the issue and its impact on young women and girls. That is why the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology is bringing forward further action to ensure that girls are protected from harm, and why later this year, we

will publish updated guidance on relationships, sex and health education to tackle all forms of misogyny and ensure that young men and women can thrive in our country.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): I point to page 86 of Baroness Casey's report, which shows a worrying number of live investigations of cases in which there is an overlap between child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation. The report notes that a "significant proportion" of cases appear to involve suspects who are claiming asylum. Which Minister is directly responsible for safeguarding our communities, including those housed in asylum hotels? If the Government manage to close asylum hotels, as they claim they will, and individuals move into other accommodation, will any dangers transferred from hotels to the wider community be accounted for?

Bridget Phillipson: The hon. Lady will know that the Home Secretary recently made an extensive statement to Parliament, setting out the actions that this Government will take to address the many failures left behind by the Conservatives. Baroness Casey outlined that there had been a decade of lost time and a failure to deliver justice for victims. This Government will take action. We will root out all forms of child sexual exploitation, keep children safe from harm, and ensure that perpetrators are finally prosecuted.

Mims Davies: For decades, too many people blocked their ears and turned their backs on towns and individuals asking for help, as well as on the national calls for help. Will the Minister confirm that those in their ivory towers in Whitehall can now be compelled to give evidence under oath on their actions and assumptions—including, vitally, senior civil servants, former Crown Prosecution Service employees, and previous Directors of Public Prosecutions?

Bridget Phillipson: As the Home Secretary set out on Monday, anyone found to have been responsible for covering up or hiding vile crimes of child sexual abuse must and will be prosecuted. However, the Conservatives had a decade to act—the lost decade that Baroness Casey talked about—and the recommendations from Alexis Jay sat on a shelf without being acted on. This Government immediately brought forward the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to deliver the biggest upgrade in child protection legislation in a generation—a Bill that the Conservatives opposed.

Mr Speaker: Before we come to Prime Minister's questions, I welcome to the Gallery the Speaker of the Assembly of Representatives of Tajikistan.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [904657] **Adrian Ramsay** (Waveney Valley) (Green): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 18 June.

The Deputy Prime Minister (Angela Rayner): I have been asked to reply, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Prime Minister has been attending the G7 summit in Canada. In an era of global instability, we are working with our partners to urge de-escalation in the middle east, to put pressure on Russia to agree to a ceasefire, and to deliver security renewal for the British people.

The Air India plane crash last week was devastating. Our thoughts and condolences are with everyone affected by this awful incident, and we are working closely with the Indian authorities to support those in need.

Nine years ago, we lost our beloved friend and colleague Jo Cox, who was a beacon of positivity and courage. Her legacy lives on. I must take this opportunity to also remember Sir David Amess, who is much missed by the whole House.

This Sunday marks Windrush Day. We celebrate the extraordinary contribution of the Windrush generation and their descendants to our country.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Adrian Ramsay: Given the strong consensus across this House on the importance of de-escalation of the deeply worrying conflict between Israel and Iran, does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that this House's actions must match its words? Will she therefore give a commitment that before any further military support is given to the Israeli Government, whether it be the deployment of RAF jets or armed forces, her Government will first give MPs in this House a free vote on the matter?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The situation in the middle east is fast-moving and deeply concerning, and there is clear potential for a significant and rapid worsening of the situation. In every step we take, we will always be guided by the safety of British nationals and the UK national interest. That is why we have deployed jets to the region, so that contingency support is in place for our armed forces personnel, and it is why we are asking British nationals to register their presence. We will keep all advice under review.

Q2. [904658] **Olivia Bailey** (Reading West and Mid Berkshire) (Lab): Too many of my constituents are stuck in unsuitable housing, and after 14 years of inaction from the Conservatives, local families are being split up because there are not enough affordable homes. I welcome this Government's plans to turbocharge the delivery of social and affordable housing, including through the new national housing bank. I ask the Deputy Prime Minister to confirm that this Government will finally give my constituents the security that they deserve.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to talk about the 14 years of failure by the Conservatives. Labour is turning the tide on the housing crisis, and I am proud to announce today our commitment to establishing a new publicly owned national housing bank, backed by £16 billion of new finance. This includes £2.5 billion in low-interest loans for social housing, to help achieve the biggest uplift to social and affordable housing in a generation.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I associate myself with the Deputy Prime Minister's remarks about the tragic air crash in India, and of course about our dear colleagues Jo Cox and Sir David Amess. I also join her in calling for de-escalation between Israel and Iran, while noting that everything possible must be done to stop Iran getting a nuclear weapon.

Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition and I met survivors of the rape gang scandal and their family members. Fiona, Teresa, Lucia and Marlon told us how authorities deliberately covered up the systematic rape of young girls, and some boys, by gangs of predominantly Pakistani-heritage men. They covered it up because they cared more about so-called community relations than protecting vulnerable girls. That is disgusting.

The survivors told us that they will only have confidence in an inquiry if it is independently led, has full statutory powers, and covers all 50 towns affected, including Bradford. They will also only have confidence in it if those who covered this up are prosecuted, foreign perpetrators are all deported, survivors are closely involved, and it is set up before the summer recess. Can the Deputy Prime Minister give the survivors and their families those assurances?

The Deputy Prime Minister: First, I thank the shadow Home Secretary for his tone, and for putting the survivors and victims at the heart of his question. It is absolutely right that we all look at what has happened over the last couple of decades, and at the countless reports that we have had, and look to implement them. He is right to talk about the confidence that people must have in the independent inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke about that earlier this week in relation to Baroness Casey's report, which we will take forward at speed. The inquiry will be independent, and it will have statutory powers. We will also implement the Jay report, which he will have known about, as the Minister in charge at the time. We will get on with taking action. I hope Conservative Members will adopt his tone, so that we can make sure that the whole House puts victims first, and that we all work together to get to the bottom of this.

Chris Philp: It is vital that scandals like this are never again covered up because of the racial background of perpetrators. Baroness Casey's report said, to use her words, that people who downplay the ethnic dimension are letting victims down, so I have to raise the matter of the language that the Prime Minister used in January, when I am afraid to say he smeared campaigners as jumping on a "far-right bandwagon" simply for calling for the very inquiry that he has now been forced to set up. Standing up for rape victims is not far-right. Will the Deputy Prime Minister apologise for what the Prime Minister said?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Prime Minister did not just raise issues; he has acted on them. He brought the first prosecutions against grooming gangs, and called for action to address ethnicity issues in 2012. The right hon. Member will know that the data that the previous Government collected was inaccurate and not complete. Baroness Casey recognised this, and it is the subject of one of the recommendations that we will take forward. The Prime Minister made those comments specifically about Tory Ministers who sat for years in Government and did absolutely nothing about this scandal.

Chris Philp: Smearing campaigners who stand up for rape victims as being “far-right” is completely unacceptable, and the Prime Minister should never have said that. I commend his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), for the grooming gangs taskforce that he set up, which led to 550 arrests in its first year. Baroness Casey’s report also said that a significant number of rape gang perpetrators were non-UK nationals or asylum seekers, many of whom entered the country illegally. We also know that most illegal immigrants crossing the channel are young men, contrary to what the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said last week. Does the Deputy Prime Minister now accept that the small boats crisis is one of public safety, as well as a border crisis?

The Deputy Prime Minister: This is a very serious issue, and more needs to be done. Let me update the House. Working with our allies, we have carried out a series of major arrests to tackle the smuggling gangs behind this vile trade. In the past month, a ringleader who has smuggled almost 4,000 migrants has been jailed for 25 years. We can go further thanks to the law-enforcement agreements we have struck with Germany, Italy, Serbia and the Balkan states. That is in stark contrast to the right hon. Gentleman, who was the man at the heart of the Home Office when immigration soared, we lost control of our borders, and we spent £700 million of taxpayers’ money on persuading just four volunteers to be removed to Rwanda. I take no lectures from him.

Chris Philp: If she wants to find out who has lost control of our borders, I suggest that she looks to her immediate right, because ever since the Home Secretary scrapped the Rwanda deterrent before it even started, illegal immigration across the channel has gone up by 30%. So far, 2025 has been the worst year in history for illegal immigrants crossing the channel. That is on her watch; that is down to her Government.

The Prime Minister is planning crisis talks with President Macron, and is finally admitting that the situation is, in his words, “deteriorating”. The Government’s laughable plan to smash the gangs lies in tatters. Will the Deputy Prime Minister at last accept that we need a removals deterrent, so that every single illegal immigrant who arrives on these shores is immediately removed? Will she commit to that—yes or no?

The Deputy Prime Minister: If the Conservatives want to argue that the 40,000 arrivals since July ’24 are down to the scrapping of the Rwanda scheme, they need to explain why there were more than 43,000 arrivals in the same period starting in July ’22, when the Rwanda agreement was in place. It is absolute rubbish. They lost control of our borders; we are getting control of our borders. The right hon. Gentleman needs to apologise.

Chris Philp: I do not see how the Deputy Prime Minister has the brass neck to claim that she has the situation under control when the numbers crossing the channel this year are the highest in history. She asked about the Rwanda deterrent. She was obviously not listening to what I said earlier. The Rwanda scheme never started; indeed, illegal immigrants in Calais—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear the question, and I am sure our constituents want to hear the question and the answer.

Chris Philp: The Rwanda scheme never started. Illegal immigrants in Calais said before the election how much they wanted the Prime Minister to get elected because he would help them to get here. When Australia started a similar scheme about 10 years ago, it worked within a few months.

As a consequence of the Government losing control, they now accommodate in asylum hotels and flats growing numbers of illegal immigrants, many of whom crossed the channel. The Home Office’s suppliers are actively offering above-market deals to landlords to get hold of their properties for use by illegal immigrants. In the meantime, hard-pressed young people here are unable to rent or buy. Why do this Government prioritise housing for illegal immigrants above housing for our young people?

Angela Rayner: Again, I gently say to the right hon. Member that, under his Government’s watch, immigration increased fourfold, until it reached almost a million in a single year. They also created the backlog—400 hotels, which we reduced to just over 200 in our first 12 months in government. One million pounds a day “spiffed” up the wall because they were so incompetent. We are building the homes that they failed to deliver over 14 consecutive years of failure. They should apologise while we get on with the job of rebuilding Britain.

Chris Philp: Goodness me, the Deputy Prime Minister has a cheek. Housing starts in quarter four last year went down—her mission to rebuild Britain is not going very well. She talks about asylum hotels, but she obviously has not looked at the most recent numbers. The number of people in asylum hotels was higher in March this year than it was at the time of the election. And she gave no answer about the priority being given to illegal immigrants over people already living here.

A Zimbabwean paedophile due for deportation was recently allowed to stay in the UK because a court found that he might face “some hostility” back in Zimbabwe, which apparently breached his article 3 rights. What about the rights of children here to be protected from this dangerous paedophile? Who is looking out for their rights? Not the Government. There are thousands of such cases involving foreign criminals. There is a solution: we need to scrap the Human Rights Act for immigration matters so that this sovereign Parliament decides on the law that our courts apply. But the Deputy Prime Minister’s party voted against that. I have a simple question: why do the Government side with foreign criminals and not the British public?

Angela Rayner: The Conservatives had 14 years of failure on these issues. We have deported 4,500 foreign national offenders since we came to office, which is more than they did over the same period. I will take no lectures from the Johnny-come-lately who could not do anything when he was in office.

Q3. [904659] **Anneliese Midgley** (Knowsley) (Lab): Last Saturday marked eight years since Grenfell—eight years fighting for justice. The Hillsborough families, including Margaret Aspinall from Huyton, have campaigned for 36 years—for decades—for the Hillsborough law. Can

the Deputy Prime Minister tell me whether this Labour Government will bring forward the Hillsborough law without delay? Will they honour the promises made to victims of state cover-ups, and will they finally deliver justice for the 97?

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, for the work that she has done with campaigners such as Margaret in their fight for justice, and for mentioning Grenfell, the eighth anniversary of which was not so long ago. We remain fully committed to bringing in a Hillsborough law. The state has failed victims and their families too many times in the past, which is precisely why our focus is now on getting the legislation right. I can assure her that measures will be brought forward as soon as we are confident that they will deliver the justice that victims deserve, and we want to do this at pace.

Mr Speaker: I call the deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): On behalf of my party, may I associate myself with the Deputy Prime Minister's remarks about the Air India crash? In a week that we remember the murder of Jo Cox and David Amess, our party's thoughts are with their friends and families and all those in this House who lost their beloved friends. We also remember those who died in the Grenfell tragedy.

In 2003, we Liberal Democrats were incredibly proud to lead the campaign against the Iraq war—a war in which the UK blindly followed the US in a move that was not backed by the United Nations. In light of reports that President Trump is seriously considering joining the war between Israel and Iran, launching a US strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that if President Trump does take such action, today's Labour Government will not blindly follow the US into war again?

Angela Rayner: The one thing I will say is that we agree with President Trump that Iran must never have nuclear weapons. But we have been consistent in urging Iran to engage with the diplomatic process and work with the United States and we continue to support that diplomatic approach.

Daisy Cooper: I am grateful to the Deputy Prime Minister. We support those efforts.

Today, the Government are set to unveil their plans to cut personal independence payments and carer's allowance, a prospect that one of my constituents described as "terrifying". Liberal Democrat analysis of the Government's own data suggests that 1.3 million disabled people are at risk of losing some support. Can the Deputy Prime Minister honestly say, hand on heart, that that is the change that 1 million disabled people and their carers were promised?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Labour is the party of work and the party of fairness and social justice. We have announced a plan to get Britain working again, and we are clear on the principles—I want to be clear on that—that those who want to work should be able to work and those who can never work should be protected.

The current system, which we have inherited, does not support those who need that support and does not allow people opportunities for employment. I have personal experience of it. I know what the hon. Lady is saying, and I know how some people are fearful of the changes, but this Labour Government have put their values into place and will ensure that people are supported into work where they can work, and those who cannot will be supported. We are the party of the welfare state—we set it up after the second world war—and believe it should be there for people who need it, but we should also help people into work.

Q5. [904661] **Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): Mr Deputy Speaker, I welcome the—[*Interruption.*] I apologise, Mr Speaker—there are too many deputies in the place today.

I welcome the Government's announcement on grooming gangs. I am sorry for stumbling; I have been floored by the point scoring going on around them—on all sides. I wonder whether the Deputy Prime Minister is aware that the victims and survivors of grooming gangs are being denied compensation by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority on bizarre technicalities, as are all children who have been victims of online abuse. For me, that is a grave injustice. The authority thinks it is better than a judge and jury. I wonder what the Deputy Prime Minister plans to do. Personally, I think it should be abolished.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a long-standing advocate for child protection, and I pay tribute to her campaigning on these issues. We share her determination to do what is right for the victims and the survivors. We recognise that no sum of money can ever fully compensate for the horrors they have experienced. We are committed to funding efforts to tackle child sexual abuse in the future and support survivors to rebuild their lives—that is why we will make it easier for victims to make personal injury claims through the civil courts by removing the three-year time limit—and we are redoubling funding for therapeutic support services.

Carla Denyer (Bristol Central) (Green): This Refugee Week is an opportunity for the House to show solidarity with those fleeing war, persecution and oppression. Compassion and welcome are core British values, but for decades the Home Office has been undermining those values, as my new report "No Way Home" shows, by treating migration as a crime rather than making it work for our communities and for newcomers. Will the Deputy Prime Minister read the report and consider its recommendation to remove migration from the responsibilities of the failing Home Office?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will commit to reading the hon. Lady's report, because it is important that we take all information on these issues. We inherited an asylum system under exceptional strain, which costs up to £9 million a day. We will end the use of hotels through suitable self-sufficient accommodation for asylum seekers, minimising the impact on local communities, and we will protect and support asylum seekers while demonstrating value for taxpayers.

Q8. [904664] **Jodie Gosling** (Nuneaton) (Lab): On 1 July, Warwickshire county council will permanently remove one of Nuneaton's two fire engines. Its decision, based on dubious data that does not account for local factors such as high deprivation, does not accurately represent the current risk to residents. The cuts will put lives in Nuneaton in danger. Will the Deputy Prime Minister please look into this matter to confirm that there has been sufficient scrutiny and a thorough risk analysis to ensure safety for the good residents of Nuneaton?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue, and I know that the fire Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North and Kimberley (Alex Norris)—will be happy to discuss it further. I am committed to ensuring that fire and rescue services across the country have the resources they need to keep communities safe. The deployment of fire engines, though, is decided locally, so this really is a question for Warwickshire county council, which is now led by Reform. The hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) should have a word with his county councillors in Nuneaton and get them to explain why Reform is cutting fire services.

Q4. [904660] **Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I remember when the Deputy Prime Minister was a fierce critic of austerity and a proud champion for the disabled, but today her Government are introducing their £5 billion disability cuts Bill that will push another 250,000 people into poverty. Does she agree that everyone has the right to oppose such devastating cuts? Is it the Prime Minister's intention to remove the Whip from any Labour MP who does the right thing and votes against these disability cuts?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Member talks about austerity, but I gently say to him that we have given the biggest amount of increase to Scotland—*[Interruption.]* I have covered this point in an earlier question. We are absolutely committed to ending child poverty. We have already introduced free school meals, we are already supporting families and we have given a living wage rise to millions of workers that need it. We are getting on with the job of rebuilding Britain. The hon. Member has had decades of failure in Scotland, and it deserves better.

Q10. [904667] **Jonathan Davies** (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): Derbyshire's Derwent valley is the home of the industrial revolution and it is also now a UNESCO world heritage site. That community showed a Victorian sense of purpose that delivered improvements to people's everyday lives. Can my right hon. Friend set out how the Government's £39 billion investment in housing will instil that same drive while maintaining the unique character of the east midlands' only UNESCO world heritage site?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I know my hon. Friend is a champion for regeneration across his constituency, and he is working hard to get homes built in his patch for his constituents. Our plan for change will deliver the biggest boost for investment in social and affordable housing in a generation, and for the first time in recent memory, we will give providers in his constituency a

decade of certainty over the capital funding to build ambitious housing projects that honour Derbyshire's history.

Q6. [904662] **Nick Timothy** (West Suffolk) (Con): The Home Secretary says that we should judge her success in smashing the gangs by whether the number of channel crossings falls, but under this Government the numbers are up by more than 30%. By which date should we judge the Home Secretary, and if she fails, will she be fired?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Conservatives continually vote against the measures that we are taking to smash the gangs. We are getting on with the job, working internationally to disrupt the abhorrent work of these smugglers and gangs, while the hon. Member harps on from the sidelines. He should apologise for their record in government, which was abysmal.

Q11. [904668] **Kirith Entwistle** (Bolton North East) (Lab): Since becoming an MP, I have received thousands of pieces of casework from constituents who are stuck on social housing waiting lists. I recently had an email from a woman with severe mobility issues who is effectively trapped in her front room while she waits and waits for suitable social housing. Even when a home becomes available, she will be forced to compete with other residents because there simply are not enough affordable options. What will the recent new funding announced by the Government mean for my constituent and others like her who have already waited too long for a decent home?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting that case. It is not an isolated case; we inherited a really dire situation and there are far too many people that do not have a safe and secure home that meets their needs. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has announced record funding of almost double the level provided by the previous Government, who ended up handing back the cash for social and affordable homes. Labour's plan for change is renewing our country and investing in Britain's future.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Q7. [904663] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): The Government quite rightly give full and unequivocal support to Israel in its bid to end the scourge of Iran's nuclear weapons programme forever. Will they also work with our allies to try and convince the Israeli Government that it is not in the long-term security interests of Israel to carry on with this policy of illegal settlements in the west bank, which is simply leading to radicalisation and desperation throughout the region? Have not the overwhelming majority of Palestinian people the right to yearn for peace and security in their own homeland, as the Jews yearned for their homeland for 2,000 years?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank the Father of the House for his important question. Settler violence and expansion in the west bank is appalling and completely unacceptable. Alongside our allies, we have sanctioned individuals responsible for inciting this extremist action, but a two-state solution is the only way to bring the

peace that the Israelis and the Palestinians deserve. That is only achievable if the hostages are released, aid is surged into Gaza and the ceasefire is restored. We will do everything we can to make that happen.

Q12. [904669] **Chris Kane** (Stirling and Strathallan) (Lab): In Scotland, over 10,000 children are stuck in temporary accommodation, including many in my constituency. Too many families face soaring rents, long waiting lists and dwindling options. It is just one of so many policy failings—we are all losing count and losing patience—as public confidence in the SNP's ability to govern collapses. What advice does the Deputy Prime Minister have for the SNP Government as they continue to preside over a chronic failure to invest in the social and affordable housing that Scotland desperately needs?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. Homelessness levels are far too high, which have a devastating impact on those affected. Under the SNP, 10,000 children in Scotland—a record high—shamefully have no fixed home to call their own. Our decisions have given Scotland a record settlement—the largest since devolution. We saw in Hamilton how Scots are fed up with the SNP's excuses. The SNP has been in power for nearly two decades and has nowhere left to hide from its failure.

Q9. [904665] **Ann Davies** (Caerfyrddin) (PC): Diolch, Mr Llefarydd. Welsh farmers are taking hit after hit, from Tory trade deals to Labour taxes. Now, on top of that, bluetongue restrictions affecting Wales and England will hamper cross-border trade. Over 550 farms on the border and key livestock markets rely on summer trading. Once-in-a-year opportunities like the Royal Welsh Show are crucial, and the disruption will be devastating. Will the Deputy Prime Minister commit to working with the Welsh Government on a scheme to compensate the losses?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I gently say to the hon. Member that you do not deliver for Wales by voting against an extra £1.6 billion for public services like Plaid did in the Senedd. We will ensure that we support Wales and Welsh farmers and will continue to do that as a UK Government.

Q13. [904670] **Andrew Pakes** (Peterborough) (Lab): In the spending review last week, the Government backed Peterborough with support for our new pool and a sports quarter in the city. That commitment has the power to turn years of campaigning into a reality, but that is not all: the Government have also recently approved the business case for our new station and have given us new police. Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that this is just the start and that places like Peterborough that were forgotten for too long by the Conservatives are now at the top of this Labour Government's agenda?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I am flanked by the two ladies—the Chancellor and the Home Secretary—who have ensured that those things happen. The Chancellor has guaranteed funding to accelerate projects like Peterborough's new sports quarter, which will include a new Olympic-sized

swimming pool. I can also confirm today that, subject to the business case approval, we will provide nearly £48 million of funding for a new city centre quarter and a refurbished eastern station building.

Q14. [904671] **Paul Holmes** (Hamble Valley) (Con): A small family business in my constituency was recently burgled by a prolific offender serving an eight-month suspended sentence. The man was caught, arrested, charged and appeared in court, where he was given another eight-month suspended sentence and was released. The business was offered £200 in compensation. Does the Deputy Prime Minister think that that is justice served, or is this Government now soft on crime and soft on the causes of crime?

The Deputy Prime Minister: First of all, I am sorry to hear about that. Hard-working businesspeople who spend a lot of their time building up a business should expect the full force of the law to protect their property and their interests. Also, while I have the opportunity, can I congratulate the hon. Member on running Hamble Valley's very first pub competition this year? I hope that I will get an invite. He is absolutely right that we have to have increased police numbers and ensure that they are responsive to people's concerns. We are doing that; his Government let people down.

Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): Saturday marked eight years since 72 people lost their lives in the Grenfell tower fire—eight years without justice. But, finally, there is the prospect of some systemic change following the public inquiry. I welcome the Government's commitment to barring all the cited companies from accessing public contracts and their full support to the police investigation to deliver real accountability. Can the Deputy Prime Minister also reassure our community that, alongside the Hillsborough law, the Government will consider some independent oversight so that victims from the Post Office to Hillsborough to Grenfell know that inquiry recommendations will actually lead to real change?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Grenfell fire was a national tragedy, and we must never forget the 72 lives that were lost. It was a honour to pay my respects on the eighth anniversary at the weekend. We remain fully committed to introducing the Hillsborough law, including a legal duty of candour for public services and criminal sanctions for those who refuse to comply. I know my hon. Friend speaks with passion and authority on the matter and, having spoken to the Grenfell community, I know that they really want to see this happen as quickly as possible. We are exploring reforms to ensure that we can get to the truth more quickly and deliver the meaningful change that these victims deserve.

Peter Fortune (Bromley and Biggin Hill) (Con): Bishop Challoner school has been helping to educate Bromley pupils for nearly 75 years, but it will close its doors in July due to Labour's decision to impose VAT on independent schools. Given the Deputy Prime Minister's well-publicised views on independent schools, does she welcome this closure or would she like to apologise to the parents, pupils and staff?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As I have said for a long time, taxpayers in this country should not be subsidising tax breaks for private schools. I welcome all schools that give children a great education, but I am also determined to ensure we have qualified teachers in every classroom, for every child, which is something the hon. Gentleman's Government failed to do.

Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab): As a trained physics teacher and a former engineering lecturer, may I ask the Deputy Prime Minister what this Government are doing to help people improve their maths skills after they have

left school? I came across an awful case the other day: a 61-year-old man who believed he had counted up £7 billion of Government spending, when there was really only £27 million. What can we do for people like the leader of Reform UK, the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage), who evidently cannot add up? [HON. MEMBERS: "More!"]

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend highlights an important fact: Reform's sums simply do not add up. He will be pleased to know that we are investing £136 million in skills bootcamps, and I will be sure to send the details to the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage).

HS2 Reset

12.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Heidi Alexander): With permission, Mr Speaker, I shall make a statement on HS2.

As a London councillor over 15 years ago, I remember hearing the then Labour Government's bold plans for high-speed rail to link our major cities, address the capacity needs of the future and, in the words of then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to join "the high-speed revolution sweeping the world."

It was a vision of a confident nation and a clear signal: our great towns and cities in the midlands and the north, with potential that had been untapped at best and ignored at worst, could be places of opportunity and aspiration again. That was the promise of HS2.

But after a decade and a half of Tory timelines planned then delayed, routes drawn up then cancelled, budgets calculated then blown and promises made then broken, we inherited a project that had lost the trust of the public, that created an image of a Britain woefully unable to deliver big infrastructure projects and that had been axed from swathes of the country it was originally meant to serve. Phase 1 could end up becoming one of the most expensive railway lines in the world, with projected costs soaring by £37 billion under previous Conservative Governments, and £2 billion of taxpayers' money was sunk into phase 2 work before it was cancelled by the previous Government.

There was also clear evidence of poor management. Despite the 2020 Oakervee review advising that Government halt construction contracts pending improvements in price and simpler engineering, they pressed ahead regardless. It has been no less than a litany of failure and today I am drawing a line in the sand, calling time on years of mismanagement, flawed reporting and ineffective oversight. It means this Government will get the job done between Birmingham and London. We will not reinstate cancelled sections we cannot afford, but we will do the hard but necessary work to rebuild public trust, and we have not wasted any time.

Since July we have appointed new leadership of HS2 Ltd to turn this project around. We have made clear to the new chief executive, Mark Wild, that the priority is building the rest of the railway safely at the lowest reasonable cost even if this takes longer. We have started the year-long task of fundamentally resetting the project, including commissioning infrastructure expert James Stewart to lead a review into governance and oversight. As part of that reset, we have reduced financial delegations to HS2 Ltd, placing a lid on spiralling costs until the reset is complete and we regain confidence, and we have supported Mark Wild's review of the size and cost of HS2 as an organisation.

But today we are going further. I can confirm we have published the landmark James Stewart review and the Department's response. The review, commissioned in October last year by my predecessor, was a tough, independent look at how the Department for Transport and Government deliver major projects. The Government not only welcome the review, but have accepted all the recommendations, and my Department is already delivering on these, specifically across five key areas.

First, on the lack of oversight and scrutiny, quite simply there have been too many dark corners for failure to hide in. The ministerial taskforce set up to provide oversight of HS2 had inconsistent attendance from key Ministers, including the then Transport Secretary and the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The Government have re-established the taskforce with full senior attendance per the review's recommendations. A new performance programme and shareholder boards will offer much-needed oversight and accountability.

Secondly, the report highlights HS2 could cost the taxpayer millions more than planned. We will stop this spiralling any further by delivering all the recommendations on cost control. That starts with HS2 fundamentally changing its approach to estimating costs. It includes certainty over funding, which the spending review has given. It also means HS2 working with suppliers so that their contracts incentivise saving costs for taxpayers; as far as I am concerned, suppliers should make a better return the more taxpayer money they save.

Thirdly, the review identified a deficit in capability and skills, with a fundamental lack of trust between my Department and HS2 Ltd. I am clear that both capability and cultural issues within HS2 must be addressed. The new chief executive is already strengthening the organisation, including by filling critical gaps in areas such as commercial expertise, and he will be backed by Mike Brown, announced today as the new chair. This is a new era of leadership that the project desperately needs, with Mike bringing significant experience as a former Transport for London commissioner. Mark and Mike were part of the team, with me, that turned Crossrail into the Elizabeth line; we have done it before and we will do it again.

Fourthly, between 2019 and 2023 HS2 Ltd provided initial designs for Euston station coming in almost £2 billion over budget. When asked for a more affordable option, it offered one costing £400 million more than the first attempt. The word "affordable" was clearly not part of the HS2 lexicon. The combined cost for those two failed designs, which has now been written off, was more than a quarter of a billion pounds.

What is more, the previous Government announced a Euston ministerial taskforce. Unbelievably, the taskforce never met. This Government recognise Euston's huge potential. We have already committed funding to start the tunnelling from Old Oak Common to Euston, and we will set out more details in our 10-year infrastructure strategy.

We will use James Stewart's findings to transform infrastructure delivery across Government. Implementing real change in how we deliver infrastructure is not just for the Department for Transport. This Government are committed to implementing these recommendations and adopting a new approach to delivering infrastructure, as will be set out in our upcoming 10-year infrastructure strategy. In that spirit, the Prime Minister has also asked the Cabinet Secretary to consider the implications for the civil service and the wider public sector of the issues raised in the report, including whether further action or investigation is warranted.

We are wasting no time in delivering on this review. I will update Parliament on our progress through my six-monthly reports, even if the information is uncomfortable, because for a Government who last week pledged billions in capital investment for new

major projects, and who believe in the power of transport infrastructure to improve lives and deliver on our plan for change, that level of failure cannot stand. We will learn the lessons of the past 15 years and restore our reputation for delivering world-class infrastructure projects.

I have spoken about our inheritance and James Stewart's review, so let me finally turn to Mark Wild's initial assessment, which lays bare the shocking mismanagement of the project under previous Governments—I will place a copy of his interim findings in the Library. He stated, in no uncertain terms, that the overall project, with respect to cost, schedule and scope, is unsustainable. Based on his advice, I see no route by which trains can be running by 2033 as planned. He reveals that costs will continue to increase if not taken in hand, further outstripping the budget set by the previous Government, and he cannot be certain that all cost pressures have yet been identified.

It gives me no pleasure to deliver news like this. Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been wasted by constant scope changes, ineffective contracts and bad management. There are also allegations that parts of the supply chain have been defrauding taxpayers, and I have been clear that those need to be investigated rapidly and rigorously. If fraud is proven, the consequences will be felt by all involved.

I have to be honest: this is an appalling mess, but it is one that we will sort out. We need to set targets that we can confidently deliver and that the public can trust, and that will take time, but rest assured that where there are inefficiencies, we will root them out; and where further ministerial interventions are needed, I will make them without fear or favour. HS2 will finally start delivering on our watch.

Years of mismanagement and neglect have turned HS2 into a shadow of that vision put forward 15 years ago, but this Government were elected on a mandate to restore trust to our politics, and that is why we will not shirk away from this challenge and why today we turn the page on infrastructure failures. I can think of no better mission than delivering new economic opportunities, new homes, commercial regeneration and an upskilled supply chain, all of which HS2 can still unlock, but no one should underestimate the scale of the reset required. Passengers and taxpayers deserve new railways that the country can be proud of. The work to get HS2 back on track is firmly under way under this Government, and I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

12.48 pm

Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and for updating the House on the initial findings of the HS2 reviews. I also thank her for advance notice and a copy of her statement.

On the substance of the Secretary of State's statement, I believe there is a broad consensus in this House on the central point that mistakes were made in the delivery of HS2. As she noted, costs more than doubled, the project has been repeatedly delayed, and the pandemic completely changed travel patterns. It undercut the assumptions that guided the original plans and caused construction costs to rise sharply across the world—by up to 40% in some cases—as a result of supply chain shortages as the world emerged from the crisis.

It has long been apparent that HS2 was not going according to plan. In my first two years as a Member of this House, I sat on the Public Accounts Committee, then chaired by the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier). In the summer of 2021, we published a report on HS2 that raised serious concerns in a number of areas and contained recommendations for how to improve the project.

In 2023, the previous Government conceded that HS2 was not going to plan and made fundamental changes to it. The result was the cancellation of the northern leg of HS2 and the creation of the Network North plan. Under that plan, £36 billion was to be diverted from the northern leg of HS2 to a multitude of transport projects that would benefit more people in more places and more quickly than the then Government believed the delivery of HS2 could. However, we also recognise that the path we took to reach that point was not perfect—far from it. I will not today pretend that the Network North plan was not a product of mistakes we made in the handling of HS2, because it clearly was. As a country, we must learn from those mistakes and we must not repeat them.

On that note, and with your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to express my gratitude to Mark Wild, the chief executive officer of HS2, for his continued efforts to support the delivery of the project. Recognising his leadership in rescuing the Crossrail project in London, it was the noble Lord Harper—then Secretary of State for Transport—who appointed him to lead HS2 in May 2024. We are all encouraged to see him playing a leading role in overseeing the correction and completion of the project, because his experience will be invaluable in helping to get it back on track. I also welcome the appointment of Mike Brown as the new chairman of HS2 Ltd. Like the Secretary of State, I know him from my years in London politics, when he was commissioner of Transport for London. He is a very capable man, and I wish him well in his new role.

The Secretary of State has informed the House of her intention to accept 89 recommendations of the independent review into HS2. I have not yet seen a copy of that report, which I believe is being released today. Although we will need to study those proposals carefully before confirming our support for them, I can assure the Secretary of State if they offer better value for taxpayers, we will back them. The Secretary of State has also raised very serious concerns that taxpayers may have been defrauded by subcontractors. I assure her that if that proves to be the case, I will share her anger, and will support whatever action is necessary to get to the bottom of those allegations. I would request that she keeps the House informed as the investigations by HS2 and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs progress.

Before I close, I would like to press the Secretary of State on a number of matters. In recent weeks the Government have announced several projects that either are funded by Network North or align with its commitments. However, we have yet to see a clear Government commitment to either fully support the Network North plan or scale it back. Can the Secretary of State now provide a definitive update on which elements will proceed and which will be abandoned? It has been reported that officials are considering a plan, backed by the Mayor of Greater Manchester, to build an "HS2-lite" track between Birmingham and Crewe. Will she confirm whether those reports are true?

[Gareth Bacon]

I will conclude by turning to the planning system more generally. The whole House will recall that HS2 grappled with legal challenges, High Court proceedings and judicial reviews, all of which added delay and cost. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the extent to which legal challenges and judicial reviews delayed the delivery of HS2? How can future infrastructure projects be protected from excessive or politically motivated litigation, and does the Secretary of State believe that sufficient action has been taken to prevent some of the more spurious concerns about such things as bats and newts obstructing future vital infrastructure projects?

Heidi Alexander: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his response, and indeed for the tone with which he made his comments. I was pleased to hear him acknowledge that mistakes had been made on HS2 by the previous Government. I think he described the path as not having been perfect—I would go so far as to say that it has been a shambolic mess. He struck a sombre note in his remarks, and I would ask him to consider going further, once he has had the opportunity to read the full James Stewart report, because an apology on the part of the Conservative party for the mess in which it left this infrastructure scheme is undoubtedly warranted. I also thank him for his comments on the action that HS2 is taking with regard to alleged fraud within the supply chain. I can assure him that I will provide appropriate updates to the House on the progress of the HMRC investigation that is now under way.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to set out our plans for investment in transport in the midlands and the north. The Conservative party took the decision to cancel HS2 north of Birmingham, and made wild promises about what it would do with the money it claimed it was saving. He is kidding himself if he thinks that that money ever existed. In last week's spending review, this Government set out £15.6 billion to be invested in local transport schemes across the country, whether in Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds or Newcastle. The hon. Gentleman's approach was a fantasy—he promised the moon on a stick and had absolutely no means to deliver. He asked me to set out the Government's plans for further enhancing rail connectivity in the midlands and the north. I can assure him that further announcements will be made, both as part of the Government's 10-year national infrastructure strategy and beyond that in the weeks and months ahead.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me to opine on the extent to which litigation has caused delays in the delivery of infrastructure projects. He will know that, through this Government's Planning and Infrastructure Bill, we are tackling this issue by limiting the number of judicial reviews and legal challenges that can be brought. Unlike his party, this Government are serious about delivering infrastructure, and about providing the stable leadership that this country needs when it comes to infrastructure.

Before coming to the Chamber today, I looked up the number of Rail Ministers in the Department under his Government—it was 18 in 12 years. It is no wonder that projects such as HS2 were left in such a state of disarray. Just as this Government have returned stability to the nation's economy, so will we return common sense and stable leadership to the delivery of the nation's infrastructure.

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

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I also thank the Secretary of State for the decisive action she has taken to address the causes of HS2's cost overruns. We look forward to having Mark Wild and the Rail Minister at our Committee very shortly.

I actually want to celebrate something that HS2's leadership should be proud of: the work they have done on skills and workforce innovation. They have provided best-practice work that the construction industry and transport projects can learn from, and in fact are learning from. However, I urge the Secretary of State to get her Department to learn from countries such as France and Spain, which have managed to deliver extensive high-speed rail projects to time and at a fraction of the cost of HS2 here in the UK.

Heidi Alexander: I thank the Chair of the Transport Committee for her comments. She is right to recognise the excellent work that HS2 has done on skills and the workforce. We have over 300,000 people working on this project at the moment, and I think that HS2 has done good work on opening up opportunities, whether through apprenticeships for the next generation or through the supply chain. I will heed my hon. Friend's advice about learning from the speed and ease with which other countries deliver infrastructure projects.¹

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Mr Paul Kohler (Wimbledon) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and for advance sight of it. What we have heard today is clearly a damning indictment of Conservative mismanagement. Connecting our largest cities with high-speed rail was meant to help boost economic growth and spread opportunity. The original idea—a high-speed rail network connecting London to Manchester and Leeds—was clearly the right one, but what we have ended up with is years of delay and billions of pounds of taxpayers' money being poured down the drain, with no end in sight. The litany of errors that the Secretary of State has outlined is truly shocking and shows that the Conservatives were comatose at the wheel. A lack of oversight, trust and planning has left us with a high-speed railway drastically reduced in scale and inflated in price. The shocking allegations of fraud by a subcontractor are emblematic of the Tories' lack of oversight and interest in properly safeguarding the public interest and public money, as we saw with the scandal of personal protective equipment procurement during covid. We must now make sure that any money lost to fraud is clawed back as soon as possible.

May I ask the Secretary of State three things? First, can she guarantee that, if any fraud has taken place, any money lost will be returned to the Government and her Department as soon as possible, and that the police will be provided with the necessary resources to investigate the matter fully? Secondly, the Secretary of State has said that the ministerial taskforce set up to provide oversight on HS2 had inconsistent attendance from the then Transport Secretary and Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Does the Secretary of State agree that those right hon. Members should apologise for those particularly damning lapses? Thirdly, we share the Secretary of State's confidence in Mark Wild and Mike Brown, but

1.[*Official Report*, 23 June 2025; Vol. 769, c. 4WC.] (Correction)

can she say when she expects to be able to give the House an accurate assessment of the scheme's full costs and of when HS2 will finally be up and running?

Heidi Alexander: The hon. Gentleman raises three fair issues, and I agree with his assessment that the previous Government were not just asleep but comatose at the wheel. He asks whether the alleged fraud in the supply chain will be fully investigated, and whether moneys will be returned to the taxpayer. I can assure him that no stone will be left unturned in getting to the bottom of this matter. He is also right to highlight the question of poor and inconsistent attendance by individuals who held my role, the Rail Minister's role and Treasury roles. It is imperative that politicians who have oversight of these infrastructure schemes stay close to the detail of what is happening, both through their own officials and directly with the executive and non-executive leadership of the project. That is certainly what I intend to do. I know the Rail Minister has a monthly meeting with the new chief executive. We have already held a meeting of the ministerial taskforce, and there is another one due soon. I have had multiple one-to-one conversations with the leadership team at HS2.

The hon. Gentleman asks when I will be in a position to provide a full update on costs and schedule. Mark Wild has told me that he will require until the end of this year to do that full piece of work. I am not prepared to get ahead of that, because that is how we have got into problems previously. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that as soon as I have more information, in addition to the six-monthly report that I provide to Parliament, I will come back to this House.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Middleton South) (Lab): This is the latest national scandal to arise in our attempts to bring in infrastructure schemes on budget and on time, but the taxpayer is not the only victim of the failure of this project so far; there are also the people of the north of England. HS2 was originally a scheme intended to help the economies of the north-west and Yorkshire and those communities on the way, so there is a complete failure there. What we will be left with is an extension to the London underground system, and that will not help people in Leeds, Bradford, Manchester, Sheffield and elsewhere. Will the Secretary of State consider safeguarding the original routes so that when we get our infrastructure plans in place, we can build something that this country can be proud of?

Heidi Alexander: I gently say to my hon. Friend that the Mayor of the West Midlands might have something to say about his great city being seen as the end of an extension to the London underground line. It is completely right that our two great cities—Birmingham and London—are connected with high-quality rail services. Although this is a difficult day in exposing the state of the project, I have no doubt that in time it will be a railway we can be proud of.

I also say to my hon. Friend that I am aware of forecast capacity constraints between Birmingham and Manchester and in other parts of the country. We are investing, through things such as the trans-Pennine route upgrade, in improving connectivity to other great cities in the north of England. We are determined to

ensure that everyone, no matter where they live in the country, has an excellent public transport system that they can rely upon.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): My constituency has been devastated by roughly 26 miles of HS2, and I have consistently warned this House—during the previous Parliament and this—through the lens of the miserable experience on the ground in Buckinghamshire, about the reasons for the cost overruns, poor governance and everything else that the Secretary of State has highlighted in her statement today. If she must persist with this wrong project with a new delay, will she give a commitment to my constituents and the rest of the county of Buckinghamshire on how much longer they will have to live in misery as part of a building site? More importantly, will she look urgently at unlocking some of the mitigation funds that we are finding incredibly hard to access and get spent on the ground? That would be of some small, tiny comfort to my constituents who are living in misery.

Heidi Alexander: It is essential that we proceed as quickly as possible with the remaining civil engineering works that will have affected the hon. Member's constituents to date. If he wishes to write to me with details of the problem he has experienced with accessing mitigation funds, I will raise that for him with the chief executive of HS2.

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): The Conservatives announced that they were scrapping the northern leg of HS2 in a former railway station, summing up their attitude to the railway and sending shockwaves through the industry, including in Derby, a rail city that will be building the HS2 trains. Will the Transport Secretary ensure certainty and timeliness going forward, so that the industry can have confidence that we will not see further delays, which have already been so damaging for the supply chain?

Heidi Alexander: My hon. Friend is right that certainty is critical for the rail supply chain. It will be a number of months before I am in a position to confirm with any certainty the schedule and estimated final cost. As soon as the new chief executive, Mark Wild, has provided that information to me and my Department, I will be updating the House.

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): The Secretary of State knows that HS2 runs through my constituency, and she will accept that what makes my constituents particularly angry about what she has described is that HS2 has pinched every penny in compensating someone unfortunate enough to find themselves in the path of this railway, yet wasted millions elsewhere. Can she assure us that as part of the reset, line-drawing or page-turning—however she describes it—she will look at how people are compensated when affected by such major infrastructure projects? Does she accept that it would be sensible to consider how Parliament could look again at this project, whose budget and timescale have ballooned, and decide whether we still think it is a worthwhile use of taxpayers' money?

Heidi Alexander: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right to point out that we have some form as a country in seeking to gold-plate infrastructure projects. The last Government talked about this railway being

[Heidi Alexander]

the fastest and the best in the world. Frankly, I would like this country to do things well and properly. The point he raises about compensation is one that any Government should keep under review, while bearing in mind the need to provide value for money to the taxpayer. I can assure him that I will make sure on any infrastructure project I oversee in this role that the House is appropriately updated and that we proceed with transparency on the costs and benefits of the schemes.

Callum Anderson (Buckingham and Bletchley) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and the candour with which she has delivered it. The villages I represent in north Buckinghamshire, be they Turweston, Westbury, Quanton or North Marston—I know the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) will be familiar with those communities—have for too long faced chaos and disruption from HS2 and its contractors. News that there will be yet more delay will cause them significant distress. Will the Secretary of State update the House and explain what additional practical support, financial or otherwise, her Department plans to give rural communities such as mine over the years ahead?

Heidi Alexander: I think the biggest reassurance that I could give my hon. Friend is my cast-iron commitment to ensure that we proceed as rapidly as possible with the completion of the remaining construction works, which I know will have had an impact on his constituents. While I cannot commit myself to the provision of further compensation from the Dispatch Box today, if they are experiencing particular problems he should not hesitate to bring them to my attention and that of my Department.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (North Cotswolds) (Con): I welcome the statement, and I do not disagree with a word of the Secretary of State's analysis of what has gone wrong in the past.

The Public Accounts Committee, which I have the honour of chairing, has produced eight comprehensive reports over the 13 years of this project, and there are some common themes throughout those reports. First, the Secretary of State's Department—I am not in any way blaming her, because this is what went on in the past—did not have the right mix of skills to be able to challenge the assertions of those in HS2 Ltd: project managers, engineers, people who really know how to build a railway. Secondly, as we said in our report published on 28 February, we found that there was considerable disagreement between HS2 and the Department about the cost of the railway—the highest estimate was the top range of HS2, which was £66 billion in 2019 prices and more than £80 billion in today's prices—and I think we need an assurance fairly soon about what it is going to cost. Thirdly, I am not at all surprised that the Secretary of State has had to delay the completion date, but this is the second reset in five years, so we really want to see it work. I think that the people of this country will be very keen to know, when her half-yearly report is published and if possible before, when the project is likely to be completed.

Heidi Alexander: I thank the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Public Accounts Committee for the work that they have done on this over so many years. He

is right to highlight the need for skills within the Government so that they can act as a strong client of HS2 Ltd. We also need to ensure that we have the right commercial acumen in HS2, and I know that the chief executive officer is working on that. I must, however, disappoint the hon. Gentleman, because I think it unlikely that in my next report to Parliament, which I believe is due before the summer recess, I will be able to provide any concrete information about a new schedule window and a new cost envelope. I think that the work will take the chief executive towards the end of the year before we are in a position to make that information public.

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): My constituents know more than most about the daily misery of HS2 construction, particularly in the villages of Water Orton and Kingsbury and the town of Coleshill, and they will welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I met the new chief executive officer, Mark Wild, on Monday to discuss the reset, and I am delighted that he accepted my invitation to come to the Spud Club in Water Orton and talk to residents there. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that it is time we ended the failures of oversight, the scandalous overspends and the suggested fraud, and it is time the dust settled on this project rather than settling on my constituents' clean washing, clean cars and clean windows?

Heidi Alexander: My hon. Friend has painted a graphic picture. I understand that when large infrastructure works are taking place those who live closest to them will often experience disruption in their daily lives, and I want to put on record my thanks to the residents of Kingsbury, Coleshill and Water Orton for their patience. I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend that we need, once and for all, to put an end to this cycle of overspends, delays and waste, and get on and build a railway that is fit for the 21st century.

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): The disastrous decision by the last Conservative Government to stop the works at Euston station dented investor and commuter confidence in our railways and in major infrastructure delivery. Their failure to keep costs under control and to manage the basics of the project—simple things such as turning up to meetings—has created the quagmire in which HS2 finds itself today, and I do not envy the Secretary of State the task that confronts her. I am glad to hear that the Government see the huge potential of a comprehensive redevelopment of Euston station, but can the Secretary of State reassure me that we will not end up with a cut-price station that does not realise the potential of the project?

Heidi Alexander: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity not only to re-provide the existing Euston station—which, I am sure, will frustrate many Members and their constituents at times—but to provide the new HS2 station there and to unlock land around it. That will enable new homes to be delivered, but is also a massive commercial opportunity for regeneration in the heart of London. It is a very exciting opportunity—one that we will be saying more about in the coming weeks.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): Delays to HS2 have blighted parts of west London around the main site at Old Oak Common. Benefits, when they finally arrive, will include a major interchange

with Great Western Railway and the Elizabeth line. Will the Secretary of State consider opening the Elizabeth line station at Old Oak Common as soon as is feasible rather than waiting for HS2 to begin operating, and will she reclaim some of the good will of the people of west London by directing a tiny fraction of the costs of HS2 to the repair of Hammersmith bridge?

Heidi Alexander: My hon. Friend has asked about the possibility of opening an Elizabeth line station at Old Oak Common before the opening of the HS2 station. I will certainly speak to the Rail Minister, in the other place, and explore what the opportunities might be. If I may, I will then write to my hon. Friend. He may have heard the Chancellor announce last week, during her statement on the spending review, that we are opening and financing a structures fund to enable local authorities with assets that are costly to repair to bid to the Government for help with repairing dilapidated bridges, tunnels and so on. I will say more in due course about how the fund will operate, and I am sure that we will be talking about Hammersmith bridge again, as we have for many years.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the clarity of her statement. Vast swathes of Staffordshire are currently owned by HS2—a third of the village of Hopton is under HS2 ownership—and this has an enormous impact on farmers and people who live along the route where so many empty houses sit. Can the Secretary of State reassure my constituents that that farmland and those houses will be returned to the farmers and to the people who actually want to live in those communities?

Heidi Alexander: I will be saying more about the safeguarded land and the directions that apply to it in due course.

Martin Wrigley (Newton Abbot) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for the actions that she has taken today. They were clearly necessary, and it sounds like we are on a better track. However, HS2 provides little or nothing for rail users in the south-west, other than ongoing delays during the construction and operation of Old Oak Common. Will the Secretary of State consider funding, or prioritising the funding for, the critical final phase of the Dawlish rail resilience work that will help businesses and rail users in Devon and Cornwall—and perhaps even in Swindon?

Heidi Alexander: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to talk about the Dawlish scheme. I must admit that it is a topic I will need to take up with the Rail Minister, and I will be happy to give the hon. Gentleman a response in writing in respect of the merits of the scheme.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for her honesty as she set out this latest reset, necessitated by the mess that the Tories left. Old Oak Common is part of my constituency, and this week eight associations across two boroughs have banded together to create the Old Oak Alliance, with the purpose of fighting for compensation and mitigation in the current circumstances. They will be bitterly disappointed by the news of even more prolonged disruption. Will my right hon. Friend meet me—or, better still, come on a site visit to meet them and see

what they are putting up with? We are dealing with a company whose idea of engagement is jam tomorrow and death by PowerPoint.

Heidi Alexander: I am sure the leadership of HS2 would be very concerned to hear that description of the way that the project is engaging with local people. That is not what I expect of an infrastructure company, and I am sure it is not what the chief executive of HS2 Ltd would want either. I would be very happy to meet my hon. Friend.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): The previous Government cancelled phase 2 of HS2, and from what the Secretary of State has said today, my understanding is that it remains cancelled and that phase 2 will not be reinstated. That being the case, can she let me know when the HS2's safeguarding of land, particularly in the mid-Cheshire section, will be lifted?

Heidi Alexander: I am afraid I cannot give the right hon. Lady a date today, but I can assure her that I am fully cognisant of this issue. We need to look at whether there is any requirement for any future schemes. As soon as we are in a position to provide updates, I will come back to this House and be sure to provide hon. Members will all the relevant information.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): The HS2 line runs down the west side of Aylesbury. It will bring no benefits at all to my constituency, yet my residents have suffered years of noise, disruption, flooding, loss of access to the countryside and the destruction of their natural environment as a result of its construction. I am pleased that the Government are getting a grip on this issue, and I commend the Secretary of State for her honesty and focus, but my constituents will understandably be concerned by the news of further delays and potential further disruption. Can the Secretary of State confirm that she will do everything in her power to hold HS2 and its contractors to account in order to minimise the ongoing disruption for my long-suffering residents?

Heidi Alexander: I can assure my hon. Friend that we are determined to see the main works civil engineering contracts completed as soon as possible. That is the element of construction that generally creates most disturbance for local communities, and we are pretty much at peak construction now. I thank her constituents for their patience while we continue to deliver this vital new piece of rail infrastructure.

Nigel Farage (Clacton) (Reform): I have campaigned against this HS2 project ever since 2010, up and down the line. I never believed the original £35 billion price tag. Furthermore, it would have benefited only rich businessmen and driven businesses from the north of England to London—it would have had the opposite of the intended effect. Rather than having another reset, has the moment not come to recognise that this is a failure? Let us scrap HS2, use the tens of billions of pounds that we can save in the next decade to upgrade railway lines across the entirety of the United Kingdom to the benefit of many millions, and spend the rest on other national priorities in these financially straitened times. Surely the time has come to scrap the entirety of the project and to recognise that we have got it wrong.

Heidi Alexander: We are not going to be a country that spends over £30 billion on rail infrastructure but then never sees a train running on it. We have already seen too much waste, and I am interested to hear that the hon. Gentleman is advocating more. We also have significant capacity constraints between Birmingham and London. He seems not to want to do anything about that, but I think those two great cities deserve a railway that is fit for the 21st century; I am just sorry that he does not.

Dave Robertson (Lichfield) (Lab): My constituency is the only one in the country that has HS2 phase 1, phase 2a and phase 2b. It is not true to say that the line will not continue north of Birmingham, because it will cut through miles of Staffordshire, through my constituency, until it rejoins the main line at Handsacre. The failings of HS2 Ltd have been clear to my constituents for years and, frankly, it is shocking to hear about the dereliction of oversight by the previous Government, although it is what we have always suspected. People across Lichfield, Burntwood and the villages will, quite rightly, be furious.

Farmers, landowners and businesses in my constituency have been fighting tooth and nail with HS2 for years to get it to do the job right. We have seen compulsory purchases that have never been paid, temporary possessions that come with a multitude of exchanges—back and forth, and back and forth again—with land agents taking massive fees for things that should have been sorted years ago, crop loss payments that never come and many, many more issues. People in Streethay have had to deal with ongoing roadworks around a junction that has become far too overcomplicated by HS2 trying to put a railway underneath it, and that has seen the village almost cut off at times.

People are absolutely sick of HS2. The failings of that organisation are multitudinous, and the failings of the Conservatives to fully hold it to account should be an embarrassment to them and an embarrassment to this country. I really do welcome a reset, but it has to lead to meaningful change. Can the Secretary of State give me and my constituents any assurances that it will be delivered as quickly as it possibly can be, and with as little disruption as we can get away with? Can she finally give us a timeline for when the safeguarded land will be returned to landowners? This has been going on for far too long.

Heidi Alexander: I share my hon. Friend's anger. He is a powerful advocate for his constituents, who have endured disruption, and I agree entirely that the way this project was handled was a dereliction of duty on the part of the previous Government. That is why we have appointed new leadership, why we are accepting all the recommendations of the James Stewart review, and why we are going through this fundamental reset. As soon as I have received advice from the new chief executive about the revised cost and schedule, I will update my hon. Friend and other hon. Members.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): As a south-west region MP, does the Secretary of State agree that the west country has for decades been the poor country cousin of our rail network, and that money spent on HS2 is money not spent elsewhere? Will she do all in her power to ensure that the relatively small changes that are necessary on the network in the

south-west to make life a lot easier go ahead, and will she look particularly at the absolutely woeful west of England line?

Heidi Alexander: There are challenges across the rail network, and I readily accept that improvements are needed in many parts of the country. I do not necessarily accept that the south-west is the poor cousin of the rail network, but I can assure the right hon. Gentleman of my determination to make sure that everyone, no matter where they live in this country, has a better rail service at the end of this Parliament than they did at the beginning of it.

Jacob Collier (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): The Transport Secretary will know that my constituents have endured years of disruption, and of drawn-out and poorly managed roadworks, as they drive past Lichfield on the A38. Given that billions of pounds were squandered by the previous Government and the disruption continues, can she say more about how she will get a grip on this project to ensure that we have vigorous oversight, and that it is delivered effectively and on time for our constituents?

Heidi Alexander: We have appointed new leadership. We are establishing new governance. We are looking at the incentives contained in the contracts on the civil engineering works. We will make sure that no stone is left unturned in providing value for money for the taxpayer on HS2, because this country is making a very significant investment and we need to ensure that every penny is wisely spent.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The cost of HS2 has now spiralled to over £100 billion. Welsh taxpayers are paying dearly for this appalling mess, even though we get no benefits whatsoever. Wales is now owed at least £5 billion. This is not going to go away—so when will we get our fair share?

Heidi Alexander: The right hon. Lady may have heard the Chancellor announce in the spending review over £400 million of investment in the Welsh railways over 10 years. That will enable work to take place on the Burns stations in south Wales, and at Padeswood sidings on the north Wales line. It is a significant investment in Welsh railways, the like of which has not been seen for many, many years.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): As shadow Transport Secretary for four years, I was wholly supportive of this concept. I just want to correct the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage), who completely misunderstands its basis. As I am sure the Secretary of State agrees, the purpose was to deliver capacity for the north of England—"speed" was a misnomer—but that opportunity has now been lost. Can she give me some assurance that through the trans-Pennine upgrade, skills and expertise will be rolled out across the entire north of England—not just to the north-west and Yorkshire, but to the north-east, including through the continuing rolling programme of electrification? I am thinking specifically of the stretch from Northallerton to Middlesbrough and beyond, because that is where we get the gross value added and the economic growth from. Can we have some assurance that those ambitions will not be fettered one jot by this damning indictment of the past 15 years of failure?

Heidi Alexander: I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government 100% recognise the need to improve rail connectivity in the midlands and the north. He is also right to highlight the need for a stable pipeline of investment, so that the supply chain can plan, and so that we do not lose skills. The Government have an ambitious rail programme; there is East West Rail, the trans-Pennine route upgrade and HS2. I am determined to build on this country's proud railway heritage and ensure that we have railways fit for the modern day.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): The Devon and Cornwall rail network is only one severe storm away from being decapitated at Dawlish. Phase 5 of the south-west rail resilience network is desperately needed. When will the Minister visit the line to see how desperately needed it is?

Heidi Alexander: Dawlish is a very beautiful part of the country, so I am very tempted to take the hon. Gentleman up on his invitation. This is the second time in this statement that the Dawlish programme has been raised. I gave the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Martin Wrigley) an undertaking that I would speak to the Rail Minister on that subject and then write to him; I will come back to the hon. Member for Torbay (Steve Darling) in writing at the same time.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. HS2 has been an abject failure when it comes to the political accountability of the previous Administration. On transport efficiencies, will she press on with reforms to the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, so that we can fix the driving test system and keep our country moving?

Heidi Alexander: We have a really important programme of work across all arms-length bodies of the Department for Transport, including the DVSA. It is really important that we provide public services in an efficient and effective way. I am conscious that my hon. Friend's constituents and others may be very keen for rapid progress on driving test wait times. I can assure him that the issue is a focus of discussions that I am having with the DVSA.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. I too served on the Public Accounts Committee, so I know that while HS2 is by far the largest civil infrastructure programme in the United Kingdom, the second largest is the lower Thames crossing from Tilbury to Gravesend, for which about £10 billion is currently budgeted. If her tighter approach to HS2 produces savings, is there any way that some of them might be vired to pay for the lower Thames crossing? If not, exactly which private-sector companies will pay for it? So far, I am afraid the Government have been rather vague on that point.

Heidi Alexander: We are exploring finance options for the lower Thames crossing. On Monday we announced that there would be £590 million of public funding this year to take forward utility works and some land purchases. I will say more to this House in future about the private finance arrangements that we are exploring.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): I commend my right hon. Friend for the swift actions she has taken to try to put right this disastrous situation, created by the previous Government. The parallels with the fast-track

contracts for personal protective equipment cannot be ignored. I understand that contracts were signed when appropriate decisions had not been made. Will the people who signed those contracts be interviewed? Will they have to explain why they decided to take those decisions, against advice? Will we get any of that money back?

Heidi Alexander: As I said in my statement, the Prime Minister has asked the Cabinet Secretary to investigate whether the James Stewart report raises any questions for the civil service or the wider public sector. My hon. Friend is completely right to highlight the point about contracts being signed with construction companies even before the scope of the works had been agreed. It is little wonder that the country has ended up paying more. We signed a contract with a company to deliver works, yet there was no clarity whatever about what work the Government wanted them to do. This is a dreadful and woeful failure of oversight by previous Government Ministers, and I will not allow that to happen on my watch.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): Before I was elected to this place, I was a member of HS2's independent panel for the community and environment fund and business and local economy fund. The Secretary of State's statement makes for pretty shocking reading. There is talk of fraud and shambolic mismanagement—things that should bring shame on everybody involved.

One of the problems with HS2 was always the name, which put the focus on speed, rather than capacity. My Hazel Grove constituents use the west coast main line, and they talk to me about the capacity problems that remain. Indeed, I see them every week when I come up and down to work. The Secretary of State says that she is not reinstating the line north of Birmingham. She also says that trans-Pennine work is under way. What specific work is being undertaken by her Department on capacity on the west coast main line north of Birmingham?

Heidi Alexander: I am aware that the Mayor of the West Midlands and the Mayor of Greater Manchester have put proposals to the Government on this issue. In the mid-2030s, we are likely to see severe capacity constraints between Birmingham and Manchester. We are reviewing those proposals, and I hope to be able to say more on them in the months ahead.

Matt Rodda (Reading Central) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the honesty with which she has addressed these very difficult issues. May I ask her to say a little more about the lessons that can be learned from the success of the Elizabeth line—both the far superior leadership and management of the programme, and the economic benefits generated? The £18 billion invested in capital yielded £42 billion in benefits in just the first three years of this amazing piece of infrastructure.

Heidi Alexander: While the delivery of the Elizabeth line was one of my proudest achievements as deputy mayor for transport in London, I must admit that it was not without its challenges. The trust between Transport for London and the delivery project, and the transparency and honesty between different parts of the system, were among the finer aspects of how we got the project over

[Heidi Alexander]

the line. It was one of my proudest days when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth opened the Elizabeth line at Paddington shortly before she passed away. There is a lot of learning that we need to take from Crossrail. We are doing that, and we are determined to get on and see this railway opened.

Blake Stephenson (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): East West Rail is due to travel through my constituency, on the historic Marston Vale line. How will the Secretary of State ensure that the mistakes made on HS2—we have heard some shocking stories today—will not also be made on East West Rail? I am afraid that there is very little confidence in the East West Rail Company. It is important that my communities are listened to, that we deliver this infrastructure faster and at lower cost, and that people who are impacted are properly compensated.

Heidi Alexander: East West Rail is fundamentally different from the construction of HS2. The hon. Gentleman will know that it is being delivered in three phases, and that it is only the latter phase, between Bedford and Cambridge, that will necessitate the construction of new track. The chief executive of East West Rail, David Hughes, is determined to deliver the scheme rapidly, offer good value for money to the taxpayer, and properly engage with communities. If there are any particular issues the hon. Gentleman is concerned about, he should raise them with me, and I will gladly speak with the leadership there.

Mr Luke Charters (York Outer) (Lab): On the Public Accounts Committee, I asked HS2 bosses what I thought was a relatively simple question: how much are they spending on new mitigation? However, they could not give an answer. Similarly, I can confirm to the House that I have information suggesting that the cost of the so-called bat tunnel is well north of the purported £100 million. I commend the Secretary of State for the leadership that she has shown today. Will she hold HS2 accountable for some of these bat-shed crazy costs?

Heidi Alexander: I can assure my hon. Friend that the estimated cost of the bat structure is £95 million in 2019 prices. I agree that we cannot have an environmental mitigations regime that allows this sort of thing to happen. The Government have put forward significant reforms in this space, and we will continue to monitor the need for further changes, so that we can deliver infrastructure in a better way.

Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): I thank the Secretary of State for giving a candid and transparent statement to this House. On Birmingham—I am the only Birmingham MP present, which surprises me—it is disappointing that there will be delay and additional costs, but every cloud has a silver lining. My constituency has one of the highest levels of unemployment at 17%—four times the national average. In addition, we have seen the closure of a number of local stations; it would improve the network if they were reopened. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how we can get my constituents into jobs, and the possibility of opening three stations: Handsworth Wood, Soho Road and City Health Campus?

Heidi Alexander: I would be very happy to ask the Rail Minister to meet the hon. Gentleman to talk about the stations in Birmingham that he mentions.

Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): I welcome the statement from the Secretary of State. May I speak today of the east of England? The right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak) famously promised a dividend when he cancelled HS2 North, so might we expect some of that to be used to replace the crucial Haughley and Ely junctions, in order to finally sort out the rail connections in the east of England?

Heidi Alexander: I understand the importance of the Ely area scheme in terms of rail infrastructure, and I hope to say more about rail investment in the weeks before the summer recess.

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): Will the Secretary of State set out the steps she is taking to ensure that infrastructure like the £100 million bat tunnel will not be included in future projects, such as East West Rail?

Heidi Alexander: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill includes proposals to reform species and habitats protection. The proposals for environmental delivery plans and the nature restoration fund enable a shift to protecting the whole population of a species, rather than focusing on purely local considerations. That will ensure better outcomes for nature, without causing us to incur unreasonable costs, as happened with the HS2 bat mitigation structure.

Mr Tom Morrison (Cheadle) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for her answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) on capacity on the west coast main line. Stockport is the one place where it is at full capacity, and HS2 was meant to solve that; however, because of the cancellation of the northern leg of HS2, we face HS2 trains going through Stockport's already packed lines. I welcome the response to the plan put forward by the Mayors of the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, but will the Secretary of State commit to engaging with Stockport council on those plans? We need to find a solution to this capacity issue, because it could hold my borough back for decades.

Heidi Alexander: I am very conscious of the need to invest in and improve public transport in Stockport, and if the council would like to write to me with any relevant information, I will gladly consider it. I also point out that our investment in transport for city regions, announced a couple of weeks, is good news for Stockport; Metrolink will be extended to the town. I hope the hon. Gentleman will welcome that as good news for his constituents.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): It may surprise the Secretary of State, but I actually have some sympathy for her for inheriting the HS2 nightmare. When she receives the updated budget and timeframe, will there be a cost and a timeline at which point she will say, "Enough is enough—it's better to stop," or is it an open-ended cheque book?

Heidi Alexander: If the hon. Gentleman had bothered to read the spending review last week, he would have seen that the Government have committed £25 billion over the next four years, which enables work to be taken forward. As I have said a number of times today, I will be updating the House when I have further information available about both the overall cost envelope, the estimated final cost at completion and the anticipated schedule.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): With a decade of delay, costs spiralling to eye-watering sums of anywhere between £60 billion and £100 billion and now credible allegations of fraud in the supply chain, will the Secretary of State say what steps the Government will take to recover hard-working taxpayers' money from fraudsters, hold those responsible to account and announce a final stop to wasting money?

Heidi Alexander: I have said on a number of occasions that billions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been wasted by constant scope changes, ineffective contracts and bad management. That is what this reset of HS2 is all about—it is why we have appointed the new leadership, and it is why we are fundamentally changing the governance structures. As I said in answer to previous questions, the matter of potential fraud in the supply chain is being investigated by HMRC, and we will be providing updates to the House as and when further information is available.

Point of Order

1.46 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish to once again raise the case of Alaa Abd el-Fattah, the British-Egyptian citizen who is still imprisoned in Egypt. His mother has been on hunger strike for a long time now; she is in St Thomas' hospital, and her health is deteriorating. I ask those on the Treasury Bench now to take a message back to the Prime Minister that we need to do everything we possibly can to secure Alaa's release, because I fear that we may well lose his mother, Laila Soueif. One initiative that could be tried again is a joint approach between our Prime Minister and President Macron to President Sisi to urge Alaa's release. I think we are in a dangerous moment. The Government have undertaken a number of actions; the Prime Minister committed to doing all in his power, and he has approached President Sisi. However, I just feel we need to make at least another last attempt, both to secure the release of Alaa and to secure the life of his mother.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for notice of it. He has put his point on the record, and I am sure his concerns will have been heard by those on the Treasury Bench.

BILL PRESENTED

UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENT BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Liz Kendall, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Pat McFadden, Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, Ellie Reeves, Sir Steven Timms, Alison McGovern, Torsten Bell and Andrew Western, presented a Bill to make provision to alter the rates of the standard allowance, limited capability for work element and limited capability for work and work-related activity element of universal credit and the rates of income-related employment and support allowance, and to restrict eligibility for the personal independence payment.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 267), with explanatory notes (Bill 267-EN).

Right to Manage and Leasehold

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

1.48 pm

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the definition of qualifying tenants for the purposes of claiming a right to manage; to reduce the proportion of qualifying tenants required to give notice of a claim to acquire a right to manage; to establish a duty on freeholders to assist a Right to Manage company in establishing contact with leaseholders within the freeholder's property; to make provision about establishing a presumption in favour of a right to manage in certain circumstances before the First Tier Tribunal; to require the Secretary of State to review procedures for converting leasehold property into commonhold property; and for connected purposes.

I rise to speak on a topic that matters dearly to all of us in this House: accountability and representation. As legislators, our job is to hold legislation to account and ensure that it represents our constituents' interests. It is the role of our constituents, in turn, to hold us to account whenever elections arise. I would like to thank my constituents for joining us in the Gallery today.

Accountability is at the heart of our consumer relationships, with standards and competition embedded into commercial law. It is also a key part of our social contract. When someone in a position of power does wrong, there needs to be a system of recourse. When it comes to housing, however, this too often goes out the window. Frequently, there is a stark gap between those who provide our housing and those who live in it, alongside an accountability deficit, whether in private renting, social housing or the sector that the Bill seeks to remedy: leasehold. My constituency has the highest proportion of leaseholders in the country. For too long they have had to endure a system that leaves them without full control over their homes and at the mercy of a wide range of bad actors.

I was proud to be elected on a manifesto that promised to ban the sale of new leasehold properties and make commonhold the default tenure across the land. Since the election, the Government have acted with speed in this area: inheriting a rushed piece of legislation from their predecessor and untangling it with speed; setting out our plans for reform; publishing a White Paper on commonhold; and expediting moves that include the recent reforms to the right to manage.

Those actions have already had a positive impact in the Cities of London and Westminster. Constituents have written to me saying that they submitted right to manage applications on 3 March, as the Government's changes allowed them to do so. I join them in thanking this Government for acting so quickly in this area, and I look forward with interest to the publication of the leasehold and commonhold reform Bill later this year.

One of the most visible consequences of the leasehold system is the scourge of unscrupulous managing agents. For the past six months, my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (David Pinto-Duschinsky) and I have been co-ordinating action as co-chairs of Labour for leasehold, which is an alliance of 150 Labour party colleagues against some of the worst-performing actors in this sector. Many of the Members supporting this Bill have

been tirelessly advocating in this campaign for leaseholders in their constituencies and nationwide, and I pay tribute to that work.

In the course of our work, we have heard stories of residents suffering at the hands of managing agents as they fail to conduct essential repairs, engage in threatening and abusive behaviour towards residents and even run off with hundreds of thousands of pounds of leaseholders' money—all while providing little justification for their service or the high fees that they charge. In this process I have also met the most dedicated leaseholders, organisers who have collected testimony from thousands of neighbours to highlight poor practice, accountants who have volunteered their time to scrutinise invoices and auditing processes, and lawyers who have provided free advice to other buildings going through the first-tier tribunal.

However, without a legal system that supports them, the leaseholders remain unable to seek the accountability that they deserve from distant and disinterested managing agents. These leaseholders include my constituents in Neville House—shared owners who pay £5,000 a year in service charges for services that have not been delivered for 20 years, with reports of mould being ignored for months, and who are stuck between their social landlord, managing agent and a freeholder in a complex cladding case. They include the residents of Sheldon Square who have had managing agents ignore sewage leaking into their flats, have been billed for damage caused by contractors to their building, and have received threatening letters posted to individual leaseholders in flagrant breaches of data protection.

These leaseholders also include the residents of Oxford and Cambridge Mansions, whose managing agent and freeholder have ignored reports of gross misconduct against building staff, failed to take action on leaks persisting for years, and ignored reports of damp and mould emerging from flats that they themselves owned and were using as storage rooms, all while complex major works loom with an opaque tendering process that may cost residents millions.

Ultimately, the situation amounts to one of accountability and representation. In most cases, managing agents do not feel a need to represent leaseholders' interests, and the only accountability they have is to the building's freeholder, who far too often takes little interest in residents' welfare. There are some ways out of this situation, and one is by acquiring the right to manage. That involves forming a right to manage association, recruiting half of the flats in a block to join, and submitting an application to the landlord, who can then accept it or drag leaseholders through the first-tier tribunal.

There are multiple loopholes and hurdles obstructing leaseholders from achieving even this basic step. Properties cannot have over a certain percentage of square footage of commercial space, and sometimes even flowerbeds or communal car parks get included in that. Even when large numbers of residents are in favour of getting the right to manage, and no one in the building is opposed, hitting the 50% threshold can be difficult. This is due to a number of reasons, from owners who do not reside in their properties to freeholders who retain a large number of flats in the building to let out privately or, as mentioned previously, to use as storage rooms.

This Bill would go some way to rectifying this hurdle. First, it would lower the threshold required for a successful right to manage application from 50% of qualifying leaseholders to 35%. As many campaigners have pointed

out, this alone is not enough. That is why the Bill redefines qualifying tenants during a right to manage application as tenants who respond either positively or negatively when asked to vote. Put simply, it changes the threshold for a right to manage claim from, “Can you find a majority of the flat owners in your building?”, to, “Do enough of the actual leaseholders in your block want this to go ahead?”.

The Bill addresses a number of other issues too. Most notably, it establishes a duty for freeholders to assist the right to manage company when it contacts their fellow leaseholders, and it establishes a presumption in favour of leaseholders on occasions when freeholders counter-claim at the first-tier tribunal. This Bill does not go all the way to fixing the right to manage, and a number of obstacles would remain, particularly in mixed-use developments.

There are no quick fixes to the right to manage, commonhold or any other reforms. Managing blocks of flats will always remain challenging and will lead to difficult debates within buildings as to how to manage complex and expensive works. What matters is that the companies who manage the buildings are accountable and represent fairly the people who live in the buildings. Through reinvigorating the right to manage, we can achieve this. Leaseholders across the country are ready to take this step to hold their managing agents to account. All they need is for the law to be on their side.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Rachel Blake, Lizzi Collinge, Dr Beccy Cooper, Deirdre Costigan, Emily Darlington, Marsha De Cordova, Anna Dixon, Amanda Hack, Jayne Kirkham, Uma Kumaran, Sarah Russell and Yuan Yang present the Bill.

Rachel Blake accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 July, and to be printed (Bill 265).

Crime and Policing Bill

[2ND ALLOCATED DAY]

Further consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

[Relevant documents: Fourth Report of the Women and Equalities Committee, Tackling non-consensual intimate image abuse, HC 336, and the Government response, HC 911; correspondence from the Women and Equalities Committee to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice, on tackling non-consensual intimate image abuse, reported to the House on 4 June]

New Clause 2

COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION BY A THIRD PARTY

“(1) A person commits an offence if—

- (a) the person (C) assists, facilitates, controls, or incites, by any means, another person (B) to engage in sexual activity with another person (A) in exchange for payment or other benefit, anywhere in the world; and
- (b) the circumstances are that—
 - (i) the person (C) knows or ought to know that the other person (B) is engaging in sexual activity for payment; and
 - (ii) the person (C) assists, facilitates, controls, or incites the other person (B) to engage in sexual activity with another person (A); or
 - (iii) the person (C) causes or allows to be displayed or published, including digitally, any advertisement in respect of activity prohibited by section 1a and 1b(i).

(2) A person (C) commits an offence under subsection (1) regardless of whether they secure personal financial gain, or personally benefits in any way, from facilitating person (B) engaging in sexual activity with person (A) in exchange for payment or other benefit.

(3) A person (D) commits an offence under subsection (1) if they knowingly secure financial gain, or benefits in any way, from person (B) engaging in sexual activity with person (A) in exchange for payment or other benefit, anywhere in the world, regardless of whether person (D) facilitated the exchange between persons B and A.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or both;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.

(5) In considering the seriousness of an offence committed under subsection (1)(b)(iii), the court must treat the following as aggravating factors—

- (a) the annual financial turnover of the digital or physical platform (the platform) used to facilitate and/or advertise activity prohibited in subsection 1a and 1b(i);
- (b) the number of prostitution related offences, under subsection (1), facilitated by the platform in question; and
- (c) whether the platform has facilitated trafficking for sexual exploitation.

(6) A person who is a UK national commits an offence under this section regardless of where the offence takes place.

(7) A person who is not a UK national commits an offence under this section if any part of the offence takes place in the UK.

(8) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the Act receiving Royal Assent, make regulations to appoint a public body (the designated body) to monitor and enforce compliance by online platforms with this section.

(9) Regulations made under subsection (5) may provide the designated body with the powers, contained in section 144 of the Online Safety Act 2023, to apply to the court for a Service Restriction Order.

(10) The designated body must, within six months of it being appointed under regulations made by subsection (5), lay before Parliament a report outlining its plan for monitoring compliance with, and enforcement of, the provisions of this section of the Act.

(11) The designated body must lay before Parliament an annual report outlining its progress in ensuring compliance with the provisions of this Act, including information on enforcement activity relating to these provisions.”—(*Tonia Antoniazzi*.)

This new clause would make it a criminal offence to enable or profit from the prostitution of another person, including by operating a website hosting adverts for prostitution.

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.59 pm

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): 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:

New clause 3—*Commercial sexual exploitation*—

“(1) A person (A) who gives, offers, or promises payment to a person (B) to engage in sexual activity with person (A) shall be guilty of an offence.

(2) A person (A) who gives, offers, or promises payment to a person (B) to engage in sexual activity with any other person (C) shall be guilty of an offence.

(3) For the purpose of subsections (1) and (2)—

- (a) a ‘payment’ includes money, a benefit, or any other consideration;
- (b) an activity is sexual if a reasonable person would consider that—
 - (i) whatever its circumstances or any person’s purpose in relation to it, it is because of its nature sexual, or
 - (ii) because of its nature it may be sexual and because of its circumstances or the purpose of any person in relation to it (or both) it is sexual;
- (c) no offence is committed by a person (A) unless the sexual activity with the other person (B) involves—
 - (i) the person (A or C) being in the other person (B)’s presence, and
 - (ii) physical contact between the person (A or C) and the other person (B), or
 - (iii) the person (B) touching themselves for the sexual gratification of the other person (A or C);
- (d) it is immaterial whether the payment is given, offered, or promised by a person (A) engaging in the sexual activity, or a third party.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under subsections (1) or (2) is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both), and a requirement to complete an offender behaviour programme at the offender’s expense;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both).

(5) A person who is not a UK national commits an offence under subsections (1) or (2) if any part of the offence takes place in the UK.”

This new clause makes it an offence to pay for, or attempt to, pay for sex either for themselves or on behalf of others.

New clause 4—*Victims of Commercial sexual exploitation*—

“(1) The Street Offences Act 1959 is amended as follows.

(2) Omit Sections 1 and 2.”

This new clause decriminalises victims of commercial sexual exploitation by repealing the offence of “Loitering or soliciting for purposes of prostitution” and relevant related parts of the Street Offences Act 1959.

New clause 5—*Interpretation (Dangerous, careless or inconsiderate cycling)*—

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

(2) After section 32 insert—

‘32A Interpretation of sections 27A to 32

- (1) For the purposes of sections 27A to 32, “a cycle” includes but is not limited to—
 - (a) a pedal cycle,
 - (b) an electronically assisted pedal cycle,
 - (c) a mechanically propelled personal transporter, including—
 - (i) an electric scooter,
 - (ii) a self-balancing personal transporter (including a self-balancing scooter, self-balancing board or electric unicycle), and
 - (iii) any other mechanically propelled personal transporter provided for by the Secretary of State in regulations made under this section.
- (2) For the purposes of subsection (1)(c), mechanically propelled personal transporters are to be defined in regulations made by the Secretary of State under this section.”

This new clause would define “a cycle” as including a pedal cycle, an e-bike, or a mechanically propelled personal transporter, for the purposes of cycling offences under the Road Traffic Act 1988, including the proposed new clauses tabled by the Government on dangerous, careless or inconsiderate cycling.

New clause 7—*Abolition of non-crime hate incidents*—

“(1) Non-crime hate incidents as a special category of incident to be recognised by police authorities are abolished. Reporting, recording and investigation of such incidents should occur only in the limited circumstances provided for in this section.

(2) For the purposes of Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR, section 35 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (‘the Act’) and Article 8 of the Law Enforcement Directive, the processing of relevant data by a police authority is unlawful.

(3) In this section, ‘relevant data’ means personal data relating to the conduct or alleged of a data subject which is unlikely to constitute criminal conduct and which has been perceived by another person to be motivated (wholly or partly) by hostility or prejudice towards one or more persons who have or who are or have been perceived to have one or more relevant characteristics and with that hostility or prejudice arising due to that or the perception of those protected characteristics.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (3), the following are relevant characteristics—

- (a) race,
- (b) religion,
- (c) sexual orientation,
- (d) disability,
- (e) transgender identity.

(5) Subsection (2) does not apply in respect of the processing of relevant data—

- (a) pursuant to an ongoing criminal investigation or prosecution,
- (b) for the purposes of the internal administrative functions of the police authority.

(6) Subsection (2) does not apply in respect of the retention of a record (a ‘non-crime perception record’) of relevant data where a police officer (the ‘certifying officer’) of the rank of inspector or above certifies that in their opinion the retention of the non-crime perception record is likely materially to assist in the detection or prevention of criminal conduct which may occur in the future.

(7) Where a certifying officer certifies the retention of a non-crime perception record pursuant to subsection (6)—

- (a) the certifying officer must include in the record a description of the future criminal conduct they have in mind and the reasons they believe that the retention of the record may assist in its detection or prevention,
- (b) the relevant data which may be retained as part of the record may be no more than the certifying officer believes is likely materially to assist in the detection or prevention of criminal conduct,
- (c) a copy of the record must be expeditiously provided to the data subject unless an officer of the rank of superintendent or above certifies that—
 - (i) the provision of the record to the data subject may interfere in the detection or prevention of criminal conduct, or
 - (ii) the officer is satisfied that it is not reasonably practicable to provide a copy of the record to the data subject.

(8) If the data subject objects to the retention of the non-crime perception record, subsection (6) does not apply unless a police officer of the rank of superintendent or above certifies that in their opinion the retention of the non-crime perception record is likely materially to assist in the detection or prevention of criminal conduct which may occur in the future.

(9) No police authority or police officer can be held under any circumstances to be under any duty to undertake the retention of any relevant data.

(10) After subsection 113B(3) of the Police Act 1997 insert—

‘(3A) An enhanced criminal record certificate must not give the details of a relevant matter to the extent that doing so would result in the disclosure of relevant data as defined in section (The retention by the police of non-crime perception records) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025.’

(11) For subsection 39A(3) of the Police Act 1996 substitute—

‘(3) No part of any Code of Practice issued by the College of Policing may be in a form which could be issued by the Secretary of State pursuant to section 60 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.’

(12) Section 60 the 2022 Act is to be amended as follows—

- (a) the cross heading to be changed to ‘Non-crime perception records’,
- (b) the section heading to be changed to ‘Code of practice relating to non-crime perception records’,
- (c) in subsection (1) leave out from ‘by’ to the end of the subsection and insert ‘of relevant data’,
- (d) omit subsection (2),
- (e) in subsection (3)(a), leave out ‘personal data relating to a hate incident’ and insert ‘relevant data’,
- (f) in subsections (3)(b), (c), (d) and (e), for ‘such personal data’ substitute ‘relevant data’,
- (g) in subsection (4)(a), for ‘personal data’ substitute ‘relevant data’,
- (h) in subsection (4)(b), leave out ‘personal data relating to the alleged perpetrator of a hate incident’ and insert ‘relevant data relating to the alleged perpetrator’,
- (i) in subsection (7), at end, insert ‘relevant data’ has the meaning given by section (The retention by the police of non-crime perception records) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025.

(13) Any code of practice previously issued under section 60 of the 2022 Act is deemed to be withdrawn.

(14) Within three months of the commencement of each calendar year, each police authority which is retaining non-crime perception records must—

- (a) undertake a review of the relevant data by an independent person to ensure that any retention of such records is in compliance with the provisions of this section.
- (b) publish a report in respect of the review prepared by the independent person including setting—
 - (i) the total number of non-crime perception records retained by the police authority;
 - (ii) the total number of data subject to which those records relate; and
 - (iii) the equivalent numbers of those records added in the previous year.

(15) In this section—

- (a) ‘a police authority’ means—
 - (i) a person specified or described in paragraphs 5 to 17 of Schedule 7 of the Act,
 - (ii) a person acting under the authority of such a person,
- (b) the terms ‘data subject’, ‘processing’ and ‘the UK GDPR’ have the same meanings as under section 3 of the Act,
- (c) ‘the Law Enforcement Directive’ means the Directive (EU) 2016/680 of the European Parliament,
- (d) ‘the 2022 Act’ means the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.”

This new clause would amend legislation and guidance to remove the recording and retention of non-crime hate incidents, replacing that in some instances with non-crime perception records.

New clause 8—CCTV on railway network—

“(1) It is a legal requirement for CCTV cameras across the railway network in England and Wales to be capable of enabling immediate access by the British Transport Police and relevant Police Forces.

(2) All footage retained by CCTV cameras on the railway network must remain accessible to the British Transport Police and relevant Police Forces for the entirety of the retention period.

(3) The retention period specified in subsection (2) is 30 calendar days.

(4) Further to subsection (1), the Secretary of State must publish a report, within three months of the passing of this Act, specifying a compatibility standard that will facilitate CCTV access for the British Transport Police and any Police Force in England and Wales.”

New clause 9—Training for those subject to a mandatory reporting duty—

“(1) Any person who is subject to the duty under section 66(1), must be trained to an appropriate standard to carry out their responsibilities under the duty.

(2) Such training shall be deemed appropriate only if it includes, but is not limited to, the following components—

- (a) the recognised signs and indicators of child sexual abuse,
- (b) what it means to suspect a child sexual offence may have been committed under the duty, as outlined in section 68—
 - (i) including understanding the different ways children may disclose abuse, and
 - (ii) the barriers to children disclosing abuse,
- (c) how to respond to and support a child who they have been given reason to suspect is the victim of a child sexual offence, as set out in section 68,
- (d) how to make notifications in accordance with section 66(2),

- (e) how to judge whether making a notification would pose a risk to the life or safety of a relevant child, as set out in section 66(5), and
- (f) how to understand, identify and apply the exemptions for consensual peer on peer activity, as set out in sections 69, 70 and 71.”

This new clause would ensure that those subject to the mandatory reporting duty for child sexual abuse are provided with appropriate training to equip them to fulfil these obligations.

New clause 10—Meaning of exploitation: modern slavery—

“(1) Section (3) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (meaning of exploitation) is amended as follows.

(2) After subsection (6)(b) insert—

‘Criminal Exploitation

- (7) Something is done to or in respect of the person which involves the commission of an offence under section 38 of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (child criminal exploitation).”

This new clause seeks to ensure criminally exploited children are not prosecuted for offences committed as result of their exploitation.

New clause 11—Offences of verbal and physical abuse of public transport workers—

“(1) This section applies to a qualifying offence that is committed against a public transport worker acting in the exercise of functions as such a worker.

(2) In this section, a ‘qualifying offence’ is—

- (a) an offence of common assault, or battery, under section 39 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, or
- (b) an offence of harassment under section 2 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 which involves the verbal abuse of the public transport worker.

(3) A person guilty of an offence to which this section applies is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or to a fine (or both);
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or to a fine (or both).

(4) In subsections (1) and (2), ‘public transport worker’ means any person working on public transport, whether on public transport vehicles, or in public transport stations, or in any relevant setting where they are working in their capacity as a public transport worker.

(5) It is immaterial for the purposes of this section whether the employment or engagement is paid or unpaid.”

New clause 12—Definition of modern slavery exploitation: orphanage trafficking—

“(1) Section (3) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 is amended as follows.

(2) After subsection (6)(b) insert—

‘Orphanage trafficking

- (7) The person is a child who has been recruited into a residential care institution overseas for the purpose of financial gain and exploitation.”

This new clause would expand the definition of exploitation under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to include children who have been recruited into residential care institutions that engage in orphanage trafficking.

New clause 13—Joint Enterprise—

“(1) The Accessories and Abettors Act 1861 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 8 (abettors in misdemeanours), after ‘shall’ insert ‘, by making a significant contribution to its commission.’”

New clause 14—Duty to review treatment of childhood convictions and cautions—

“(1) Within a year of this Act receiving Royal Assent, the Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament a report on the management of childhood convictions and cautions.

(2) The report must look at—

- (a) the prevention of automatic disclosure of childhood conditional cautions;
- (b) the prevention of adult treatment of offences committed by individuals who were minors at the time of the offences, in question, taking place;
- (c) the range of childhood convictions which are removed from standard and enhanced checks after five and a half years.

(3) In considering the areas outlined in subsection (2), the report must look at the policy merits for reform of the existing management of childhood convictions and cautions, and the legislative steps which would be required in each case for reform to take place.”

New clause 15—Unlicensed drivers: penalties—

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

(2) In Section 87, after subsection (2) insert—

- ‘(2A) The maximum penalty available to the Courts when sentencing an individual who has been convicted of driving without a license, and who has never held a license, shall be an unlimited fine, or a custodial sentence of six months (or both).’”

New clause 16—Failure to stop—

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

(2) In Section 170, after subsection (4) insert—

- ‘(4A) The maximum penalties available to the Courts when sentencing an individual who has been convicted of an offence under this section are as follows—
- (a) an unlimited fine;
- (b) a custodial sentence of one year; and
- (c) disqualification from driving for a period of up to two years.

When considering its sentence, the Court may issue more than one of the maximum penalties listed above.”

New clause 18—Definition of the criminal exploitation of children—

“For the purpose of defining the offence created in section 38 of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (Child criminal exploitation), the criminal exploitation of children is a form of child abuse in which a child under the age of 18 is used for purposes that constitute, enable or facilitate an offence under the law in England and Wales, regardless of whether the activity appears to be consensual, or whether the activity occurs online, through the use of technology, or in person.”

This new clause would create a statutory definition of the criminal exploitation of children.

New clause 19—Power of Secretary of State to disregard convictions or cautions—

“(1) The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 92(1) after ‘same sex’ insert ‘, or for an offence committed under Section 1 of the Street Offences Act 1959’.

(3) In section 92(2) after ‘A and B are met’ insert, ‘, or, for a conviction or caution for an offence committed under Section 1 of the Street Offences Act 1959, B alone is met’.”

This new clause would mean that convictions or cautions for loitering or soliciting for the purposes of prostitution become disregarded.

New clause 21—Prohibition of the use of live facial recognition technology by police forces—

“(1) The use of live facial recognition technology for real-time biometric identification in publicly accessible spaces by police forces is prohibited.

(2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), facial recognition systems used for biometric verification, where the sole purpose is to confirm a person's identity for the purpose of unlocking a device or having security access to premises, are not prohibited."

New clause 22—*Automated decision-making in the law enforcement context*—

"(1) Where a significant decision taken by, or on behalf of, a controller in relation to a data subject in the law enforcement context is—

- (a) based entirely or partly on personal data, and
- (b) based solely on automated processing,

the controller must ensure that safeguards, which comply with subsection (2), for the data subject's rights, freedoms and legitimate interests are in place.

(2) The safeguards must consist of, or include, measures which—

- (a) provide the data subject with personalised information about any decisions described in subsection (1) that have been taken in relation to the data subject;
- (b) enable the data subject to make representations about such decisions;
- (c) enable the data subject to obtain human intervention from the controller in relation to such decisions;
- (d) enable the data subject to contest such decisions;
- (e) ensure human reviewers of algorithmic decisions have the necessary competence, training, time to consider, authority to challenge the decision, and analytical understanding of the data to rectify automated decisions; and
- (f) require the publication of any algorithmic tools that have been used to process personal data on the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard.

(3) For the purpose of subsection (1), a decision based entirely or partly on personal data may not be made unless—

- (a) the data subject has given explicit consent; or
- (b) the decision is required or authorised by law."

New clause 23—*Restrictions on the delivery of pointed knives after agreements made by distance communication*—

"(1) This section applies to any delivery of a pointed knife if the cutting edge of its blade exceeds 3 inches and,

- (a) the delivery of the pointed knife is the result of an agreement made by distance communication; and
- (b) either the delivery or the agreement for the delivery is made in the course of a business.

(2) For the purposes of this section an agreement is made by 'distance communication' if, at the time that the agreement is made, none of the parties to the agreement is within visual sight of the other.

(3) A party is not within visual sight of another if the only way that they can be seen is by use of an electronic, digital or other artificial means.

(4) A company or partnership is to be treated as being within visual sight of any other party if one or more of its employees or partners is within visual sight of the other parties.

(5) A means of distance communication may include, but not be limited to—

- (a) electronic mail,
- (b) unaddressed printed matter,
- (c) telephone with human intervention,
- (d) telephone without human intervention (including automatic calling machine, audiotext),
- (e) videophone (telephone with screen),
- (f) any form of social media,
- (g) addressed printed matter,
- (h) letter,
- (i) press advertising with order form,

(j) catalogue,

(k) radio,

(l) videotext (microcomputer and television screen) with keyboard or touch screen,

(m) facsimile machine (fax), or

(n) television (teleshopping).

(6) A person in England or Wales is guilty of an offence if they knowingly or recklessly cause a pointed knife to be delivered or deliver any pointed knife to either—

(a) domestic premises; or

(b) a remote locker or collection point which is not supervised by a human being at the time when the pointed knife is collected

(7) For the purposes of this section domestic premises are defined as any premises which have not been assessed as liable for business rates and do not appear as such on the list maintained by the Valuation Agency Office.

(8) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months, or a fine not exceeding Level 5 on the standard scale or both.

(9) Nothing in this section prevents the delivery of rounded knives without a point."

This new clause would create an offence of delivering a lethal pointed knife to domestic premises or remote locker/collection point.

New clause 24—*Prohibition of displays of pointed knives*—

"(1) A person who in the course of a business displays any pointed knife, or causes any pointed knife to be displayed, in a place in England and Wales or Northern Ireland is guilty of an offence.

(2) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide for the meaning of 'place' in this section.

(3) No offence is committed under this section if the display is a requested display to an individual aged 18 or over.

(4) Subsections (5) and (6) apply where a person ('D') is charged with an offence under this section in a case where the display is a requested display to an individual aged under 18.

(5) Where D is charged by reason of D having displayed the pointed knife it is a defence that—

- (a) D believed that the individual was aged 18 or over, and
- (b) either—

- (i) D had taken all reasonable steps to establish the individual's age, or
- (ii) from the individual's appearance nobody could reasonably have suspected that the individual was aged under 18.

(6) For the purposes of subsection (5), a person is treated as having taken all reasonable steps to establish an individual's age if—

- (a) the person asked the individual for evidence of the individual's age, and
- (b) the evidence would have convinced a reasonable person.

(7) Where D is charged by reason of D having caused the display of a pointed knife it is a defence that D exercised all due diligence to avoid committing the offence.

(8) In this section 'a requested display' means a display to an individual following a particular request by the individual to purchase a pointed knife, or for information about a pointed knife.

(9) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months, or a fine not exceeding Level 5 on the standard scale or both.

(10) Nothing in this section prevents the display of rounded knives without a point."

This new clause would create an offence of displaying pointed knives in the course of a business.

New clause 25—Unauthorised Encampments—

“The amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 inserted by Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 are repealed.”

This new clause would repeal amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 in respect of unauthorised encampments, including those on which the High Court has made a Declaration of Incompatibility under section 4 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

New clause 26—Provision of information by the Secretary of State—

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish, on a quarterly basis, data on the use of anti-social behaviour orders.

(2) The data published under subsection (1) must include—

- (a) The number of civil orders issued;
- (b) The purposes for which such orders were issued;
- (c) Information about the number of occasions when stop and search powers were utilised by the police prior to issuing anti-social behaviour orders; and
- (d) The protected characteristics of persons subjected to anti-social behaviour orders.”

This new clause requires the Home Office to publish quarterly data on the issuing of anti-social behaviour orders, including the number of occasions when stop and search has been used by the police prior to issuing anti-social behaviour orders and the protected characteristics of those who have been issued with orders.

New clause 27—Suspension of Police Force’s ability to use stop and search powers: ‘Engage’ monitoring stage—

“(1) The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 7 insert—

‘7A Suspension of Police Force’s ability to use stop and search powers: ‘Engage’ monitoring stage

- (1) The Secretary of State may, by regulations, vary the ability of Police Forces in England and Wales to use stop and search powers.
- (2) The Secretary of State must, within a fortnight of being notified by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) that a police force in England and Wales has been moved to the ‘Engage’ stage of HMICFRS’s monitoring process, bring forward regulations under subsection (1) to suspend the respective Force’s ability to use stop and search powers.
- (3) The Secretary of State may not bring forward regulations to re-instate a suspended Police Force’s stop and search powers until such a time as HMICFRS confirms that the Force is no longer subject to the ‘Engage’ monitoring process.”

This new clause allows regulations to vary the ability of police forces to use stop and search, and requires the Government to suspend a police force’s stop and search powers if that force is subject to the ‘engage’ monitoring process by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services.

New clause 28—Disapplication of time limit for offence of sharing intimate photograph or film—

“In section 66B of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, (sharing or threatening to share intimate photograph or film), after subsection (9) insert—

‘(9A) Section 127 of the Magistrates’ Courts Act 1980 (time limit for summary offences) does not apply to an offence under subsection (1).”

This new clause allows the offence of sharing intimate photograph or film to be tried by a Magistrates’ Court at any time by disapplying the six-month time limit in s.127 of the Magistrates’ Court Act 1980.

New clause 30—Prohibition of Police use of technologies to predict offences based on automated decisions, profiling, etc—

“(1) Police Forces in England and Wales shall be prohibited from using any automated decision-making system, profiling or artificial intelligence system for the purpose of—

- (a) Making risk assessments of natural persons or groups thereof in order to assess the risk of a natural person for offending or reoffending; or
- (b) Predicting the occurrence or reoccurrence of an actual or potential criminal offence based on profiling of a natural person or on assessing personality traits and characteristics, including the person’s location, or past criminal behaviour of natural persons or groups of natural persons.

(2) ‘Profiling’ is profiling as defined by Article 4(4) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council (‘the UK GDPR’).

(3) Automated Decision Making means a decision based solely on automated processing, including profiling, which produces legal effects concerning him or her or similarly significantly affects him or her.

(4) Artificial Intelligence systems are computer systems designed to produce results, opinions or assessments, produced through modelling from datasets and other automated training methods.”

This new clause would prohibit Police Forces from using of certain forms of ‘predictive’ policing technologies, particularly those that rely on automated decision-making, profiling, and AI to assess the likelihood that individuals or groups will commit criminal offences.

New clause 41—Inspection of police force firearms licensing departments—

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

(2) In section 54 (appointment and functions of inspectors of constabulary), after subsection (2) insert—

‘(2A) Any inspection conducted under subsection (2) shall include a review of the performance of the police force’s firearms licensing department.”

This new clause would require HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMICFRS) to inspect the efficiency and effectiveness of police force’s firearms licensing departments as part of every police, efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspection.

New clause 42—Offences with a terrorism connection—

“(1) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(2) In Section 69, omit subsection (4).”

This new clause would raise the threshold of offences which can be considered as terrorism related offences back to the level provided for by the Sentencing Act 2020 as originally enacted.

New clause 43—Commencement of the Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act—

“(1) Section 4 of the Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023 is amended as follows.

(2) Leave out subsections (3) and (4) and insert—

‘(3) Sections 1, 2 and 3 come into force on the day that the Crime and Policing Act 2025 receives Royal Assent’.”

This new clause automatically commences Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023 when the Crime and Policing Bill receives Royal Assent, removing the need for regulations to bring the Act into force. The Act criminalises the public harassment of individuals where that harassment is based on an individual’s sex.

New clause 44—Sentencing: “honour”-based offences:—

“(1) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(2) In Schedule 21, after paragraph 9(g) insert—‘(h) the fact that the offender inflicted “honour”-based abuse on the victim.’

(3) In Schedule 21, after paragraph 10(g) insert—“(h) the fact that the offender was a victim of “honour”-based abuse perpetrated by the deceased.””

This new clause would modify the Sentencing Act 2020 to recognise “honour” as an aggravating factor under paragraph 9 and as a mitigating factor under paragraph 10.

New clause 45—Disclosure of convictions for child sexual offences—

“(1) This section applies where a police force is aware or notified of an individual within its jurisdiction who has been cautioned or convicted of a child sex offence.

(2) A police force must notify any organisation that has responsibilities for a child’s welfare where an individual identified under subsection (1) is employed by or volunteering for that organisation, or is seeking to do so.

(3) The Secretary of State must issue guidance to police forces on their duty under subsection (2) within six months of the passing of this Act.”

This new clause would require police forces to proactively notify an organisation of an individual working or volunteering for it, or seeking to do so, where that individual has been cautioned or convicted of a child sex offence.

New clause 46—Requirements on sellers of vehicle to provide specified information—

“(1) The Road Vehicle (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 2002 are amended as follows.

(2) After regulation 18, insert—

‘Requirements on sellers of vehicle to provide specified information

(1) Where a keeper sells a vehicle, the keeper must record relevant information in the registration document of the vehicle at, or before, the date on which the vehicle is sold to a new keeper.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), the relevant information is—

(a) where the keeper is an individual, the home address of the keeper,

(b) where the keeper is a company, information which the Secretary of State may specify, and

(c) where the keeper is the keeper of a fleet, information equivalent to that required in paragraphs (a) and (b) as relevant to the circumstances of the keeper.’

(3) The information the Secretary of State may specify under paragraph (2)(b) may include the company’s registered address and company number.

(4) A keeper who fails to record relevant information in accordance with this regulation commits an offence.

(5) A person who is guilty of an offence under this regulation is liable for a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

(6) For the purposes of this regulation ‘company’ has such meaning as the Secretary of State may specify.”

This new clause would create a requirement for a person selling a vehicle to provide their address in the registration document of the vehicle.

New clause 47—Failure to disable stolen mobile devices: civil penalty—

“(1) An appropriate officer must provide the relevant service provider with a notification of a stolen mobile device.

(2) A notification under subsection (1) must—

(a) identify the stolen device or service provided to the device;

(b) require the service provider to disable the stolen device or take actions to prevent it from being re-registered;

(c) explain that the notification must be complied with before the end of a period of 48 hours beginning with the time the notification is given; and

(d) set out the potential consequences of failure to comply with the notification.

(3) A service provider who is given a notification under subsection (1) may, before the end of the initial 48-hour period, request a review of the decision to give the notification.

(4) The grounds on which a recipient may request a review include, in particular, that—

(a) the device to which the notification relates is insufficiently identified for the service provider to be able to take the action required by the notification; or

(b) the service provider that received the notice is not, in fact, the provider of the relevant service to which the notification relates.

(5) If the initial 48-hour period has expired without the notification having been complied with or without a review request having been received, an appropriate officer may give a penalty notice requiring the service provider to pay a penalty of an amount not exceeding £10,000.

(6) Schedule 4 makes further provision in connection with penalty notices given under this section.

(7) In this section—

‘appropriate officer’ has the same meaning as in Schedule 13, paragraph 14

‘service provider’ means a provider of a relevant mobile phone service.

(8) In Schedule 4, after all instances of ‘section 16’, insert ‘section (Failure to disable stolen mobile devices: civil penalty)’.”

This new clause would require the police to issue notifications to service providers requiring them to disable stolen mobile devices within 48 hours or be issued with a penalty.

New clause 48—Assault on a delivery worker—

“(1) A person who assaults a delivery person in connection with a delivery commits an offence under this section.

(2) ‘Delivery person’ means a person who—

(a) is logged into a delivery app,

(b) is travelling to a location to collect goods for delivery,

(c) is at a location waiting for, or taking possession of, goods for delivery,

(d) is travelling to deliver those goods to another location,

(e) is delivering those goods to another location,

(f) is within an hour of having delivered those goods to another location, or

(g) has commenced travel to another location.

(3) A person who commits an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding the maximum term for summary offences or a fine (or both).

(4) In subsection (3) ‘the maximum term for summary offences’ means — (a) if the offence is committed before the time when section 281(5) of the Criminal Justice Act (alteration of penalties for certain summary offences: England and Wales) comes into force, 6 months; (b) if the offence is committed after that time, 51 weeks.

(5) In section 40(3) of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (power to join in indictment count for common assault etc), after paragraph (ad) insert—

‘(ae) an offence under section (Assault on a delivery worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025;’.”

This new clause would create an offence of assault on a delivery worker.

New clause 49—Definition of serious disruption: amendment—

“(1) The Public Order Act 2023 is amended as follows.

(2) Omit Section 34.”

This new clause would restore the previous threshold for serious protest disruption by removing the wording in the Public Order Act which defines it to mean any obstruction that caused ‘more than minor hindrance’ to day to day activities.

New clause 50—Right to protest—

“(1) The Public Order Act 1986 is amended as follows.

(2) In Part II (Processions and Assemblies) before section 11, insert—

‘10A The right to protest

- (1) Everyone has the right to engage in peaceful protest, both alone and with others.
- (2) Public authorities have a duty to—
 - (a) respect the right to protest;
 - (b) protect the right to protest; and
 - (c) facilitate the right to protest.
- (3) A public authority may only interfere with the right to protest, including by placing restrictions upon its exercise, when it is necessary and proportionate to do so to protect national security or public safety, prevent disorder or crime, protect public health or the rights and freedoms of others.
- (4) For the purposes of this section “public authority” has the same meaning as in section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998.”

New clause 51—Causing death while driving unlicensed or uninsured—

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

(2) In section 2A (meaning of dangerous driving), at the end of subsection (1)(b) insert ‘,or

- (c) at the time when they were driving, the circumstances were such that they were committing an offence under section 87(1) of this Act (driving otherwise than in accordance with a licence), or section 143 of this Act (using motor vehicle while uninsured).’

(3) Omit section 3ZB.”

This new clause would mean that an individual who is driving without a licence and/or insurance and causes a death would be considered as causing death by dangerous driving.

New clause 83—Prevention of resale of stolen GPS products—

“(1) The Equipment Theft Act 2023 is amended as follows.

(2) In Section 1(2)(b), after ‘commercial activities’ insert, ‘including GPS equipment’.”

This new clause extends the Equipment Theft Act 2023 to specifically include the theft of GPS equipment.

New clause 84—Rural Crime Prevention Strategy—

“(1) A day after this Act receiving Royal Assent, the Secretary of State must establish a rural crime prevention task force to develop proposals for tackling rural crime.

(2) The task force should be tasked with a remit that includes, but is not confined to, examining—

- (a) The particular types of crime that occur in rural areas;
- (b) Crime rates in rural communities across England and Wales;
- (c) The current levels of police resources and funding in rural communities;
- (d) Whether specific training in how to respond to rural crime call-outs should be undertaken by police control room operators;
- (e) The operational case, and the funding implications, of appointing rural crime specialists in Police Forces across England and Wales which serve areas that include a significant rural population; and
- (f) Whether a National Rural Crime Coordinator should be established

(3) The task force established under subsection (1) must submit a rural crime prevention strategy to the Secretary of State within six months of its appointment.

(4) The Secretary of State must, within a month of receiving the report made by the task force, lay before both Houses of Parliament a written response to the task force’s recommendations.

(5) The Secretary of State must, within a month of laying their response to the task force’s report, ensure that an amendable motion on the subject of the rural crime task force’s recommendations is laid, and moved, before both Houses of Parliament.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to establish a task force to produce a strategy for tackling rural crime, makes provision for specific aspects of the task force’s remit, and requires the Secretary of State to bring forward a substantive motion before both Houses of Parliament on the task force’s recommendations.

New clause 85—Neighbourhood Policing: minimum levels—

“(1) Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament proposals on maintaining minimum levels of neighbourhood policing.

(2) The proposals must include—

- (a) A requirement for every Police Force in England and Wales to maintain neighbourhood policing teams at a level necessary to ensure effective community engagement and crime prevention;
- (b) A plan to designate a proportion of funds, recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, for neighbourhood policing initiatives; and
- (c) A plan for future Police Grant Reports to include a ring-fenced allocation of 20% of total funds to be allocated specifically for neighbourhood policing.”

New clause 86—Neighbourhood Policing—

“(1) The Secretary of State must ensure that every local authority area in England and Wales has a neighbourhood policing team must be assigned exclusively to community-based duties, including:

- (a) High-visibility foot patrols;
- (b) Community engagement and intelligence gathering;
- (c) Crime prevention initiatives; and
- (d) Solving crime.

(2) The Home Office must publish proposals detailing the additional funding that will be required to ensure that police forces can meet these requirements without reducing officer numbers in other frontline policing roles.

(3) The Secretary of State must publish an annual report detailing:

- (a) The number of officers and PCSOs deployed in neighbourhood policing roles;
- (b) The total cost of maintaining the required levels; and
- (c) The impact on crime reduction and public confidence in policing.

(4) If a police force fails to meet the minimum staffing levels required under subsection (1), the Home Office must intervene and provide emergency funding to ensure compliance within six months.”

New clause 87—Offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels—

“(1) A water or water and sewerage company (‘C’) commits an offence where C has—

- (a) failed to meet its pollution performance commitment level for three consecutive years; or
- (b) experienced an increase in serious pollution levels

for three consecutive years.

(2) For the purposes of this section—

- (a) ‘water or water and sewerage company’ means companies which are responsible for the provision of water, or water and sewerage, services and which are regulated by Ofwat and the Environment Agency;

- (b) ‘pollution performance commitment level’ means the level of performance on pollution that the company has committed to deliver, and which is reported against by Ofwat in its annual water company performance report; and
 - (c) ‘total pollution incidents per 10,000km²’ and ‘serious pollution incidents’ mean the relevant figures under those headings reported by the Environment Agency in its annual environmental performance report.
- (3) If guilty of an offence under this section, C is liable—
- (a) on summary conviction, to a fine;
 - (b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine.”

This new clause creates an offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels.

New clause 88—Senior manager liability for failure to meet pollution performance commitment levels—

- “(1) A person (‘P’) commits an offence where—
- (a) P is a senior manager of a water or water and sewerage company (‘C’),
 - (b) C commits an offence under section [Offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels], and
 - (c) P has failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent that offence being committed by C.
- (2) For the purposes of this section—
- ‘senior manager’ means an individual who plays a significant role in—
- (a) the making of decisions about how C’s relevant activities are to be managed or organised, or
 - (b) the actual managing or organising of C’s relevant activities;

(3) Where P is charged with an offence under this section, it is a defence for P to show that P was a senior manager of C for such a short time during the relevant period that P could not reasonably have been expected to take steps to prevent that offence being committed by C.

- (4) Where P is guilty of an offence under this section, P is liable—
- (a) on summary conviction, to a fine;
 - (b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine.”

This new clause creates senior manager liability for failure to meet pollution performance commitment levels.

New clause 89—Duty of candour—

- “(1) Every police officer shall have a duty to act with candour and transparency in relation to—
- (a) the investigation of criminal offences;
 - (b) the investigation of misconduct or complaints involving the police;
 - (c) participation in any public inquiry, inquest, disciplinary proceedings, or legal process arising from their duties;
 - (d) any engagement with bodies exercising oversight of policing or the criminal justice system.
- (2) This duty shall apply regardless of whether the officer is directly the subject of the matter in question or is providing evidence as a witness.
- (3) The duty includes an obligation to—
- (a) disclose any information which the officer knows or reasonably believes to be relevant;
 - (b) disclose such information proactively and not solely in response to formal requests;
 - (c) refrain from withholding or distorting relevant facts, whether by act or omission.
- (4) Failure to comply with the duty of candour shall—
- (a) constitute misconduct for the purposes of police disciplinary procedures;

- (b) amount to gross misconduct where the breach is intentional or demonstrates reckless disregard for the truth;
- (c) be subject to mandatory referral to the Independent Office for Police Conduct.

(5) The Secretary of State shall, within six months of this Act coming into force, issue statutory guidance on the implementation of the duty of candour.

(6) The College of Policing shall include the duty of candour within the Code of Ethics and ensure its incorporation into training programmes.

(7) The Independent Office for Police Conduct shall report annually to Parliament on the application, enforcement, and impact of this duty.

- (8) For the purposes of this section, ‘police officer’ means—
- (a) any constable or member of a police force in England and Wales;
 - (b) any special constable;
 - (c) any former officer where the conduct in question occurred during their service.”

New clause 90—Mandatory mental health training for police officers—

“(1) Every police force in England and Wales must ensure that all frontline police officers receive regular training in dealing with incidents involving individuals experiencing mental health crises.

- (2) The training provided under subsection (1) must—
- (a) be developed and delivered in consultation with NHS mental health trusts, clinical commissioning groups, and other relevant health and social care bodies;
 - (b) reflect the principles of the Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) approach;
 - (c) include instruction in de-escalation techniques, legal obligations under the Mental Health Act 1983, communication with vulnerable persons, and referral pathways to appropriate healthcare services; and
 - (d) be trauma-informed and culturally competent.

(3) Initial training must be completed within six months of an officer’s commencement of frontline duties.

(4) Refresher training must be undertaken at least once every two years.

(5) Each police force must publish an annual statement on compliance with this section, including the number of officers trained and steps taken to evaluate the effectiveness of the training.

- (6) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision for—
- (a) minimum standards for training content and delivery;
 - (b) procedures for monitoring and enforcement; and
 - (c) sanctions for non-compliance.

(7) Regulations under this section must be made by statutory instrument and are subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.”

New clause 91—Right to protest: report on restrictions—

“(1) Within six months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, the Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament a report on the restrictions which have been made to the right to protest over the last ten years.

(2) The Secretary of State must ensure that within a month of the report produced under subsection (1) being published, time is made available for a debate on a substantive motion in both Houses of Parliament.”

New clause 92—Safeguards for the use of facial recognition technology in public spaces—

“(1) The use of live facial recognition technology for real-time biometric identification, by any public or private authorities, shall be prohibited unless one or more of the following conditions are met—

- (a) It is used for the purpose of preventing, detecting, or investigating serious crimes as defined under the Serious Crime Act 2007;
- (b) The deployment has received prior judicial authorization specifying the scope, duration, and purpose of its use;
- (c) It is necessary and proportionate for preventing an imminent and substantial threat to public safety, such as a terrorist attack; and
- (d) It is deployed for the purpose of locating missing persons or vulnerable individuals at risk.

(2) Any public authority deploying live facial recognition technology must:

- (a) Conduct and publish a Data Protection Impact Assessment before deployment;
- (b) Ensure that use is compliant with the principles of necessity and proportionality as outlined in the Human Rights Act 1998;
- (c) Maintain clear and publicly available records of deployments, including justification for use and any safeguards implemented;
- (d) Inform the public of deployments, unless exceptional circumstances apply; and
- (e) Create, implement and follow nationwide statutory guidance for using the technology.

(3) The use of live facial recognition technology for mass surveillance, profiling, or automated decision-making without human oversight, is an offence.

(4) The Information Commissioner’s Office and an independent oversight body shall be responsible for monitoring compliance with the provisions of this clause, conducting audits, and investigating complaints.

(5) Within six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must sure that a motion is tabled, and moved, before both Houses of Parliament to approve the appointment of the independent oversight body specified in subsection (5).

(6) A public authority or private entity guilty of an offence under this section will be liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to a fine;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine

(7) A private individual found guilty of an offence under this section will be liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to a fine;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine or imprisonment (or both).

(8) The Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament an annual report detailing the use of live facial recognition technology, including instances of authorisation and compliance measures undertaken, and ensure that a motion is tabled, and moved, before both Houses to approve the report.

(9) The motion specified in subsection (9) must include proposals to strengthen the role of the Office of the Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner (OBSCC) in overseeing the impact of emerging technology such as facial recognition and its impact on civil liberties.”

New clause 93—Right to peaceful protest—

“(1) It is the duty of public authorities, including police forces, to respect and facilitate the exercise of the right to peaceful protest in accordance with Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

(2) A person’s presence at, or participation in, a peaceful protest—

(a) must not, of itself, be treated as grounds for arrest or the use of force; and

(b) must not be subject to unnecessary or disproportionate restrictions.

(3) In exercising powers under this Act or any other enactment, a constable must have regard to the importance of—

- (a) enabling peaceful protest to take place; and
- (b) minimising interference with the rights of those engaged in peaceful protest.

(4) This section does not prevent a constable from imposing conditions on a protest or taking enforcement action where necessary and proportionate to prevent—

- (a) serious disruption to the life of the community;
- (b) serious public disorder;
- (c) serious damage to property; or
- (d) the commission of serious crime.

(5) The Secretary of State must issue guidance on the application of this section within six months of the passing of this Act.”

New clause 95—Offence of stalking: review—

“(1) Within six months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, the Secretary of State must establish a review into the effectiveness of Sections 2A and 4A of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

(2) The review established under subsection (1) must complete its work within nine months of its establishment.

(3) Within a month of the review submitting its final report, the Secretary of State must lay a copy of the report before both Houses of Parliament and make time available in both Houses for a debate on a substantive motion relating to the report.”

This new clause would require the Government to establish a review into the effectiveness of the stalking provisions of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, specifies the review’s timeframe, and requires the Government to make time available in both Houses of Parliament for a substantive debate on the review’s report.

New clause 96—Stalking awareness guidelines: review—

“(1) Within six months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, the Secretary of State must establish a review into the effectiveness and adequacy of stalking awareness guidance provided by public bodies in England and Wales.

(2) The terms of reference for this review should include examining whether stalking awareness guidance should form part of the national curriculum in England.

(3) Within a month of the review submitting its final report, the Secretary of State must lay a copy of the report before both Houses of Parliament and make time available in both Houses for a debate on a substantive motion relating to the report.”

This new clause would require the Government to establish a review into the effectiveness of the stalking awareness guidance provided by public bodies, specifies that the review should examine making stalking awareness guidance mandatory under the national curriculum, and provides for a substantive debate in Parliament on the review’s report.

New clause 97—Electronic searches under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000—

“(1) The Terrorism Act 2000 is amended as follows.

(2) In Schedule 7, after paragraph 8 insert—

8A ‘(1) An examining officer may not search any electronic device under paragraph 8(1) without the prior authorisation of a judge, unless the examining officer has reasonable grounds to believe that the device contains information necessary to prevent—

- (a) an emergency threatening the life of a person or persons, or
- (b) an immediate threat to national security.

- (2) An examining officer may seek the prior authorisation of a judge to engage in conduct which is for the purpose of obtaining data necessary for the purpose of determining whether the person falls within section 40(1).
- (3) Authorised conduct may consist of an officer—
 - (a) scanning the information stored on the device using technology approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of ascertaining whether someone falls within section 40(1),
 - (b) requiring the person to permit the scan, and
 - (c) requiring the person to take such steps as appear necessary to allow the scan to be performed.”

This new clause places safeguards on the searches of electronic devices to ensure these are conducted only when necessary to determine whether the person is a relevant person for the purposes of the Terrorism Act 2000.

New clause 98—Use of Prevent data—

“In the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, after section 33 insert—

‘33A Duty to obtain authorisation for use of Prevent data

- (1) This section applies where a specified authority uses information collected under the Prevent duty for criminal investigations, national security or any other purpose unrelated to compliance with the general duty under section 26.
- (2) Where this section applies, a specified authority must seek the prior authorisation of a judge for the use of the information, except where doing so would prevent the authority from addressing—
 - (a) an emergency threatening the life of a person or persons, or
 - (b) an immediate threat to national security.
- (3) A specified authority which uses information under paragraphs 2(a) or (b) must seek a review of its use from a judge at its earliest convenience and no later than a week after the use.
- (4) A specified authority is a person or body listed in Schedule 6.”

This new clause would require specified users to seek the approval of a judge prior to using data collected under the Prevent duty, except where there was an emergency or immediate threat. If data is used in urgent situations, a judge must review it within a week.

New clause 99—Universal jurisdiction over the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and ancillary conduct (England and Wales)—

“(1) The International Criminal Court Act 2001 is amended as follows.

- (2) In section 51(1)—
 - (a) After ‘person’, insert ‘, whatever his or her nationality,’
 - (b) After ‘war crime’, insert ‘in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.’
- (3) Omit section 51(2).
- (4) In section 52(1)—
 - (a) After ‘person’, insert ‘, whatever his or her nationality,’
 - (b) After ‘conduct’, insert ‘in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.’
- (5) Omit section 52(4).”

This new clause would amend the ICC Act 2001 to provide for the exercise of universal jurisdiction over the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and ancillary conduct, allowing authorities in England and Wales to prosecute persons suspected of these crimes without any requirement for a connection to the UK.

New clause 100—Universal jurisdiction over the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and ancillary conduct (Northern Ireland)—

“(1) The International Criminal Court Act 2001 is amended as follows.

- (2) In section 58(1)—
 - (a) After ‘person’, insert ‘, whatever his or her nationality,’
 - (b) After ‘war crime’, insert ‘in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.’
- (3) Omit section 58(2).
- (4) In section 59(1)—
 - (a) After ‘person’, insert ‘, whatever his or her nationality,’
 - (b) After ‘conduct’, insert ‘in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.’
- (5) Omit section 59(4).”

This new clause would amend the ICC Act 2001 to provide for the exercise of universal jurisdiction over the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and ancillary conduct, allowing authorities in Northern Ireland to prosecute persons suspected of these crimes without any requirement for a connection to the UK.

New clause 101—Threshold for offences to be considered as terrorism-related: review—

“(1) Within six months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, the Secretary of State must establish a review into the effect of the raising of the threshold of offences which can be considered as terrorism related offences by the Counter Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021.

(2) The review specified in subsection (1) must report within nine months of its establishment and its final report must be laid before both Houses of Parliament, and time made available for a debate on a substantive motion in both Houses of Parliament on the report’s conclusions, within a month of the report’s publication.”

New clause 102—Amendment of Possession of extreme pornographic images—

“(1) The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 is amended as follow.

(2) In section 63 subsection (7) (possession of extreme pornographic images) after paragraph (a) insert—

(aa) an act of choking, suffocating or strangling another person.”

This amendment would extend the definition of extreme pornographic images to cover realistic and explicit pornographic depictions of acts of strangulation/choking.

New clause 103—Pornographic content: online harmful content—

“(1) A person commits an offence if they publish or allow or facilitate the publishing of pornographic content online which meets the criteria for harmful material under section 368E(3)(a) and section 368E(3)(b) of the Communications Act 2003.

(2) An individual guilty of an offence is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both);

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine or both.

(3) A person who is a UK national commits an offence under this section regardless of where the offence takes place.

(4) A person who is not a UK national commits an offence under this section if any part of the offence takes place in the UK.

(5) The platform on which material that violates the provisions in this section is published can be fined up to £18 million or 10 percent of their qualifying worldwide revenue, whichever is greater.

(6) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the Act receiving Royal Assent, make regulations appointing one or more public bodies (the appointed body) to monitor and enforce compliance by online platforms with this section.

(7) Regulations made under subsection 6 may provide the appointed body appointed by the Secretary of State with the powers, contained in sections 144 and 146 of the Online Safety Act 2023, to apply to the court for a Service Restriction Order or Access Restriction Order (or both).

(8) The appointed body must, within six months of being appointed by the Secretary of State, lay before Parliament a strategy for monitoring, and enforcing, compliance with the provisions in this section.

(9) The appointed body must lay before Parliament an annual report, outlining the enforcement activity undertaken in relation to this section.”

This new clause extends safeguarding requirements for pornography distributed offline to pornography distributed online, making it an offence to publish online harmful material under section 368E(3)(a) and section 368E(3)(b) of the Communications Act 2003.

New clause 104—Pornographic Content: Duty to safeguard against illegal content—

“(1) The Online Safety Act is amended as follows.

(2) In section 80(1), after ‘service’ insert ‘and the illegal content duties outlined in Part 3 of this Act.’”

This new clause extends the illegal content duties in Part 3 of the Act to all internet services which are subject to the regulated provider pornographic content duties in Part 5 of the Act.

New clause 105—Pornographic Content: Duty to verify age—

“(1) A person (A) commits an offence if they publish or allow or facilitate the publishing of pornographic content online where it has not been verified that—

- (a) every individual featuring in pornographic content on the platform has given their consent for the content in which they feature to be published or made available by the service; and/or
- (b) every individual featuring in pornographic content on the platform has been verified as an adult, and that age verification completed before the content was created and before it was published on the service; and/or
- (c) every individual featured in pornographic content on the platform, that had already published on the service when this Act is passed, is an adult.

(2) It is irrelevant under (1a) whether the individual featured in pornographic material has previously given their consent to the relevant content being published, if they have subsequently withdrawn that consent in writing either directly or via an appointed legal representative to—

- (a) the platform, or
- (b) the relevant regulator where a contact address was not provided by the platform to receive external communications.

(3) If withdrawal of consent under (2) has been communicated in writing to an address issued by the platform or to the relevant public body, the relevant material must be removed by the platform within 24 hours of the communication being sent.

(4) An individual guilty of an offence is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both);
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine (or both).

(5) A person who is a UK national commits an offence under this section regardless of where the offence takes place.

(6) A person who is not a UK national commits an offence under this section if any part of the offence takes place in the UK.

(7) The platform on which material that violates the provisions in this section is published can be fined up to £18 million or 10 percent of their qualifying worldwide revenue, whichever is greater.

(8) The Secretary of State will appoint one or more public bodies to monitor and enforce compliance by online platforms with this section, with the relevant public body—

- (a) granted powers to impose business disruption measures on non-compliant online platforms, including but not limited to service restriction (imposing requirements on one or more persons who provide an ancillary service, whether from within or outside the United Kingdom, in relation to a regulated service); and access restriction (imposing requirements on one or more persons who provide an access facility, whether from within or outside the United Kingdom, in relation to a regulated service).
- (b) required to act in accordance with regulations relating to monitoring and enforcement of this section issued by the Secretary of State, including but not limited to providing the Secretary of State with a plan for monitoring and enforcement of the provisions in this section within six months of the bill entering into force, and publishing annual updates on enforcement activity relating to this section.

(9) Internet services hosting pornographic content must make and keep a written record outlining their compliance with the provisions of this section. Such a record must be made summarised in a publicly available statement alongside the publishing requirements in section 81(4) and (5) of the Online Safety Act.”

This new clause makes it a requirement for pornography websites to verify the age and permission of everyone featured on their site, and enable withdrawal of consent at any time.

New clause 107—Equality Impact Analyses of provisions of this Act—

“(1) The Secretary of State must review the equality impact of the provisions of this Act.

(2) A report of the review under this section must be laid before Parliament within 12 months of the date of Royal Assent to this Act.

(3) A review under this section must consider the impact of the provisions of this Act on—

- (a) households at different levels of income,
- (b) people with protected characteristics (within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010),
- (c) the Government’s compliance with the public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, and
- (d) equality in the different nations of the United Kingdom and different regions of England.

(4) A review under this section must include a separate analysis of each section of the Act, and must also consider the cumulative impact of the Act as a whole.”

New clause 108—Extension of freedom of expression—

“For section 29J of the Public Order Act 1986 (protection of freedom of expression), substitute—

‘Nothing in—

- (a) this Act;
- (b) section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988 (offence of sending letters etc. with the intent to cause distress or anxiety); and
- (c) section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 (improper use of public communications network)

shall be read or given effect in a way which prohibits or restricts discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents, or of any other belief system or the beliefs or practices of its

adherents, or proselytising or urging adherents of a different religion or belief system to cease practising their religion or belief system.”

This new clause would extend the protection of freedom of expression afforded to Part 3A of the Public Order Act 1986 to other areas of statute that create offences relating to speech or communication.

New clause 109—Review of compliance and enforcement mechanisms in relation to Police Forces—

“(1) Within six months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, the Secretary of State must publish a proposal for approval by the House of Commons on the establishment of an independent commission to investigate the enforcement powers of His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

(2) The proposal for an independent commission must include a terms of reference, which must include, but may not be limited to—

- (a) a review of the powers available to other independent regulatory and investigative bodies, such as Ofqual, the Care Quality Commission, the Financial Conduct Authority, and Ofsted;
- (b) the lessons learned from other regulatory bodies with stronger enforcement powers; and
- (c) an examination of whether a statutory framework of coordination between HMICFRS, the Independent Office for Police Conduct, and Police and Crime Commissioners, could enhance the enforcement powers available to all three sets of bodies and the accountability of policing in England and Wales.

(3) The proposal for an independent commission must set out a timetable for its work including that—

- (a) the commission should conclude its deliberations within nine months of its establishment, and
- (b) the Secretary of State must lay a copy of the report before both Houses of Parliament and ensure that time is made available, within a fortnight of the report being laid, in both Houses for a substantive debate on the report’s conclusions.”

This new clause would require the Government to publish a proposal for an independent commission for approval by the House of Commons to review the enforcement powers of His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), including consideration of a statutory framework to enhance the collective enforcement powers of bodies supervising Police Forces in England and Wales.

New clause 110—Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks—

“(1) The Secretary of State must within 3 months of the passing of this Act publish proposals for approval by the House of Commons for the establishment of an inquiry, including the appointment of members of any such inquiry in accordance with section [Proposals for an inquiry: appointment of inquiry panel members].

(2) The terms of reference contained in the proposals referred to in subsection (1) must include, but may not be limited to—

- (a) investigation of the nature and extent of sexual exploitation of children by organised networks, including—
 - (i) the experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation by organised networks,
 - (ii) the extent to which local authorities, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and other public authorities were aware of child sexual exploitation by organised networks in their areas,
 - (iii) the appropriateness and effectiveness of any responses of those public authorities to cases of child sexual exploitation, including the effectiveness of sentencing or sentences served for offences involving child sexual exploitation by organised networks,

(iv) the extent to which public authorities have cooperated with previous inquiries and investigations into cases of child sexual exploitation in their areas,

(v) any organisational or individual responsibilities for not responding effectively to cases of child sexual exploitation,

(vi) identification of common patterns of behaviour and offending between organised networks,

(vii) identification of the type, extent and volume of crimes committed by organised networks including the number of victims of those crimes,

(viii) identification of the ethnicity of members of organised networks, and

(b) recommendations about legislative, policy and institutional changes to prevent child sexual exploitation in the future.

(3) The Secretary of State’s proposals must stipulate that any inquiry should conclude within 18 months of the passing of this Act, and report to the Secretary of State within 3 months of concluding.

(4) The Secretary of State’s proposals may make provision for the issuing of such interim reports as the chair of any inquiry considers to be appropriate.

(5) The Secretary of State’s proposals may make provision for supplementing the terms of reference of any inquiry after consultation with the chair, but may not omit, modify, or otherwise adversely affect any of the terms of reference set out in subsection (2).”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to bring forward proposals for setting up an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks for approval by the House of Commons.

New clause 111—Proposals for an inquiry: appointment of inquiry panel members—

“(1) The inquiry proposals brought forward by the Secretary of State under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks] must make provision for any inquiry to be overseen by a chair and inquiry panel appointed by the Secretary of State.

(2) The inquiry proposals must require the prospective chair to have senior experience of and expertise in the successful investigation of serious offences and that the person does not have a conflict of interest in the subject matter of the inquiry.

(3) The inquiry proposals must make provision for the chair to appoint one or more persons to act as assessors to assist the inquiry panel and may at any time terminate the appointment of an assessor.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State’s proposals for an inquiry relating to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks under NC10 to make provision for the appointment of a chair and inquiry panel members.

New clause 112—Proposals for an inquiry: inquiry evidence and procedure—

“(1) The inquiry proposals brought forward by the Secretary of State under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks] must make provision for the procedure and conduct of any inquiry to be such as the chair may direct.

(2) The inquiry proposals must require the chair, in making any decision as to the procedure or conduct of any inquiry to act in a manner which is consistent with the terms of reference and—

- (a) fairness,
- (b) regard to the need for a detailed investigation of the issues before the inquiry,
- (c) regard to the need to conclude the inquiry within the period set in the terms of reference, and
- (d) regard to the need to avoid unnecessary cost (whether to public funds or to witnesses or others).”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State's proposals for an inquiry relating to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks to require the chair to make provision for the procedure of that inquiry.

New clause 113—Proposals for an inquiry: requirement for public access to inquiry proceedings and information—

“(1) The inquiry proposals brought forward by the Secretary of State under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks] must make provision for the chair of any inquiry to take steps to secure that members of the public (including reporters) are able to—

- (a) attend a hearing of the inquiry,
- (b) see and hear a simultaneous transmission of proceedings at the inquiry, and
- (c) obtain or to view a record of evidence and documents given, produced or provided to the inquiry or inquiry panel,

subject to any restrictions imposed by an order under section [Proposals for an inquiry: restrictions on public access etc].

(2) The inquiry proposals brought forward by the Secretary of State under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks] must make provision for records (including transcripts of the proceedings) of any inquiry to be held for a period of 10 years, and to be made available on a website maintained by the Secretary of State, subject to any restriction imposed under section [Proposals for an inquiry: Inquiry restrictions on public access etc].”

This new clause would enable the chair of any inquiry proposed by the Secretary of State relating to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks to make provision for public access to that inquiry.

New clause 114—Proposals for an inquiry: inquiry restrictions on public access etc—

“(1) The inquiry proposals brought forward by the Secretary of State under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks] must make provision on restrictions that may, in accordance with this section, be imposed on—

- (a) attendance at any inquiry established following approval by the House of Commons, or at any particular part of the inquiry,
- (b) the disclosure or publication of any, or part of, evidence or documents given, produced or provided to the inquiry (including the simultaneous transmission of proceedings at the inquiry), and
- (c) disclosure or publication of the identity of any person.

(2) Restrictions made under subsection (1) may be imposed by being specified in an order (a ‘restriction order’) made by the chair during the course of the inquiry

(3) A restriction order must, having regard to the matters in subsection (4), specify only such restrictions required by any express statutory provision, assimilated enforcement obligation, or for national security purposes, or which otherwise protect—

- (a) a victim or a whistle-blower,
- (b) the identity of an individual authorised for the conduct or the use of a covert human intelligence source except where that person is accused of an offence and the chair considers it to be conducive to the inquiry in fulfilling its terms of reference, or
- (c) a matter which the chair considers to be in the public interest provided that this does not affect the inquiry fulfilling its terms of reference.

(4) The matters referred to in subsection (3) are—

- (a) the importance of public attendance at the inquiry and disclosure or publication of information to the allaying of public concern,
- (b) any risk of harm to—

- (i) a victim or survivor of child sexual exploitation,
- (ii) a whistle-blower, or
- (iii) the future operational practices or methods of law enforcement,

that could be avoided or materially reduced by any such restriction,

- (c) any conditions as to confidentiality subject to which a person acquired information which that person is to give, or has given, to the inquiry, and
- (d) the extent to which not imposing any particular restriction would be likely to cause delay or to impair the efficiency or effectiveness of the inquiry or the fulfilment of the terms of reference.

(5) The Secretary of State may direct the chair to revoke any restriction order made under this section or require the chair to impose a restriction order if they consider it conducive to the fulfilment of the terms of reference of the inquiry and in the public interest having regard to the matters in subsection (4).

(6) The Secretary of State must, by a notice published within a month of the end of the inquiry—

- (a) revoke a restriction order containing disclosure restrictions that are still in force, or
- (b) vary such a restriction order so as to remove or relax any of the restrictions,

unless the Secretary of State considers it necessary, having regard to the matters in subsection (4), to retain any of the disclosure restrictions after the end of the inquiry.”

This new clause would enable the Secretary of State and the chair of any inquiry proposed by the Secretary of State on the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks, to make provision for restrictions on information provided to that inquiry.

New clause 115—Proposals for an inquiry: powers to require production of evidence etc.—

“(1) The inquiry proposals brought forward by the Secretary of State under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks] must make provision for powers to produce evidence in accordance with this section.

(2) The chair of any inquiry may require a person at a time and place stated by notice—

- (a) to give evidence,
- (b) to produce any documents in the custody or under the control of that person which relate to a matter in question at the inquiry, or
- (c) to produce any other thing in the custody or under the control of that person for inspection, examination or testing by or on behalf of the inquiry panel.

(3) The Secretary of State must require a public authority that has control of audio or visual records of specified proceedings to provide those audio or visual records to the Secretary of State.

(4) Subject to subsection (5), the Secretary of State must, following the provision of audio or visual records under subsection (2), publish a transcription of those records on a website maintained by the Secretary of State for a period of 10 years.

(5) The Secretary of State may redact or omit any or all of the transcription where it is required by any express statutory provision, assimilated enforcement obligation, or for national security purposes, or which otherwise—

- (a) protect a victim or a whistle-blower,
- (b) protect the identity of an individual authorised for the conduct or the use of a covert human intelligence source except where that person is accused of an offence and the Secretary of State considers it to be conducive to do so, or
- (c) avoid or remove any risk of harm to—
 - (i) a victim or survivor of child sexual exploitation, or
 - (ii) a whistle-blower, or
 - (iii) the future operational practices or methods of law enforcement, or

- (d) adversely affect any conditions as to confidentiality subject to which a person acquired information which that person has provided in the course of any specified proceedings.

(6) A person subject to subsection (2) cannot be required to give, produce or provide any evidence or document if that person could not be required to do so on the grounds of legal professional privilege if the proceedings of the inquiry were civil proceedings in a court in England and Wales.

(7) In this section, ‘specified proceedings’ means any previous inquiry or commission or criminal proceedings which is notified in writing to the Secretary of State by the chair of the inquiry.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State’s proposals for an inquiry into the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks to enable the chair to require that attendance or evidence is provided to that inquiry and, would provide for a process requiring the publication of specified proceedings.

New clause 116—*Inquiry offences—*

“(1) This section applies if the House of Commons has approved the establishment of an inquiry relating to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks].

(2) A person (‘P’) is guilty of an offence if during the course of the inquiry—

- (a) P intentionally suppresses or conceals a document that is, and that P knows or believes to be, a relevant document, or
- (b) P intentionally alters or destroys a relevant document.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (2) a document is a ‘relevant document’ if it is likely that the inquiry panel would (if aware of its existence) wish to be provided with it.

(4) A person who is guilty of an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 51 weeks.”

This new clause would make it a criminal offence not to provide evidence to an inquiry relating to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks if an inquiry was established under NC110.

New clause 117—*Inquiry enforcement by High Court and contempt—*

“(1) This section applies if the House of Commons has approved the establishment of an inquiry relating to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks].

(2) Where a person—

- (a) fails to comply with, or acts in breach of, a notice to provide evidence or an order made by the chair, or
- (b) threatens to do so,

the chair may bring a case referring the matter to the High Court.

(3) The High Court, after hearing any evidence or representations on a matter brought to it under subsection (2), may make any order by way of enforcement or otherwise which it could have made if the matter had arisen in proceedings before it.”

This new clause would enable enforcement to be taken in relation to a person who breached a requirement to provide evidence or attend proceedings in connection with any inquiry into the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks established under NC110.

New clause 118—*Inquiry immunity from suit and legal challenges—*

“(1) This section applies if the House of Commons has approved the establishment of an inquiry relating to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks].

(2) No legal action may be brought against—

- (a) a member of the inquiry panel,
- (b) an assessor, counsel or solicitor to the inquiry,
- (c) a person engaged to provide assistance to the inquiry, or
- (d) the Secretary of State,

in respect of any act done or omission made in the execution of that person’s duty or power, or any act done or omission made in good faith in the purported execution of that person’s duty in the undertaking of the inquiry.

(3) Notwithstanding any other provision of any other enactment, a court or tribunal must not consider any claim or complaint (whether by way of judicial review or otherwise) which relates to the decision or conduct of—

- (a) a member of the inquiry panel,
- (b) an assessor, counsel or solicitor to the inquiry,
- (c) a person engaged to provide assistance to the inquiry, or
- (d) the Secretary of State,

in respect of any act done or omission made in the execution of that person’s duty or power as part of the inquiry, or any act done or omission made in good faith in the purported execution of this Act.

(4) An application which is not excluded under subsection (2) for judicial review of a decision made—

- (a) by the Secretary of State in relation to the inquiry, or
- (b) by a member of the inquiry panel,

must be brought promptly and, no later than 14 days after the day on which the applicant became aware of the decision, unless that time limit is extended by the court.”

This new clause would make provision relating to legal challenges in connection with any inquiry into the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks established under NC110.

New clause 119—*Duty of cooperation with inquiry—*

“(1) This section applies if the House of Commons has approved the establishment of an inquiry relating to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks under section [Requirement to bring forward proposals for an inquiry on the exploitation of children by organised networks].

(2) A public authority must not act in a manner which conflicts with or impedes the inquiry acting in accordance with its terms of reference and must otherwise cooperate with the members of the inquiry in the exercise of its functions.

(3) In this section, ‘public authority’ includes any person or body certain of whose functions are functions of a public nature.”

This new clause would ensure there is a duty of cooperation in connection with any inquiry into the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks established under NC110.

New clause 120—*Racial and religious hatred and hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation against an emergency worker—*

“(1) The Public Order Act 1986 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 18, after subsection (2) insert—

‘(3) The exemption in respect of a dwelling place in subsection (2) does not apply where the offence is committed against an emergency worker.

(3A) For the purposes of subsection (3) the term “emergency worker” has the meaning given by section 3 of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018.’

(3) In section 29B, after subsection (2) insert—

‘(3) The exemption in respect of a dwelling place in subsection (2) does not apply where the offence is committed against an emergency worker.

- (3A) For the purposes of subsection (3)(a) the term “emergency worker” has the meaning given by section 3 of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018.”

This new clause would create an offence where racial or religious hatred or hatred on the basis of sexual orientation is directed against an emergency worker, and the offence takes place in a private dwelling.

New clause 121—Amendment of Possession of extreme pornographic images—

“(1) Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (possession of extreme pornographic images) is amended as follows.

- (2) In subsection (7) after paragraph (a) insert—

‘(aa) an act which affects a person’s ability to breathe and constitutes battery of that person.’”

This amendment would extend the legal definition of the extreme pornography to include the depiction of nonfatal strangulation.

New clause 122—Aggravated offences against people because of their sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability—

“(1) An offence is to be considered aggravated on the basis of sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability if—

- (a) at the time of committing the offence, or immediately before or after doing so, the offender demonstrates towards the victim of the offence hostility based on the victim’s—
 - (i) sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability (or presumed sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability), or;
 - (ii) association with an individual or group defined by reference to sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability (or presumed sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability); or
- (b) the offence is motivated (wholly or partly) by hostility towards people because of their sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability or presumed sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability).

- (2) In this section—

‘presumed’ means presumed by the offender.

‘disability’ has the same meaning as in the Sentencing Act 2020.

‘transgender identity’ has the same meaning as in the Sentencing Act 2020.

‘sexual orientation’ has the same meaning as in the Public Order Act 1986.

- (3) A person is guilty of an offence under this section if they commit—

- (a) an offence under section 20 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 (malicious wounding or grievous bodily harm);
- (b) an offence under section 47 of that Act (actual bodily harm);
- (c) an offence under section 75A of the Serious Crime Act 2015 (strangulation or suffocation); or
- (d) common assault,

which is aggravated for the purposes of this section.

- (4) A person guilty of an offence falling within subsection (3)(a), (b) or (c) above shall be liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years or to a fine, or to both.

- (5) A person guilty of an offence falling within subsection (3)(d) above shall be liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both;

- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to a fine, or to both.

- (6) A person is guilty of an offence under this section if they commit an offence under section 1(1) of the Criminal Damage Act 1971 (destroying or damaging property belonging to another) which is aggravated for the purposes of this section.

- (7) A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both;

- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years or to a fine, or to both.

- (8) For the purposes of this section, subsection (1) above shall have effect as if the person to whom the property belongs or is treated as belonging for the purposes of that Act were the victim of the offence.

- (9) A person is guilty of an offence under this section if they commit—

- (a) an offence under section 4 of the Public Order Act 1986 (fear or provocation of violence);
- (b) an offence under section 4A of that Act (intentional harassment, alarm or distress); or
- (c) an offence under section 5 of that Act (harassment, alarm or distress),

which is aggravated for the purposes of this section.

- (10) A person guilty of an offence falling within subsection (9)(a) or (b) above shall be liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to a fine, or to both.

- (11) A person guilty of an offence falling within subsection (9)(c) above shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale.

- (12) If, on the trial on indictment of a person charged with an offence falling within subsection (9)(a) or (b) above, the jury find them not guilty of the offence charged, they may find them guilty of the basic offence mentioned in that provision.

- (13) For the purposes of subsection (9)(c), subsection (1)(a) above shall have effect as if the person likely to be caused harassment, alarm or distress were the victim of the offence.

- (14) A person is guilty of an offence under this section if they commit—

- (a) an offence under section 2 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 (offences of harassment and stalking); or
- (b) an offence under section 4 or 4A of that Act (putting people in fear of violence and stalking involving fear of violence or serious alarm or distress),

which is aggravated for the purposes of this section.

- (15) A person guilty of an offence falling within subsection (13)(a) above shall be liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to a fine, or to both.

- (16) A person guilty of an offence falling within subsection (13)(b) above shall be liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both;

- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 14 years or to a fine, or to both.

(17) If, on the trial on indictment of a person charged with an offence falling within subsection (13)(a) above, the jury find them not guilty of the offence charged, they may find them guilty of either basic offence mentioned in that provision.

(18) If, on the trial on indictment of a person charged with an offence falling within subsection (13)(b) above, the jury find them not guilty of the offence charged, they may find them guilty of an offence falling within subsection (13)(a) above.”

This new clause would create statutory aggravated offences motivated by hostility towards an individual's disability status, sexual orientation or transgender identity (or perception thereof). The new clause would also protect people who are victims of hate crime because of their association with individuals based on their disability status, sexual orientation or transgender identity (or perception thereof).

New clause 123—Removal of parental responsibility for individuals convicted of sexual offences against children—

“(1) After section 2 (parental responsibility for children) of the Children Act 1989, insert —

‘2A Prisoners: suspension of parental responsibility

(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a person (“P”) has been found guilty of a serious sexual offence involving or relating to a child or children; and
- (b) P had parental responsibility for a child or children at the time at which the offence was committed.

(2) P ceases to have parental responsibility for a child or all children—

- (a) until the child, or children, turns 18, or
- (b) until an application by P to the family court to reinstate parental responsibility has been approved.”

This new clause would terminate the parental rights of any individual convicted of child sex offences to any children the individual had at the time the crime was committed.

New clause 124—Duty to follow strategic priorities of police and crime plan—

“(1) The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 8(1) (Duty to have regard to police and crime plan), for “have regard to” substitute ‘follow the strategic priorities of’.

(3) In section 8(2) for ‘have regard to’ substitute ‘follow the strategic priorities of’.

(4) In section 8(3) for ‘have regard to’ substitute ‘follow the strategic priorities of’.

(5) In section 8(4) for ‘have regard to’ substitute ‘follow the strategic priorities of’.”

This new clause would require Police and Crime Commissioners to follow the strategic priorities of the police and crime plan rather than have regard to it.

New clause 125—Amendment of the Police Act 1996—

“(1) Section 39A of the Police Act 1996 is amended as follows.

(2) After subsection (7) insert—

- “(8) The Secretary of State may require that the College of Policing revises the whole or any part of a code of practice issued under this section or any other guidance or standards for policing the College of Policing may issue.
- (9) The Secretary of State may require that the National Police Chiefs’ Council revises the whole or any part of policy, strategic plan, action plan, or any other document intended direct policing practices.”

This new clause gives the Secretary of State the power to amend, or require the withdrawal of, any Code of Practice issued by the College of Policing, or any document issued by the National Police Chiefs’ Council intended to direct policing practices.

New clause 126—Previous conduct as factor in deciding whether to investigate a complaint—

“(1) The Police Reform Act 2002 is amended as follows.

(2) In Schedule 3, paragraph 1(6B)(d), at end insert ‘or

- (e) the complaint is made about a person serving with the police who has previous convictions or has had previous complaints made against them.”

This new clause would make previous complaints or convictions a factor in determining how to handle a new complaint against a police officer.

New clause 127—Points on driving licence for fly tipping—

“(1) The Environmental Protection Act is amended as follows.

(2) In section 33, subsection 8(a) at end insert ‘and endorse their driving record with 3 penalty points;”

This new clause would add penalty points to the driving licence of a person convicted of a fly-tipping offence.

New clause 128—Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third or subsequent shoplifting offence—

“(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In section 208 (community order: exercise of power to impose particular requirements), in subsections (3) and (6) after ‘subsection (10)’ insert ‘and sections 208A’.

(3) After that section insert—

“208A Community order: requirements for third or subsequent shoplifting offence

(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a person is convicted of adult shoplifting (“the index offence”),
- (b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of adult shoplifting or an equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence, and
- (c) the court makes a community order in respect of the index offence.

(2) The community order must, subject to subsection (3), include at least one of the following requirements—

- (a) a curfew requirement;
- (b) an exclusion requirement;
- (c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—

- (a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—
 - (i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, an
 - (ii) justify the court not including any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or
- (b) neither of the following requirements could be included in the order—
 - (i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;
 - (ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

(4) In subsection (1)(b), the reference to an occasion on which an offender was sentenced in respect of adult shoplifting does not include an occasion if—

- (a) each conviction for adult shoplifting for which the offender was dealt with on that occasion has been quashed, or
- (b) the offender was re-sentenced for adult shoplifting (and was not otherwise dealt with for adult shoplifting) on that occasion.

- (5) In this section—
 “adult shoplifting” means an offence under section 1 of the Theft Act 1968 committed by a person aged 18 or over in circumstances where—
 (a) the stolen goods were being offered for sale in a shop or any other premises, stall, vehicle or place from which a trade or business was carried on, and
 (b) at the time of the offence, the offender was, or was purporting to be, a customer or potential customer of the person offering the goods for sale;
 “equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence” means—
 (a) in Scotland, theft committed by a person aged 18 or over in the circumstances mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b) of the definition of “adult shoplifting”, or
 (b) in Northern Ireland, an offence under section 1 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 committed by a person aged 18 or over in those circumstances.
- (6) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be included in a community order if it could not otherwise be so included.
- (7) Where—
 (a) in a case to which this section applies, a court makes a community order which includes a requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2),
 (b) a previous conviction of the offender is subsequently set aside on appeal, and
 (c) without the previous conviction this section would not have applied, notice of appeal against the sentence may be given at any time within 28 days from the day on which the previous conviction was set aside (despite anything in section 18 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968).”

(4) After section 292 insert—

“292A Suspended sentence order: community requirements for third or subsequent shoplifting offence

- (1) This section applies where—
 (a) a person is convicted of adult shoplifting (“the index offence”),
 (b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of adult shoplifting or an equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence, and
 (c) the court makes a suspended sentence order in respect of the index offence.
- (2) The suspended sentence order must, subject to subsection (3), impose at least one of the following requirements—
 (a) a curfew requirement;
 (b) an exclusion requirement;
 (c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.
- (3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—
 (a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—
 (i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and
 (ii) justify the court not imposing on the offender any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or
 (b) neither of the following requirements could be imposed on the offender—
 (i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;
 (ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.

- (4) Section 208A(4) (occasions to be disregarded) applies for the purposes of subsection (1)(b).
- (5) In this section “adult shoplifting” and “equivalent Scottish or Northern Ireland offence” have the meaning given by section 208A.
- (6) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be imposed by a suspended sentence order if it could not otherwise be so imposed.
- (7) Where—
 (a) in a case to which this section applies, a court makes a suspended sentence order which imposes a requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2),
 (b) a previous conviction of the offender is subsequently set aside on appeal, and
 (c) without the previous conviction this section would not have applied, notice of appeal against the sentence may be given at any time within 28 days from the day on which the previous conviction was set aside (despite anything in section 18 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968).”

This new clause imposes a duty (subject to certain exceptions) to impose a curfew requirement, an exclusion requirement or an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement on certain persons convicted of shoplifting, where the offender is given a community sentence or suspended sentence order.

New clause 129—Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third assault of retail worker offence—

“(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In section 208 (community order: exercise of power to impose particular requirements), in subsections (3) and (6) after ‘and sections 208B’ (inserted by section [Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third shoplifting offence] of this Act) insert ‘and 208B’.

(3) After sections 208B insert—

‘208B Community order: requirements for third or subsequent assault of retail worker offence

(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a person is convicted of an offence under section 14 of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (assault of retail worker) (“the index offence”),
 (b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of an offence under section (Assault of retail worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 committed when the offender was aged 18 or over, and
 (c) the court makes a community order in respect of the index offence.
- (2) The community order must, subject to subsection (3), include at least one of the following requirements—
 (a) a curfew requirement;
 (b) an exclusion requirement;
 (c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.
- (3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—
 (a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—
 (i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and
 (ii) justify the court not including any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or
 (b) neither of the following requirements could be included in the order—
 (i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;
 (ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.’

(4) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be included in a community order if it could not otherwise be so included.

(5) After section 292A (inserted by section [Requirements in certain sentences imposed for third shoplifting offence] of this Act) insert—

‘292B Suspended sentence order: community requirements for third or subsequent assault of retail worker offence

(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a person is convicted of an offence under section (Assault of retail worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 (assault of retail worker) (“the index offence”),
 - (b) when the index offence was committed, the offender had on at least two previous occasions been sentenced in respect of an offence under section (Assault of retail worker) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025 committed when the offender was aged 18 or over, and
 - (c) the court makes a suspended sentence order in respect of the index offence.
- (2) The suspended sentence order must, subject to subsection (3), impose at least one of the following requirements—
- (a) a curfew requirement;
 - (b) an exclusion requirement;
 - (c) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.
- (3) Subsection (2) does not apply if—
- (a) the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances which—
 - (i) relate to any of the offences or the offender, and
 - (ii) justify the court not imposing on the offender any requirement of a kind mentioned in subsection (2), or
 - (b) neither of the following requirements could be imposed on the offender—
 - (i) an electronic compliance monitoring requirement for securing compliance with a proposed curfew requirement or proposed exclusion requirement;
 - (ii) an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement.
- (4) Nothing in subsection (2) enables a requirement to be imposed by a suspended sentence order if it could not otherwise be so imposed.”

This new clause imposes a duty (subject to certain exceptions) to impose a curfew requirement, an exclusion requirement or an electronic whereabouts monitoring requirement on certain persons convicted of an offence under section 15, where the offender is given a community sentence or suspended sentence order.

New clause 130—Theft of tools: prevention of re-sale and prosecution of offences—

“(1) The Equipment Theft Act 2023 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 3 (Enforcement), subsection (2) at end insert ‘equal to—

- (a) the replacement cost of the equipment,
- (b) the cost of repairing any damage caused during the theft, and
- (c) the trading losses incurred by the offended party.’

(3) In section 3 (Enforcement), after subsection (3) insert—

‘(3A) An enforcement authority must put in place an enforcement plan to enforce regulations made under section 1 at temporary markets in their area.’

(4) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(5) In Chapter 3, Aggravating Factors, after section 72 insert—

‘72A Theft of tools from tradesmen

- (1) This section applies where the court is considering the seriousness of an offence specified in section 7 of the Theft Act 1968.
- (2) If the theft was of tools from a tradesman, the court—
 - (a) must treat that fact as an aggravating factor, and
 - (b) must state in open court that the offence is so aggravated.”

New clause 131—Power to deport foreign nationals for possession of child sexual abuse images—

“(1) The Protection of Children Act 1978 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 1 (Indecent photographs of children) after subsection (4) insert—

‘(4A) Where a person is a foreign national and is charged with—

- (a) an offence under subsection (1), or
- (b) is found to be carrying an electronic device storing child sexual abuse images under section 164B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979,

the Secretary of State must make a deportation order in accordance with section 32 of the UK Borders Act 2007.”

This new clause would make foreign nationals found in possession of child sexual abuse images subject to automatic deportation.

New clause 132—Annual report on police actions in areas with high levels of serious offences—

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish an annual report on police actions in areas with high levels of serious offences.

(2) Each such report must include data from police forces in England and Wales to identify areas with the highest rates of serious offences.

(3) For each area specified under subsection (2), each report must include data on—

- (a) levels of police officers on duty;
- (b) use of powers under section 1 (power of constable to stop and search persons, vehicles etc.) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; and
- (c) use of live facial recognition technology.

(4) The first such report must be laid before Parliament within a period ending 6 months after the passing of this Act.

(5) Each subsequent report must be laid before Parliament within 12 months of the publication of the last report under this section.

(6) For the purposes of this section, ‘serious offences’ has the same meaning as in Schedule 1 of the Serious Crime Act 2007.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish annual reports on police presence, use of stop and search, and live facial recognition technology in areas with the highest levels of serious crime.

New clause 133—Stop and search—

“(1) The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 60(1)(a) and (aa) leave out ‘serious.’”

This new clause lowers the threshold for stop and search to “violence” rather than “serious violence.”

New clause 134—Seizure of motor vehicles: driving licence penalties—

“(1) The Police Reform Act 2002 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 59 (Vehicles used in a manner causing alarm, distress or annoyance), after subsection (6) insert—

‘(6A) A person who is convicted of repeat offences under subsection (6) will have their driving licence endorsed with penalty points up to and including the revocation of their driving licence.”

This new clause would make a person guilty of repeat offences of using vehicles in a manner causing alarm, distress or annoyance liable to penalty points on their driving licence or the revocation of their licence.

New clause 135—Automatic dismissal of officers who fail vetting—

“(1) The Police Act 1996 is amended in accordance with subsection (2).

(2) In section 39A (Codes of practice for chief officers), after subsection (1) insert—

- “(1A) Without prejudice to subsection (1) and subject to subsection (1B), a code of practice may provide for an officer to be dismissed without notice where—
- (a) the officer fails vetting, and
 - (b) it is not reasonable to expect that the officer will be capable of being deployed to full duties within a reasonable time frame.
- (1B) Subsection (1A) does not apply where a chief officer concludes that—
- (a) the officer, notwithstanding his vetting failure, is capable of being deployed to a substantial majority of duties appropriate for an officer of his rank; and
 - (b) it would be disproportionate to the operational effectiveness of the force for the officer to be dismissed without notice.”

This new clause would ensure police officers who failed their vetting can be dismissed.

New clause 136—*Theft from farms*—

“(1) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(2) In Chapter 3, Aggravating Factors, after section 72 insert—

‘(72A) *Theft from farms*

- (1) This section applies where the court is considering the seriousness of an offence specified in section 7 of The Theft Act 1968.
- (2) If the theft was of high value farming equipment, the court—
 - (a) must treat that fact as an aggravating factor, and
 - (b) must state in open court that the offence is so aggravated.
- (3) For the purposes of this section—

“high value farming equipment” is machinery and tools used in agricultural operations to enhance productivity and efficiency, with a value of at least £10,000.”

This new clause makes theft of high value farming equipment an aggravating factor on sentencing.

New clause 137—*Defence to criminal damage*—

“(1) The Criminal Damage Act 1971 is amended as follows.

(2) Leave out subsection (5)(3) and insert—

- “(3) For the purposes of this section, a belief must be both honestly held and reasonable.”

This new clause would change the defence to criminal damage in the Criminal Damage Act 1971 to specify that the belief that the owner of the property would have consented must be reasonable.

New clause 138—*Meaning of serious disruption to the life of the community*—

“(1) Section 12 of the Public Order Act 1986 (imposing conditions on public processions) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2A), for the words from ‘, the cases’ to the end substitute—

- “(a) the cases in which a public procession in England and Wales may result in serious disruption to the life of the community include, in particular, where it may, by way of physical obstruction, result in—
- (i) the prevention of, or a hindrance that is more than minor to, the carrying out of day-to-day activities (including in particular the making of a journey),
 - (ii) the prevention of, or a delay that is more than minor to, the delivery of a time-sensitive product to consumers of that product, or
 - (iii) the prevention of, or a disruption that is more than minor to, access to any essential goods or any essential service,

(b) in considering whether a public procession in England and Wales may result in serious disruption to the life of the community, the senior police officer—

- (i) must take into account all relevant disruption, and
 - (ii) may take into account any relevant cumulative disruption, and
- (c) “community” in relation to a public procession in England and Wales, means any group of persons that may be affected by the procession, whether or not all or any of those persons live or work in the vicinity of the procession.’

(3) In subsection (2B), for ‘subsection (2A)(a)’ substitute ‘subsection (2A) and this subsection—

“access to any essential goods or any essential service” in particular, access to—

- (a) the supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel,
- (b) a system of communication,
- (c) a place of worship,
- (d) a transport facility,
- (e) an educational institution, or
- (f) a service relating to health;

‘area’, in relation to a public procession or public assembly, means such area as the senior police officer considers appropriate, having regard to the nature and extent of the disruption that may result from the procession or assembly;

‘relevant cumulative disruption’, in relation to a public procession in England and Wales, means the cumulative disruption to the life of the community resulting from—

- (a) the procession,
- (b) any other public procession in England and Wales that was held, is being held or is intended to be held in the same area as the area in which the procession mentioned in paragraph (a) is being held or is intended to be held (whether or not directions have been given under subsection (1) in relation to that other procession), and
- (c) any public assembly in England and Wales that was held, is being held or is intended to be held in the same area in which the procession mentioned in paragraph (a) is being held or is intended to be held (whether or not directions have been given under section 14(1A) in relation to that assembly), and it does not matter whether or not the procession mentioned in paragraph (a) and any procession or assembly within paragraph (b) or (c) are organised by the same person, are attended by any of the same persons or are held or are intended to be held at the same time;

‘relevant disruption’, in relation to a public procession in England and Wales, means all disruption to the life of the community—

- (a) that may result from the procession, or
- (b) that may occur regardless of whether the procession is held (including in particular normal traffic congestion);”.

(4) Section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 (imposing conditions on public assemblies) is amended as follows.

(5) In subsection (2A), for the words from ‘, the cases’ to the end substitute—

- “(a) the cases in which a public assembly in England and Wales may result in serious disruption to the life of the community include, in particular, where it may, by way of physical obstruction, result in—
- (i) the prevention of, or a hindrance that is more than minor to, the carrying out of day-to-day activities (including in particular the making of a journey),

- (ii) the prevention of, or a delay that is more than minor to, the delivery of a time-sensitive product to consumers of that product, or
- (iii) the prevention of, or a disruption that is more than minor to, access to any essential goods or any essential service,
- (b) in considering whether a public assembly in England and Wales may result in serious disruption to the life of the community, the senior police officer—
 - (i) must take into account all relevant disruption, and
 - (ii) may take into account any relevant cumulative disruption, and
- (c) ‘community’ in relation to a public assembly in England and Wales, means any group of persons that may be affected by the assembly, whether or not all or any of those persons live or work in the vicinity of the assembly.’

(6) In subsection (2B), for ‘subsection (2A)(a)’ substitute ‘subsection (2A) and this subsection—

“access to any essential goods or any essential service”, includes, in particular, access to—

- (a) the supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel,
- (b) a system of communication,
- (c) a place of worship,
- (d) a transport facility,
- (e) an educational institution, or
- (f) a service relating to health;

‘area’, in relation to a public assembly or public procession, means such area as the senior police officer considers appropriate, having regard to the nature and extent of the disruption that may result from the assembly or procession;

‘relevant cumulative disruption’, in relation to a public assembly in England and Wales, means the cumulative disruption to the life of the community resulting from—

- (a) the assembly,
- (b) any other public assembly in England and Wales that was held, is being held or is intended to be held in the same area in which the assembly mentioned in paragraph (a) is being held or is intended to be held (whether or not directions have been given under subsection (1A) in relation to that other assembly), and
- (c) any public procession in England and Wales that was held, is being held or is intended to be held in the same area as the area in which the assembly mentioned in paragraph (a) is being held or is intended to be held (whether or not directions have been given under section 12(1) in relation to that procession), and it does not matter whether or not the assembly mentioned in paragraph (a) and any assembly or procession within paragraph (b) or (c) are organised by the same person, are attended by any of the same persons or are held or are intended to be held at the same time;

‘relevant disruption’, in relation to a public assembly in England and Wales, means all disruption to the life of the community—

- (a) that may result from the assembly, or
- (b) that may occur regardless of whether the assembly is held (including in particular normal traffic congestion).”

This new clause defines “serious disruption to the life of the community” so as to amend the effects of the Zeigler judgement.

New clause 139—Removal of prohibition on entering a private dwelling to confiscate an off-road bike and ensure their destruction—

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

(2) In section 165A, after subsection (5)(c) insert—

‘(5A) In exercising their powers under subsection (5), a constable may enter a private dwelling house for the purposes of seizing an off-road bike’.

(3) The Police Reform Act 2002 is amended as follows.

(4) In section 59(7), at end insert ‘, except where the intention is to seize an off-road bike.’

(5) The Road Traffic Act 1988 is amended as follows.

(6) In section 165B(2), at end insert—

‘; (g) where the seized motor vehicle is an off-road bike, to ensure its destruction by the police’.

(7) The Police Reform Act 2002 is amended as follows.

(8) In section 60(2), at end insert—

‘; (g) where the seized motor vehicle is an off-road bike, to ensure its destruction by the police.’”

This new clause would remove the prohibition on the police entering a private dwelling to confiscate an off-road bike that is driven without a licence, uninsured, or being used illegally and would create a duty to destroy off-road bikes.

New clause 140—Police access to the UK tobacco track and trace system—

“The Secretary of State must, through regulations, make provision for the police to access the HMRC tobacco track and trace system for the purposes of determining the provenance of tobacco products sold by retailers.”

This new clause would allow the police to access the UK Tobacco Track and Trace system for the purposes of determining whether a retailer has obtained stolen or counterfeit tobacco illegally.

New clause 141—Soliciting Prostitution for Rent Offence—

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

(2) After section 52 (causing or inciting prostitution for gain) insert—

‘52A Soliciting prostitution for rent

(1) A person commits an offence if—

- (a) they intentionally cause or incite a person to become a prostitute in exchange for accommodation;
- (b) they intentionally cause or incite a person to become a prostitute in exchange for a reduction in money paid as rent for a property;
- (c) they attempt to cause or incite a person to become a prostitute in exchange for accommodation; or
- (d) they attempt to cause or incite a person to become a prostitute in exchange for a reduction in money paid as rent for a property.

These offences refer to both properties owned or resided in by the offender.

(2) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or both;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 7 years; or
- (c) to a “banning order” as defined in part 2, chapter 2 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016.”

This new clause would create a new offence of soliciting prostitution in exchange for rent and allow offenders to be banned from renting properties after the offence.

New clause 142—Travel abroad to support a proscribed organisation—

“(1) A person commits an offence if they travel outside of the United Kingdom to support a proscribed organisation.

(2) For the purposes of this section, ‘support’ includes—

- (a) becoming a member of a proscribed organisation, or an affiliated group of a proscribed organisation;

- (b) working for any entity, either voluntarily or for financial gain, run by a proscribed organisation;
- (c) attending political, religious or social gatherings in support of a proscribed organisation;
- (d) meeting with members of a proscribed organisation;
- (e) creating content, both online and offline, to raise support for a proscribed organisation; or
- (f) travelling to territory controlled by a proscribed organisation without an exemption.

(3) This section does not apply to—

- (a) accredited non-governmental organisations and humanitarian organisations;
- (b) accredited media outlets and journalists;
- (c) diplomats and other governmental officials travelling in an official capacity; or
- (d) independent journalists and content creators reporting on a proscribed organisation, or in a territory with a proscribed organisation present.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable—

- (a) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 14 years, to a fine (or both), or
- (b) on summary conviction, to imprisonment of a term not exceeding 6 months, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both)."

This new clause would make travelling abroad to support a proscribed organisation an offence.

New clause 143—Individual preparation for mass casualty attack—

"(1) A person commits an offence, if, with the intention of—

- (a) killing two or more people, or
- (b) attempting to kill two or more people, they engage in any conduct in preparation for giving effect to their intention.

(2) A person found guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable, on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for life."

This new clause would allow the police to intervene early to prevent attacks, like in terrorism cases, without causing unintended consequences for wider counter-terrorism efforts. It gives effect to a recommendation by the independent reviewer of terrorist legislation following the Southport attack.

New clause 144—Requirement to bring forward proposals for a national statutory inquiry into grooming gangs—

"(1) The Secretary of State must, within 3 months of the passing of this Act, publish proposals for approval by the House of Commons for the setting up of a statutory inquiry into grooming gangs.

(2) The Secretary of State's proposals for an inquiry must include, but may not be limited to identification of—

- (a) common patterns of behaviour and offending between grooming gangs;
- (b) the type, extent and volume of crimes committed by grooming gangs;
- (c) the number of victims of crimes committed by grooming gangs;
- (d) the ethnicity of members of grooming gangs;
- (e) any failings, by action, omission or deliberate suppression, by—
 - (i) police,
 - (ii) local authorities,
 - (iii) prosecutors,
 - (iv) charities,
 - (v) political parties,
 - (vi) local and national government,
 - (vii) healthcare providers and health services, or
 - (viii) other agencies or bodies, in the committal of crimes by grooming;

- (f) such national safeguarding actions as may be required to minimise the risk of further such offending occurring in future; and

(g) good practice in protecting children.

(3) The Secretary of State's proposals for an inquiry must stipulate that the inquiry may do anything it considers is calculated to facilitate, or is incidental or conducive to the carrying out of its functions and the achievement of the requirements of subsection (2).

(4) The Secretary of State's proposals must make provision for the timetable of any inquiry, including that a report must be published within two years of its launch.

(5) For the purposes of this section—

'gang' means a group of at least three adults whose purpose or intention is to commit a sexual offence against the same victim or group of victims;

'grooming' means—

- (a) activity carried out with the primary intention of committing sexual offences against the victim;
- (b) activity that is carried out, or predominantly carried out, in person;
- (c) activity that includes the provision of illicit substances and/or alcohol either as part of the grooming or concurrent with the commission of the sexual offence."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to bring forward proposals on the setting up of a national statutory inquiry into grooming gangs for approval by the House of Commons.

New clause 145—Annual statement on ethnicity of members of grooming gangs—

"The Secretary of State must make an annual statement to the House of Commons on the ethnicity of convicted members of grooming gangs."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to make an annual statement to the House on ethnicity data of convicted members of grooming gangs.

New clause 146—Publication of sex offender's ethnicity data—

"(1) The Secretary of State for the Home Office must publish—

- (a) quarterly; and
- (b) yearly; datasets containing all national data pertaining to the ethnicity of sex offenders.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a 'sex offender' is anyone convicted of—

- (a) an offence under section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 (taking etc indecent photograph of child),
- (b) an offence under section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (possession of indecent photograph of child),
- (c) an offence under any of sections 5 to 8 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (rape and other offences against children under 13),
- (d) an offence under any sections 9 to 12 of that Act (other child 25 sex offences),
- (e) an offence under section 14 of that Act (arranging or facilitating commission of child sex offence),
- (f) an offence under any of sections 16 to 19 of that Act (abuse of position of trust),
- (g) an offence under section 25 or 26 of that Act (familial child sex offences), or
- (h) an offence under any of sections 47 to 50 of that Act (sexual exploitation of children),
- (i) an offence under any of sections 1 to 4 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (rape, assault and causing sexual activity without consent),

- (j) an offence under any of sections 30 to 41 of that Act (sexual offences relating to persons with mental disorder),
- (k) an offence under any of sections 61 to 63 of that Act (preparatory offences), or
- (l) an offence under any of sections 66 to 67A of that Act (exposure and voyeurism),
- (m) an offence under section 71 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (sexual activity in a public lavatory) and a person involved in the activity in question was under the age of 18.”

This new clause would introduce a requirement that ethnicity data of sex offenders be published on a quarterly and a yearly basis.

New clause 147—Financial gain from child sexual exploitation and abuse—

“(1) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 70 insert—

‘70A Financial gain from child sexual exploitation

- (1) This section applies where—
 - (a) a court is considering the seriousness of a specified child sex offence; or
 - (b) the offence is aggravated by financial gain; and
 - (c) the offender was aged 18 or over when the offence was committed.
- (2) The court—
 - (a) must treat the fact that the offence is aggravated by financial gain from a specified child sex offence or child sexual abuse material as an aggravating factor; and
 - (b) must state in open court that the offence is so aggravated.
- (3) An offence is “aggravated by financial gain from a specified child sex offence or child sexual abuse material as an aggravating factor” if—
 - (a) the offence was facilitated by, or involved, the offender financially profiting from a child sexual offence; or
 - (b) the offence was facilitated by, or involved, a person other than the offender financially profiting from a child sex offence, and the offender knew, or could have reasonably been expected to know that the said person was financially profiting from said child sex offence.
- (4) In this section “specified child sex offence” means—
 - (a) an offence within any of subsections (5) to (7); or
 - (b) an inchoate offence in relation to any such offence.
- (5) An offence is within this subsection if it is—
 - (a) an offence under section 1 of the Protection of Children Act 1978 (taking etc indecent photograph of child);
 - (b) an offence under section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (possession of indecent photograph of child);
 - (c) an offence under any of sections 5 to 8 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (rape and other offences against children under 13);
 - (d) an offence under any of sections 9 to 12 of that Act (other child sex offences);
 - (e) an offence under section 14 of that Act (arranging or facilitating commission of child sex offence);
 - (f) an offence under any of sections 16 to 19 of that Act (abuse of position of trust);
 - (g) an offence under section 25 or 26 of that Act (familial child sex offences); or
 - (h) an offence under any of sections 47 to 50 of that Act (sexual exploitation of children).
- (6) An offence is within this subsection if it is—
 - (a) an offence under any of sections 1 to 4 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (rape, assault and causing sexual activity without consent);

- (b) an offence under any of sections 30 to 41 of that Act (sexual offences relating to persons with mental disorder);
 - (c) an offence under any of sections 61 to 63 of that Act (preparatory offences); or
 - (d) an offence under any of sections 66 to 67A of that Act (exposure and voyeurism), and the victim or intended victim was under the age of 18.
- (7) An offence is within this subsection if it is an offence under section 71 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (sexual activity in a public lavatory) and a person involved in the activity in question was under the age of 18.
- (8) For the purposes of this section “financially profiting” means receiving money, goods, or any other form of payment.”

This new clause would create an aggravating factor when sentencing for any individual who has financially benefited from the creation, distribution, possession or publication of any specified child sexual abuse offence.

New clause 148—Annual statement on employment status of sexual offenders—

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish an annual report on the employment status of convicted sexual offenders at the time of their offence.

(2) For the purpose of subsection (1), ‘Sexual offenders’ means any person found guilty of an offence stipulated in the Sexual Offences Act 2003.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to release an annual report on the employment status of convicted sexual offenders.

New clause 149—Child Murder Sentencing Guidelines—

“(1) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(2) In Schedule 21, paragraph 2(2) omit (b) and (ba) and insert—

‘(zb) the murder of a child’.”

This new clause would make the starting punishment for child murder a whole life order. Currently a child murderer must have abducted, sexually abused or put substantial planning into the murder to receive a whole life order. Any child murderer should receive a whole life order.

New clause 150—Prohibition on sexual relationships between first cousins—

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

(2) In section 27 (family relationships), subsection (2)(a) after ‘uncle,’ insert ‘first cousin.’

(3) In section 64 (sex with an adult relative: penetration), subsection (2) after ‘niece’ insert ‘or first cousin.’

(4) In subsection 64(3) at end insert—

‘(c) “first cousin” means the child of a parent’s sibling.’

(5) This section does not affect the continued sexual relationships between first cousins that had begun before the Crime and Policing Act 2025 received Royal Assent.”

This new clause would ban sexual relationships between first cousins after the passing of this Act.

New clause 151—Threshold for intentional harassment, alarm or distress—

“(1) The Public Order Act 1986 is amended as follows.

(2) In sections 4A(1)(a) and (b) leave out ‘or insulting.’”

New clause 152—Points on driving licence for littering out of a vehicle window—

“(1) The Environmental Protection Act 1990 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 87, subsection (5), at end insert—

“(5A) Where a person is found guilty of an offence of littering committed under section 87(1) that occurs as a result of litter being thrown, dropped or otherwise deposited from a vehicle, they shall also be liable to an endorsement of 3 penalty points on their driving record.”

This new clause would add penalty points to the driving licence of a person convicted of littering from a vehicle.

New clause 153—Access to public funds for organisations supporting criminal conduct—

“An organisation or group will not be eligible for public funding if there is evidence that it—

- (a) actively promotes or supports criminal conduct, or
- (b) seeks to subvert the constitutional integrity or democratic institutions of the United Kingdom through violent or illegal means.”

This new clause would prevent organisations or groups which support criminal conduct or use violence to seek to subvert the constitutional integrity or democratic functions of the UK from accessing public funds.

New clause 155—Report on an economic crime fighting fund—

“(1) The Secretary of State must undertake an assessment of the viability, and potential merits, of establishing an economic crime fighting fund based on the principle of reinvesting a proportion of receipts resulting from economic crime enforcement into a pooled fund for the purposes of providing multi-year resourcing for tackling economic crime.

(2) The assessment specified in subsection (1) must also examine whether such a fund could address how annularity rules can prevent some law enforcement agencies from benefiting from recovered assets under the asset recovery incentivisation scheme.

(3) In carrying out the assessment, the Secretary of State must consult such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(4) The Secretary of State must publish and lay before Parliament a report on the outcome of the assessment by the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.”

New clause 156—Filming and distributing violent acts: offence—

“(1) It is an offence for person (X) to film and distribute violent acts involving person (Y) where there was clear premeditation, and deliberately participate with intent, by X to humiliate and/or distress Y.

(2) It is also an offence under this section for any person, whether X or another individual, to have made the recording with the premeditated intention that it will be distributed, streamed or broadcast, with the intent to humiliate and/or distress Y.

(3) When sentencing an individual convicted of an offence under subsection (1) or (2) (or both), the courts are to treat the age and vulnerability of person Y as aggravating factors.

(4) An offence is not committed where the footage is used for public interest journalism or evidentiary purposes.”

New clause 157—Processing of data in relation to a case-file prepared by the police service for submission to the Crown Prosecution Service for a charging decision—

“(1) The Data Protection Act 2018 is amended as follows.

(2) After Section 40, insert—

‘40A Processing of data in relation to a case-file prepared by the police service for submission to the Crown Prosecution Service for a charging decision

- (1) This section applies to a set of processing operations consisting of the preparation of a case-file by the police service for submission to the Crown Prosecution Service for a charging decision, the making of a

charging decision by the Crown Prosecution Service, and the return of the case-file by the Crown Prosecution Service to the police service after a charging decision has been made.

- (2) The police service is not obliged to comply with the first data protection principle except insofar as that principle requires processing to be fair, or the third data protection principle, in preparing a case-file for submission to the Crown Prosecution Service for a charging decision.
- (3) The Crown Prosecution Service is not obliged to comply with the first data protection principle except insofar as that principle requires processing to be fair, or the third data protection principle, in making a charging decision on a case-file submitted for that purpose by the police service.
- (4) If the Crown Prosecution Service decides that a charge will not be pursued when it makes a charging decision on a case-file submitted for that purpose by the police service it must take all steps reasonably required to destroy and delete all copies of the case-file in its possession.
- (5) If the Crown Prosecution Service decides that a charge will be pursued when it makes a charging decision on a case-file submitted for that purpose by the police service it must return the case-file to the police service and take all steps reasonably required to destroy and delete all copies of the case-file in its possession.
- (6) Where the Crown Prosecution Service decides that a charge will be pursued when it makes a charging decision on a case-file submitted for that purpose by the police service and returns the case-file to the police service under subsection (5), the police service must comply with the first data protection principle and the third data protection principle in relation to any subsequent processing of the data contained in the case-file.
- (7) For the purposes of this section—
 - (a) the police service means—
 - (i) constabulary maintained by virtue of an enactment, or
 - (ii) subject to section 126 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (prison staff not to be regarded as in police service), any other service whose members have the powers or privileges of a constable,
 - (b) the preparation of, or preparing, a case-file by the police service for submission to the Crown Prosecution Service for a charging decision includes the submission of the file,
 - (c) a case-file includes all information obtained by the police service for the purpose of preparing a case-file for submission to the Crown Prosecution Service for a charging decision.”

This new clause adjusts Section 40 of the Data Protection Act 2018 to exempt the police service and the Crown Prosecution Service from the first and third data protection principles contained within the 2018 Act so that they can share unredacted data with one another when making a charging decision.

New clause 158—Anti-social behaviour: definition and enforcement—

“(1) For the purposes of—

- (a) section 2(1) of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, and
 - (b) Part 1 of this Act,
- conduct shall not be considered ‘anti-social behaviour’ solely on the basis that it involves—
- (i) rough sleeping,
 - (ii) non-aggressive begging,
 - (iii) the use of public space for shelter, rest, or subsistence-related activity,

- (iv) any conduct arising directly from homelessness, socio-economic need or vulnerability, or lack of access to housing or essential services.

(2) For conduct to meet the threshold of being ‘likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person’, it must—

- (a) involve behaviour that is targeted, threatening, or persistently disruptive to others, and
- (b) give rise to a genuine and ongoing risk of harm or serious nuisance beyond mere visibility or discomfort caused by socio-economic need or vulnerability.

(3) In assessing whether behaviour constitutes anti-social behaviour under either Act, the relevant authority or court must have regard to—

- (a) whether the conduct reflects socio-economic need or vulnerability rather than intent to harm or harass,
- (b) the individual’s housing status, mental and physical health, and access to support, and
- (c) whether alternative, non-punitive interventions have been offered or exhausted.

(4) An order, injunction, or direction under either Act must not be imposed where the conduct arises from destitution or homelessness unless—

- (a) the conduct poses a demonstrable and ongoing risk to the public, and
- (b) enforcement is necessary and proportionate, and
- (c) appropriate support, including housing or welfare assistance, has been actively sought and reasonably refused.

(5) Nothing in this section shall prevent proportionate enforcement action where conduct constitutes a demonstrable and ongoing threat to public safety or the rights and freedoms of others, and where such action is necessary and proportionate in the circumstances.”

This new clause would make clear that rough sleeping, passive begging, or visibly using public space for shelter or subsistence does not, on its own, amount to anti-social behaviour. It would place a legal duty on authorities to consider context, vulnerability, and proportionality when assessing whether behaviour constitutes anti-social behaviour.

New clause 159—Duty for church, faith groups and other bodies to report suspected child sex offences—

“(1) An individual must make a notification under this section if they are given reason to suspect that a child sex offence may have been committed (at any time).

(2) A notification—

- (a) must be made to a relevant police force or a relevant local authority (but may be made to both);
- (b) must identify each person believed to have been involved in the suspected offence (so far as known) and explain why the notification is made;
- (c) must be made as soon as practicable; and
- (d) may be made orally or in writing.

(3) The duty under subsection (1) applies to—

- (a) any person undertaking work on either a paid or voluntary basis, or holding a leadership position, within the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim or Sikh faiths, or any other religion or faith, and
- (b) any other belief system or cult.”

New clause 160—Removal of 12-Month Limitation Period for Historic Sexual Offences—

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

(2) After section 8, insert—

‘(8A) Removal of 12-Month Limitation Period for Historic Sexual Offences

- (1) Proceedings may be instituted at any time for the offence of unlawful sexual intercourse with a person aged 13 to 15 under section 6 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956, regardless of the time elapsed since the alleged offence.

- (2) Subsection (1) applies to offences alleged to have been committed before 1 May 2004.”

This new clause removes the 12-month limitation period for offences under section 6 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 where the offence occurred before 1 May 2004.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I am proud to have stood on a manifesto pledge to halve violence against women and girls in a decade, and I know that colleagues on the Front Bench take that extremely seriously. There are significant measures in this Bill on intimate image abuse, stalking, spiking and the sexual exploitation of children. I know they mark only the beginning of the Government’s mission to tackle those shameful crimes. As a national inquiry into child sexual exploitation perpetrated by grooming gangs rightly gets under way, we must now also confront the adult sexual exploitation being perpetrated on an industrial scale by pimping websites and men who pay for sex, both of which currently enjoy near-total legal impunity.

Laws against the commercial sexual exploitation of adults in this country are outdated, unjust and totally ineffective. In fact, our current legal framework creates a conducive context for commercial sexual exploitation—a failing that overwhelmingly affects women. Pimping websites, which function as massive online brothels, operate openly and freely, supercharging the sex trafficking trade by making it easier and quicker for exploiters to advertise their victims. Those online mega-brothels make millions of pounds every year by advertising thousands of vulnerable women from across the world for prostitution in the UK. Sadly, our legislation allows that.

Men who pay for sex, so often left out of conversations on prostitution and sex trafficking but who are the beating heart of such a brutal trade, abuse with impunity. Their demand and their money drives the sex trafficking trade, yet we do very little to deter them. Let us therefore start that process today by making it crystal clear as a Parliament that it is not possible to buy sexual consent. Giving someone money, accommodation, goods or services in exchange for sex acts is sexual exploitation and abuse; it is never acceptable.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady and her party for bringing this legislation forward. She is probably well aware that we in Northern Ireland, through Lord Morrow and the Assembly sometime back, brought in specific legislation on this, for the first time in the United Kingdom. Has she had an opportunity to look at that legislative change we had at Stormont? What she brings forward is even better than what we had originally tried to get at the Assembly. Does she feel, in all honesty, that women will be protected from sexual exploitation, as she has clearly said that they should?

Tonia Antoniazzi: The hon. Member is right to say that there is excellent practice in Northern Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, which I chair, is looking at that. He may be interested in that.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Why should we implement this model for sex work when the evidence from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland shows that it has increased violence towards sex workers?

Tonia Antoniazzi: My hon. Friend and I obviously do not look at this through the same lens. For me, it is prostitution and not sex work, and we need to see some more examples of that being used. We currently have a situation where sex buyers enjoy near-total impunity while the vulnerable women they exploit can face criminal sanctions if they solicit on the street. The state hands out fines to women in a self-defeating effort to stop them soliciting on the street, ignoring the question of where those women are most likely to earn the money to pay their fine. Sanctioning victims of sexual exploitation is counterproductive and a barrier to seeking help and exiting this ruthless trade.

That is why I have tabled amendments new clauses 2, 3 and 4. New clause 2 would make it a criminal offence to enable or profit from the prostitution of another person online and offline, thereby outlawing dangerous pimping websites that are fuelling demand and facilitating sex trafficking. New clauses 3 and 4 would together shift the burden of criminality off victims of sexual exploitation and on to perpetrators. New clause 3 would make it a criminal offence to pay for sex, sending a clear message to boys that that is not an acceptable way to treat women and an equally clear message to men who are considering paying for sex that they face prosecution. We know from research with UK sex buyers that this would be an effective deterrent. Over half of 1,200 sex buyers questioned in one study said that they would definitely, probably or possibly change their behaviour if a law were introduced that made it a crime to pay for sex.

New clause 4 would repeal sanctions against victims of sexual exploitation who solicit on the street to remove that barrier to women exiting prostitution and rebuilding their lives. It is also widely agreed that the expunging of criminal records of section 1 offences is necessary to end the unjust stigmatisation that these women continue to experience. That is why I have also tabled new clause 19 to introduce such a mechanism.

The Home Affairs Committee has recommended that “the Home Office change existing legislation so that soliciting is no longer an offence”, and

“legislate for the deletion of previous convictions and cautions for prostitution from the record of sex workers by amending the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.”

For most of these women, their record of convictions is a record of their exploitation and abuse, and they live in fear of having to disclose that history when applying for jobs or volunteering. Decriminalising section 1 offences and allowing for the expunging of those historical convictions would allow those women to finally be free of the record of their abuse and the stigma they have endured for decades.

My amendments would usher in a legal framework that recognises that prostitution is violence against women, and the only way to end this violence is to deter the perpetrators and profiteers. I am delighted, then, that more than 50 hon. Members have signed new clauses 2 to 4. I particularly thank members of the all-party parliamentary group on commercial sexual exploitation, which I chair, for their support. The amendments are informed and supported by survivors and best practice frontline support services such as NIA, Kairos Women Working Together, and Women@TheWell.

I note that, unsurprisingly, some of my proposals are hated by pimping websites, one of which, Vivastreet, emailed its allies, urging them to mobilise against my amendments. A recent Sky News investigation found that over half of the 14,000 prostitution adverts on Vivastreet displayed a phone number linked to another advert on the site, which is a key red flag for organised sexual exploitation. I therefore find it reassuring that those prostitution peddlars are unnerved by my proposals.

I want to address a myth promoted by defenders of pimping websites that shutting down these sites will make no difference to the scale of sexual exploitation taking place and will, instead, simply drive it all into the dark web and make it harder to identify. That is patently nonsense, lacking in logic and evidence. The dark web carries major disadvantages for both traffickers and sex buyers. It would require significant technical expertise to post, as well as locate and access, prostitution adverts on the dark web, thereby substantially restricting the pool of exploiters able to engage in this crime. There is also no evidence that such a shift has taken place in jurisdictions that have outlawed pimping websites. The reality is that police simply cannot keep up with the scale of sexual exploitation taking place via pimping websites on the open web.

Another myth I want to address was all too visible in the written submissions opposing my amendments submitted to the Public Bill Committee. Every single one of the organisations who argued that pimping websites should be allowed to operate described prostitution as work—as “sex work”. The idea that paying someone to perform sex acts is an ordinary consumer activity—that ordering a woman online to perform a blow job is the equivalent of ordering a cappuccino—is a pernicious and harmful myth. Prostitution is violence against women.

Let us legislate to put pimps and traffickers out of business. We must protect individuals from exploitation today, but also address the historical criminalisation of victims and abuse. I thank Members on the Front Bench for their engagement on this issue and I look forward to working with them very closely.

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): I rise to speak to new clauses 12 and 123 in my name, new clause 43 in the name of the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mike Martin) and new clause 121 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage).

New clause 43 seeks to commence the Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023, which was taken through the House as a private Member’s Bill by Greg Clark, the predecessor of the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells. Greg did great work on this Bill. I was one of its supporters and a member of the Bill Committee. I spoke on Second Reading, Third Reading and in Committee. It is a simple Act, which had cross-party support—it was not in any way a controversial piece of legislation. It corrected an oversight in the law that had been missed out in a previous piece of legislation.

As so often happens, a private Member’s Bill requires a statutory instrument to commence it, and that statutory instrument has not yet been laid in this House. I am sure the Minister is well aware of that and is seeking to do so. This new clause would allow the Act to commence now, rather than requiring that statutory instrument, thereby saving her a little bit of time. I hope, therefore,

that she might look favourably on it. As I say, this was an Act that was supported across the House. There was no Division on it; it was very much something that we all wanted to see, so I hope that the Government accept the new clause and that the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells can follow on in the footsteps of his predecessor in making sure that this Act of Parliament becomes live and real for the people who need it.

Let me turn now to new clause 121 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport. I was almost disappointed not to be able to table this new clause myself, because it fits with the work that I have done previously on these issues. I was Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport when the Digital Economy Act 2017 introduced age verification for pornography. Again, new clause 121 is a simple piece of legislation, which would make non-fatal strangulation a criminal act if in pornography. This does not impact on what people may wish to do in their private lives, but it does mean that those images would not then be available to be seen in pornographic films. It also means that there is protection for children who may be looking at this pornography—we do not want them to look at it, but we are realists and recognise that this happens—and that it does not normalise what is a really dangerous act, which should not be promoted in any way.

I know from experience that social media companies will remove content if it is illegal. They will not remove it if it is not. Therefore this simple change would mean that the depiction of non-fatal strangulation would become illegal content and social media companies would therefore be forced to act. I hope that this is something that can be supported across the House. Although I understand that we will be pushed to Division this evening, I do hope that the Minister can say something about the Government introducing something similar—perhaps in the other place—so that we can make sure that this inappropriate content is illegal and therefore not available to be seen by children.

Let me turn now to the new clauses in my name. I wish to start with new clause 123, because my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden and Solihull East (Saqib Bhatti), who has been such a champion of this legislation, has to go to a Delegated Legislation Committee at 2.30 pm. I also wish him a very happy birthday. He is choosing to spend his birthday in this Chamber and attending a DL Committee—what a hero! Again, I think that this new clause will have cross-party support. It concerns the removal of parental responsibility for individuals convicted of sexual offences against children. When I have talked about this to colleagues and asked them to consider supporting the new clause, they have been utterly amazed that anybody convicted of a sexual offence against a child may be allowed to have parental responsibility for their own child. That responsibility is stopped only if the offence is committed against their own child. That cannot be right.

How can it be that a convicted sex offender—somebody who has been convicted of a sexual offence against a child—is allowed to make parental decisions about their own children? My hon. Friend's constituent has talked about this—I believe that they are known as “Bethan” in this situation—and has been a real champion on this issue. In this particular case, a man who was convicted of raping a relative who was a child still has parental responsibility for his own child. That cannot

be acceptable. Again, this feels like a piece of legislation where, at some point, we just failed to address this one issue. I hope, therefore, that this can be seen as a defect in the legislation that we all agree should be corrected.

New clause 12 is a relatively simple amendment to the Modern Slavery Act 2015, but it reflects a phenomenon that we simply did not know about when we introduced the Act 10 years ago. As the Minister on the Bill, I remember going through many definitions of what constituted trafficking and exploitation, but, at the time, the phenomenon of orphanage trafficking was simply not known. That may be a shock to some in this Chamber, because there is such awareness of the issue in Australia and New Zealand but we simply do not know about it here.

2.15 pm

What happens is that institutions that call themselves orphanages are set up, but they are not orphanages. When we think of orphanages, we think of a place where children with no parents are looked after because the state does not have any other way of looking after them. In this country and across the western world, we do not want to put children into such institutions; we want them to be in family-based settings; we want to make sure that they are fostered and that they have the right support. Orphanages exist around the world, but some of them are not orphanages and more than 80% of the children there are not orphans. They have been put into these institutions, which are not registered with the authorities or anything else, simply to raise money.

The Walk Free Foundation estimates that there are 5.4 million children globally living in those institutions—that is horrifying. When it is put to people that 5 million children, over 80% of whom have parents, have been taken from their parents purely for the purpose of raising money, there is utter disbelief. How can this possibly be the situation today? It is estimated that Christian churches in the United States gives \$3.3 billion per year to institutions that are not orphanages. They are simply there to raise money.

Imagine being on a cruise around south-east Asia and one of the excursions is to view an orphanage—this did happen to a friend of mine—and to pay money for the privilege of reading stories to the children. How cruel is that? This is a child who has been put in an institution. Perhaps their families believed that they were put there for a better life—for an education. I do not necessarily blame the families, but these children are there simply to raise money. A busload of tourists—kind western people—turn up, and sit down to read a story to these children and then give money. These poor children are left. They do not have any further contact with these people. Gap-year students can be involved. They may have decided to spend a bit of their gap year working in one of these institutions, which are in South America, Africa, or south-east Asia—across the world. Those young people are doing what they believe is the right thing—voluntourism, I think it is called—but they are being exploited. These children are there simply to raise money.

My amendment would add one further definition into section 3 of the Modern Slavery Act. It would add orphanage trafficking to the definition of modern slavery exploitation. It would just mean that we, in our legislation, would reflect orphanage trafficking within the law. There

is more that we need to do, but this is a simple first step to make sure that it is recognised. That would mean that, first, we would be raising awareness of the matter, but secondly, individuals and organisations that wish to give money to these orphanages would potentially be in breach of the Modern Slavery Act and steps could be taken against them. I would not wish to criminalise anybody who wants to do the right thing for people, but it is important that we pass this measure.

We would also be only the second country in the world to take such action, because the only other country that has legislated on this is Australia. I pay tribute here to Linda Reynolds—I think that she has just stopped being a senator—who took up this issue. She is an incredible woman. She took up the issue and has gone around the world with it. She forced legislative change in Australia and has taken it up with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which, as a result, has issued a lawmakers' guide to stopping orphanage trafficking and passed motions and resolutions to raise awareness. Linda Reynolds is the hero on this issue. She went to one of those orphanages and walked away saying, "This is not right. This does not feel like an authentic place. These children don't seem to be being looked after. This is not something I want to support."

I understand that this new clause will not be selected for a separate decision, but I ask the Minister, when summing up, to reflect on steps that the Government may take and whether they might consider bringing this measure back in the other place. I will introduce private Members' Bills on it and continue trying to amend legislation. I hope that, at some point, the Government will be able to get the collective responsibility agreement they need so that we can reflect this heinous crime in our legislation.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I appreciate being called to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also really appreciate being able to follow in the wake of my two friends—my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) and the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley)—who have been incredible campaigners on these issues. I know from first-hand experience of meeting the victims and survivors they spoke about that there are gaping holes in our legislation. I hope that the House will support their amendments, because that would do something to close them.

I rise to speak first about my new clauses 9, 10 and 18, which seek to better protect child victims of sexual and criminal exploitation and empower our frontline responders to keep them safe. I welcome the Government's introduction of the mandatory duty to report, which was recommendation 13 of the independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation, as it has the potential to strengthen our child protection system. However, following detailed conversations and meetings with Rotherham and Sheffield NHS safeguarding staff, I share their concerns about the finer details of its implementation.

To put it bluntly, the duty will not protect children as intended unless mandated reporters are adequately trained. Recognising, reporting and—crucially—responding to child sexual abuse is far from straightforward, so to prevent overwhelming an already strained system, all those under the duty must be trained to know what to look for and how to report it.

Let me give an example. A nursery nurse might see bruising around the genital areas of a toddler, and with the fear—I put it that way—of her duty on mandatory reporting, she will report it to the hotline or directly to the NHS safeguarding teams, which is absolutely the right thing to do. However, toddlers fall over and they fall in awkward places, so that nursery worker needs to have the skills and experience to be able to know when it is appropriate to report and when it is not appropriate, along with what evidence to gather and what not to. At the moment, I am scared that everything will be reported and that the system, which is there to protect and safeguard those children, will be unable to cope. I hope that a standard training package will be given to all people who fall under the duty.

I will now turn to new clauses 10 and 18, on child criminal exploitation, which I know the safeguarding Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips), is very familiar with, I having campaigned on this with her for many years in previous Parliaments. As Baroness Casey's report states, right now criminally exploited children are at risk of prosecution rather than protection. These new clauses seek to change that. They have the backing of Action for Children, ECPAT UK, Barnardo's and many other children's charities.

In 2024 alone, more than 2,891 children were referred to the national referral mechanism as potential child victims of criminal exploitation, but many more ended up in courtrooms, not safeguarding systems. As my police chief said to me, it is deeply sad that the first time we see these criminally exploited children is when we are looking to criminalise them. We cannot get above this and ahead of it.

Clause 38 rightly creates a new offence of CCE, recognising the severity of that abuse. However, without corresponding changes to the Modern Slavery Act 2015, legal protections remain inconsistent and inadequate. New clause 10 seeks to fix that.

In a similar vein, new clause 18 would insert a definition of "child criminal exploitation" alongside the offence in clause 38. Evidence from the Jay review into criminal exploitation of children demonstrates that the current lack of a definition contributes to significant inconsistencies in practice across the country and persistent failures to identify children as victims. I saw that time and again in Rotherham, with young, exploited girls all too often referred to as "child prostitutes" and not given the support they needed. The shift started only after we got the statutory definition for child sexual exploitation. Clear, consistent legislation empowers professionals to intervene earlier, prevents inappropriate prosecutions and ensures that exploited children receive the safeguarding support that they need.

I turn to my amendment 9, on registered sex offenders, which is supported by 39 MPs from across the parties. It will not be new to many in the House as I have brought it up in the last three Parliaments. Between 2019 and 2022, 11,500 sex offenders were prosecuted for failure to notify changes of information. The same ongoing pattern allows offenders to slip through the cracks, with over 700 going completely missing in those years. I welcome the new measures in the Bill that require some offenders to seek police authorisation before applying to change their name on UK passports and driving licences, which will genuinely make a difference.

However, I remain deeply concerned that many of the new measures lack strength and could lead to confusion. Clause 80 states that sex offenders must give seven days' notice of using a new name but does not define what "using" means. The amendment seeks to provide much-needed clarity. It would require offenders to notify the police of an intention to change their name seven days before doing so by deed poll. That would allow vital time for the authorities to conduct appropriate risk assessments. More than that, I want to draw attention to the fact that the Bill still relies too heavily on a sex offender doing the right thing, which is something they rarely do.

Finally, I will speak to my new clauses 99 and 100, in my capacity as Chair of the International Development Committee. Last week my Committee published its report on international humanitarian law. It is vital that those responsible for attacks on aid workers and unlawful blockages of humanitarian assistance are brought to justice. Throughout the inquiry, it became apparent that the UK needed powers to exercise universal jurisdiction over crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. There must be no safe haven for those who commit such heinous crimes.

My new clauses would allow the relevant authorities to prosecute people suspected of those crimes without any requirement for a connection to the UK. At a time when the legitimacy and impartiality of some international courts is being questioned, the UK must stand firm in support of these important mechanisms for accountability, to prevent impunity for serious violations of international humanitarian law while ensuring that we have the domestic powers needed to hold perpetrators to account, no matter where their crimes are committed.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I rise to speak to new clause 5, which stands in my name and is supported by hon. Friends in different political positions across the House. But, before I do so, I want to congratulate the Government—that is unusual from the Opposition, but I will do so anyway. I think that the Minister will know what I am about to say. The cuckooing amendment, which was moved in the last Parliament—the previous Government and she, in particular, were in discussions on that—has been passported through, as it were, so that cuckooing will be a criminal offence. That will hugely help those who have their houses taken over—the vulnerable and the elderly—and, where crimes are committed from those houses, the police will have a reason to go in without explicit knowledge of the crime being committed other than the cuckooing. To that extent, I thank the Government for making that a law. Hopefully it will go through without too much problem in the other place. I and many others appreciate that enormously.

New clause 5 is consequential to an amendment to an earlier Bill on reckless and dangerous cycling, because there were no offences that were relevant to that and people were being killed and injured as a result of cyclists' bad behaviour on the roads. One person in particular who campaigned for that amendment was Matt Briggs, and he was the reason that I brought that amendment forward. The Government accepted that amendment and it is now bound into legislation. However, there was an issue at the time about the danger of e-bikes. We know from talking to the police that e-bikes

are now becoming responsible for some of the worst crimes on the streets, involving antisocial and threatening behaviour. They are silent and they can creep up on people rather quickly, and a lot of things that were being snatched by people on motorised scooters are now being snatched using e-bikes.

2.30 pm

I shall come back to the question of illegal e-bikes in a second, but the users of legal e-bikes are as much of a problem, because they were not included in any relevant legislation that would have allowed them to be prosecuted by the police for offences such as dangerous or reckless cycling, as would normally happen for bicycle users. E-bikes are a huge and growing problem. In 2022, there were 462 pedestrian casualties in the UK resulting from collisions with pedal cycles, including e-bikes. Recent data indicates that there were 11,266 incidents involving e-bikes and e-scooters in 2023-24, an increase from 10,000 incidents in the previous year. While this rise partly reflects the growing number of riders, it also highlights concerns regarding the reckless behaviour of a number of those users. E-bike riders are approximately 57% more likely to be involved in accidents, compared with traditional cyclists, and e-bike accidents are nearly twice as likely to cause severe injuries, and nearly twice as likely to require surgical intervention compared with conventional bicycle accidents. That is not to mention the illegal e-bikes and the enhanced e-bikes, which the Minister will know are the cause of even more significant problems.

We tabled new clause 5 because it was our impression that the original cycling amendment that is now law did not deal properly with e-bikes. However, after a long debate with the Department for Transport and a heavy look through some of the legislation that already existed, I have finally agreed that the definition under the cycling element of the original amendment which was accepted by the Government incorporates e-bikes.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): I have a similar concern about mobility scooters. Obviously, they are a fabulous tool, enabling so many in our constituencies to get out and about, but the number of serious injuries caused by mobility scooters has gone up by nearly 60% in the last 10 years, and the number of fatalities has doubled. These heavy class 3 mobility scooters, which can go up to 8 mph and travel on the roads, are not subject to insurance rules and cannot be penalised under dangerous driving regulations. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is something the Government also need to consider very carefully? I would really love the Minister to look at whether there is any legislation that would be implementable in cases such as these.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is right, and I hope the Government will respond to that. However, she will forgive me if I focus on the essence of new clause 5, which is e-bikes.

The definition of a legal e-bike is one that uses pedals and also uses electricity to assist the cyclist. All the other ones are illegal. This brings me to the problem that, if this measure is going to go through into law, as it will, will the Government press the police to start arresting and prosecuting not only the people who deliberately use e-bikes for nefarious purposes but more

[*Sir Iain Duncan Smith*]

importantly, those who just cycle dangerously on footpaths? E-bikes are now more dangerous than bicycles in the sense that they are e-bicycles and therefore get up to higher speeds. Even though the speeds are supposed to be governed, they are still higher than most cyclists will get up to in the normal act of pedalling their way to work.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): My right hon. Friend and I had a discussion about this earlier. On the subject of illegal e-bikes, does he agree that we need to clamp down on the illegal conversion kits that are readily accessible online which allow an ordinary bicycle to be converted to do anything up to 30 or 40 mph? I tabled a written question about that, and the Government said that it was for the Office for Product Safety and Standards and local authority trading standards to enforce that, but could the Government do more to crack down on it?

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: It is funny that my hon. Friend raises that point, because I was just about to get on to it. I am glad he has pinched my speech, but we are on the same side, so let me thank him for getting ahead of me.

I reinforce that point: the Government now need to decide whether to do something about that issue in the other place. All non-bicycle electricity-supported cycles are legal, but all the others are either illegal or have to be used on the road and therefore have to qualify for road use, which means in many cases taking instruction and passing a test, or treating the e-bike like a car or a motorcycle. The problem is that most people do not know that. They are either ignorant of it or they deliberately do not care, and they can buy these illegal bikes in lots of legal shops in the UK. It seems bizarre that we are allowing people to buy these bikes—many are not bikes; they could be boards or all sorts of contraptions—and they then think they are able to use them. Most people do not check up on the highway code or the law; they just get on and use them. They are deeply dangerous to themselves, but also to other road users. I would press the Government to look at this again in the other place—it is too late to do it here—to see whether there is some way in which selling these things to people without proper licences could be made illegal.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I have listened to the right hon. Gentleman's speech with genuine interest. This is not a party political point at all. Is there perhaps work that could be done on a public information campaign to make people aware of these bikes? As he has just said, many people do not realise that they are illegal. If they can buy them in legal shops, they do not realise that they are doing anything wrong in the first place. Does he agree that a public campaign like that would be welcome?

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I am all in favour of public campaigns and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it would be a very good idea for people to know that what they were buying was illegal. I suspect many of them already do so. That notwithstanding, if such a campaign could be backed up by a penalty for selling illegal bikes in shops, that would be a far better way of dealing with it. Right now, lots of kids do not know that the bikes

are illegal, and they go and take these things and they can pay for them, and that is where the danger comes from. We are shutting the door too late. These kids have gone on to the roads, they have created an accident and they have killed themselves. That is too late for us. What we need to do is get ahead of this and try to figure it out completely.

The final bit of this issue is the fact that people can change the monitors inside the boxes, even on the legal bikes, and lots of them do so. We see them going down the road at 30 mph, which is incredibly dangerous. I am a motorcyclist, I have to say, but Members should not go looking for the leather jacket; I left it at home.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): Oh no!

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: Don't get excited—it's not that great!

Motorcyclists have to be tested even more than car drivers. There are balancing tests and they have to know everything like that. This is absolutely critical, because it is a slightly more dangerous mode of transport—more exciting, yes, but more dangerous. Someone cannot buy a motorcycle in a shop and take it away unless they are able to show their licence and that they are qualified to ride that bike, and that really requires instruction, but people can buy e-bikes—these electric vehicles—without any sort of licence. It seems bizarre that that should be allowed. Even though we want people not to use petrol, diesel and all the rest of it because of the environment, this goes beyond that.

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): Is the right hon. Member aware of Simon Cowell's campaign? He purchased an electric bike, flipped over backwards and almost broke his back. That is definitely a clear indication of how dangerous these bikes can be.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: These bikes often accelerate fast, and only someone who is used to riding something that can move quickly on two wheels can do that. If not, they will go off the back. In a car, they would be restrained by the seat, but that is not the case on a bike or motorcycle. Knowing that does take some instruction—being ready, leaning into it and all the rest of it. My main point is that that is a good illustration of how we are being a bit too casual about these modes of transport, and too many young kids do not understand that they should have some training. For their sake, we should do more on this issue.

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Con): My right hon. Friend has been generous with taking interventions. I support his amendment and note that his amendment helpfully includes e-scooters, because there is a real problem. As e-scooters do not meet the criteria in the Highways Act 1980, they are effectively banned. When I speak to the hard-working police in Waterlooville, they say that e-scooters are banned in public areas. We have a real problem with illegal usage in public areas and in the shopping centre. However, people do not know that, and we need the law to be more proactive, deliberate and expressive, and that is why an amendment like this is right. Is there anything he would like to add on the issue of e-scooters?

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I bow before my right hon. Friend's greater knowledge in these matters, having headed up the Department. I simply say that for this

particular purpose, I agree with her. I am urging the Government to take this matter away and look at it in the other place. Although I will not press my amendment, because legal bikes are incorporated in the earlier cycling amendment that I put forward and the Government accepted, we need more work on illegal bikes and e-scooters.

My worry, as I have said again and again, is that people can buy these things without any qualification whatsoever, whereas if I as a motorcyclist buy a bike, I have to be able to demonstrate that I am qualified to ride it away from the shop. People are not required to do so with e-bikes and e-scooters, so there is a peculiarity. Everywhere else in our legislation, we follow through. This one has dropped through the grid, and I therefore urge the Minister and the Department to look closely at the matter and see whether we can define that better in the other place and ensure that shops are unable to sell those bikes. I will not press this new clause because I think we are at the right place so far with the Government.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): I will speak to new clauses 23, 24 and 25 in my name. New clauses 23 and 24 propose restrictions on the delivery and display of pointed knives to avoid death and serious injury from knife attacks. New clause 25 repeals certain unnecessary and unlawful punitive measures directed against Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities.

I am grateful for the interest the Minister has shown in these matters and for meeting me to discuss them. I do not intend to press them to a vote, but I look forward to her response as to how they may be progressed. I support many other amendments and new clauses to the Bill. I have signed new clause 13 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson) and new clause 155 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Phil Brickell) on setting up an economic crime fighting fund. I of course congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) on her new clause 1 which was debated and passed yesterday.

On Second Reading, I expressed a general concern that the necessary and complex legislation affecting the criminal justice system set out in the Bill and in other Bills and reports in this Session would place an even greater strain on an already creaking system. I will not repeat what I said then, but I hope and trust that Ministers from the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice are working together to ensure that resources are in place to deal with the unintended consequences when supply in one part of the criminal justice system causes demand in another. More police numbers mean more arrests, prosecutions, convictions and incarcerations, but early release or community alternatives to custody can create more work for probation and for the police.

New clauses 23 and 24 would change the selling practices of manufacturers and retailers in the following ways. First, they would prevent the delivery of lethal pointed knives to domestic premises, remote lockers and collection points. Nothing in them would prevent the delivery of pointed knives to chefs, butchers, fishmongers or any other commercial enterprise that uses pointed knives in the course of business. Secondly, they would prevent the display of pointed knives in shops, but would allow safer, rounded knives to be openly displayed in shops, and delivered by courier or mail with minimal restrictions.

2.45 pm

There are three key drivers of the proposals. Home Office statistics show that two people are killed by kitchen knives every week. They also show that in homicide cases in which a pointed weapon was used, over half of those weapons were kitchen knives. Research from De Montfort University shows that it is the points of knives that kill. Safer, rounded knives may injure, but they do not penetrate clothing, let alone arteries or vital organs.

We are approaching the one-year anniversary of the Southport killings. The Dunblane killings led to changes in the law on the sale of guns. Southport should be the Dunblane moment for knives. I welcome Ronan's law and the Government's amendment to the Bill to impose enhanced age verification, but those amendments do not go far enough; more could and should be done.

No reputable manufacturer or retailer will be prosecuted if these new clauses become law. Indeed, they would make it easier for reputable manufacturers and retailers to market and sell rounded kitchen knives. Any homeowner would still be able to purchase a pointed kitchen knife by mail order. They would simply have to collect their purchase in store, where more effective face-to-face age verification can take place. Knife harm is a complex issue. There is no single, simple solution, but these new clauses would help reduce the harm caused by knives, whether by criminal activity, accident or self-harm.

Dawn Butler: I support my hon. Friend's new clauses. In fact, when I was Minister for Young Citizens and Youth Engagement, we posed this question of whether there should be rounded knives. I am glad to see that the debate has moved on, because at that point, people found the idea that this would help solve the knife crime problem almost comical, so I thank him for pursuing this issue.

Andy Slaughter: When it was people like me proposing it, it was regarded as comical, but now Idris Elba is in favour of it, as well as experts across the field. I pay tribute to not just those celebrities, but victims and experts, particularly those on the Safer Knives group, of which I am member. It looks at the legal, medical and psychological effects of knife crime, and suggests practical ways of not eliminating but reducing the number of deaths and serious injuries.

New clause 25 seeks to repeal draconian police powers relating to unauthorised encampments. Those powers were introduced to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which became law under the previous Government. These punitive and hostile powers led to the victimisation of Romani, Gypsy and Irish Travellers, who are among the most marginalised groups in UK society.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I am clear that Traveller and minority groups absolutely do have rights, but they also have responsibilities. When this law was put in place, there was good reason for it: to redress some of the imbalance. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that repealing this law would leave our communities unprotected against unauthorised Traveller encampments? In areas like mine, the police became involved in a game of cat and mouse. Excrement, litter and worse was left in our communities. Would not a repeal leave the police with no powers to tackle the issue?

Andy Slaughter: I am afraid that is the sort of nonsense that I hear a lot of the time. Let me read to the right hon. Lady some of the measures that were in force before the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act was passed: temporary stop notices, injunctions to protect land from unauthorised encampments, licensing of caravan sites, possession orders, interim possession orders, local byelaws, the local authority power to direct unauthorised campers to leave land, addressing obstructions to the public highway, planning contravention notices, enforcement notices and retrospective planning, stop notices, breach of condition notices, powers of entry on to land, power of the police to direct unauthorised campers to leave land, and police powers to direct trespassers to an alternative site. That was the position before that Act came into effect. There were ample powers to deal with these matters.

Wendy Morton *rose*—

Andy Slaughter: No, I will not give way again. Frankly, I found the right hon. Lady's last intervention a bit beyond the pale, so I am not giving her another opportunity. I am afraid that the sort of information she peddles leads to the situation that we are in. The constant threat of criminalisation of nomadic lifestyles has a devastating impact on families. That is why human rights campaigners and international bodies, including the Council of Europe and the United Nations, have raised concerns about the legality of the provisions that I am addressing.

Charlie Dewhirst (Bridlington and The Wolds) (Con): The hon. Member has just painted a complex legislative picture. Does he not agree that there was a need for the 2022 legislation, because all the measures that he has just read out simply were not working?

Andy Slaughter: The powers are there, but we must look at their implementation. I am always sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman, because he was such a good opponent for me at two elections, and I take to heart the measured way in which he puts his point, but to counter what he says, in May 2024, following a judicial review of part 4 of the 2022 Act brought by Wendy Smith against the Home Office, the High Court issued a declaration of incompatibility with the Human Rights Act 1998. The Court found that certain provisions on the extension of a ban on returning to a particular area from three months to 12 months constituted unjustified discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers. Despite that, the powers remain in force, and although the declaration of incompatibility with our laws relates only to the provisions I just mentioned, I put it to the Minister that all of part 4 could be scrapped without any detriment to the enforcement of previous laws.

Police and local authorities already have a whole spectrum of other powers, as I have set out, which they can and do use against encampments. If they are failing to use those, it is for them to say why. I also know that the police did not seek those powers; they were simply imposed on them. The Crime and Policing Bill presents the perfect opportunity for the Government to put this right by repealing part 4 of the 2022 Act, which, let us remember, allows police to ban Gypsies and Travellers from an area, to arrest and fine them, and even to seize their home.

I hope to receive positive news today, but if my right hon. Friend the Minister wishes to discuss these matters further, I would be happy to engage in that discussion—I have great support from Friends, Families and Travellers, and other excellent groups representing the Roma Gypsy and Traveller communities—to see how the law can be made fair to nomadic and non-nomadic communities. That is what is being asked for here. Frankly, at the moment the law does not create a balance; it creates a bias one way.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (North Cotswolds) (Con): I rise to speak in support of new clause 41, which is in my name, and in the names of others. It is a very simple amendment that would require His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services to include firearms licensing in their PEEL—police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy—obligations. I declare an interest as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on shooting and conservation, and as a firearms owner.

I first thank the Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention for attending our most recent meeting of the APPG to answer a range of questions from our members; we were very grateful for her time. I share her commitment to protecting public safety through sensible firearms law and an effective and efficient firearms licensing system. It is not in the interests of the public or the shooting community for the wrong people to have guns in their possession. That is why I am proposing the new clause.

Members will be aware that the firearms licensing system in the UK is a postcode lottery. With 43 separate licensing authorities, inconsistency in the application of the law, guidance and services is endemic across the system. A quarter of police forces are taking a year or more to process applications for certificates, with delays across the system. Gloucestershire constabulary—the force that I know best—recently put out a statement saying that it was not accepting any new firearm licence applications for two years, due to a lack of trained firearms officers. I intervened, and the police acted quickly to reverse the decision, setting up a gold command, and I now receive regular updates from the team. However, that wait is not good enough, especially when the Government are imposing a 133% hike in fees.

An inefficient and ineffective licensing department endangers the public. The inquest on the tragic murders in Keyham, Plymouth, revealed that the Devon and Cornwall police firearms licensing department, which had issued a certificate to the murderer, removed his firearm after an assault but, unbelievably, gave it back to him once he had done an anger management course. The department was described as a “chaotic shambles” that could not operate its own risk matrix. It identified the murderer as low-risk, when in reality he was high-risk and should never have received a certificate.

I appreciate that the Minister has given assurances that data on licensing department waiting times, for both renewals and new applications, are now being made available to the public. However, that does not go far enough to ensure that police forces take their inefficiencies seriously and put an action plan in place to improve departments across both England and Wales.

PEEL inspections take place every year or so for every police force in England and Wales. They include themes such as treating the public fairly, responding to

the public, and resources and value for money. Firearms licensing comes under all three categories, yet there is no mention of it in any previously published PEEL inspection. In addition, although the Minister has reassured us that all funds received from the full cost recovery of firearms licensing will be ringfenced for improving firearms licensing departments, that is not guaranteed. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation, which acts as my secretariat on the APPG, wrote to all forces when the increase in firearms licensing fees was imposed, seeking assurances that all funds would go to firearms licensing. To date, only a third of constabularies have given that assurance.

Including firearms licensing in PEEL inspections is a powerful way to ensure that police forces are publicly accountable, funded properly and run efficiently for the benefit of public safety. New clause 41 is a sensible and proportionate probing amendment that I hope the Minister might feel able to accept, if it were to be tabled in the other place.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of new clause 107, which stands in my name, and to lend my support to other vital amendments, particularly those relating to protest rights, joint enterprise, facial recognition and predictive policing technologies.

New clause 107 would require the Home Secretary to publish a comprehensive equality impact assessment within 12 months of the Bill becoming law. I acknowledge the initial equality impact assessments, but I must stress that they are no substitute for a thorough and ongoing review of how the powers will be used and who they will affect. This Bill touches every part of our criminal justice system, from police powers and sentencing to surveillance. If we know anything from decades of experience, it is that such legislation rarely lands equally. We already know, for example, that black men are disproportionately stopped and searched; that Muslim communities are targeted by counter-terrorism laws; and that ethnic minority communities are more likely to face over-policing, under-protection and systemic mistrust.

We must also talk frankly about how the system fails women, particularly in the context of violence against women and girls.

While the state has found countless new ways to expand police powers and increase maximum sentences, we are yet to find the will to use those powers to properly protect women: not when women who report domestic abuse and sexual violence are ignored; not when black, minoritised and working-class women who report violence are dismissed; and not when rape is effectively decriminalised, with cases rarely making it to court. Let us not forget those cases that have shocked the nation, the reports that have exposed misogyny, racism and abuse within police ranks, and the institutional discrimination and failures that some forces still fail to admit exists.

3 pm

We have a lot of work to do to rebuild trust between police and communities, and that is why new clause 107 matters so much. If we are to hand over even more power to the police and the state, we also need to demand more scrutiny, accountability and transparency. We have to ask: what does this mean for women, survivors

and marginalised communities? A full post-legislative equality impact assessment will help to ensure that this House understands the real-world effects of the laws it passes, particularly on women, girls and those whose experiences are shaped by intersecting inequalities of race, class, immigration status and more.

I voice my continued support for amendments relating to joint enterprise, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson). Too many young people, disproportionately young black men, have been convicted under joint enterprise simply for being present; not for pulling a trigger, wielding a knife or planning a crime, but for being in the wrong place, with the wrong people, at the wrong time. Sometimes that place just happens to be where they live. That doctrine relies on racist assumptions about gang affiliation and collective guilt, and despite repeated warnings from campaigners, academics and even senior judges, nothing has changed. That is why these amendments are so important to review, to correct and to prevent any further injustices.

I reaffirm my support for new clause 50, which protects the fundamental right to protest. On the potential infringements of protest overall in the Bill, let me say that protest is not a nuisance but a vital part of democracy. Whether it is the suffragettes demanding the vote, trade unionists fighting for fair pay or Black Lives Matter campaigners calling for racial justice, every major advance in civil rights has come through protest.

I stand here as a black woman from a working-class background because of the organising, resistance and, yes, protest of those who came before me. Any legislation that seeks to silence dissent or to criminalise those who dare to challenge power must be wrong. If the history of protest has taught us anything, it is that the struggles of today are a mark of progress tomorrow. We must not continue the legacy of the previous Government, which chipped away at civil liberties under the guise of public order. Our job as lawmakers is to protect, not repress, the right to be heard.

Finally, I reiterate my concern about the provisions in the Bill relating to facial recognition, artificial intelligence and predictive policing, addressed in new clauses in the names of the hon. Members for Leicester South (Shokat Adam) and for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry). These technologies are not neutral: they are trained on biased data and deployed in biased ways that pose a very real threat to civil liberties and racial justice. Facial recognition has been shown time and again to be less accurate in identifying black and brown faces. Predictive policing draws on historically racist patterns of enforcement, and uses that data to justify further surveillance in the same communities. This is automated injustice and if we pass the Bill without proper guardrails, we will be responsible for unleashing technologies that entrench discrimination in ways that we do not yet fully understand and that those affected will feel for years to come.

The role of this House is not just to pass laws but to ensure that those laws are just, their impacts are fair and they reflect the values of equality and accountability that we all claim to stand for. That means demanding better protections for women and girls, particularly in the face of state and police failure; defending our right to protest; ending legal doctrines, such as joint enterprise, which sweep up the innocent with the guilty; and putting stricter safeguards around surveillance technologies, which

are already disproportionately harming minoritised communities. That would also mean putting in place something like new clause 107 to ensure that we properly assess and monitor the real effects on the most marginalised in our community of the powers that we grant in this House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I apply an immediate five-minute time limit.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): I rise to speak in favour of new clause 130 to strengthen the law on tool theft.

In early May this year, I joined police officers from Sidcup and Havering in a raid to uncover stolen tools at a boot sale in east London. Unlicensed boot sales are notorious for selling stolen goods. However, I was still astounded by what officers found. As they arrived in police vans and unmarked cars, there was a flurry of action among some traders: stolen goods were hidden, a van tried to flee and the keys to vehicles crowded with tools were suddenly lost. But the police had struck quickly and in numbers. Stolen tools were uncovered across traders' stalls, six arrests were made and, eventually, officers struck the mother lode—a van overflowing with stolen tools.

The raid took officers to a second site, where even more stolen tools were uncovered. Over 1,650 stolen tools were found, worth around half a million pounds, on just one day. Officers were even able to return some marked tools to their owners. The raid shows why tradespeople must mark their tools properly. If they are marked with the likes of DNA tagging, the police can easily prove they are stolen and lock up the thieves responsible. They can also return the stolen tools to the hard-working tradespeople across the country.

But marking tools alone will not stop tool theft. Vans are being broken into in broad daylight and tools sold openly across the country. It is a disgrace. The law must change to punish the thieves responsible and crack down on the boot sales driving the crime wave. That is why I encourage all Members to support new clause 130, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton West (Matt Vickers). First, it would increase fines to better match the severity of the crime, reflecting the cost of replacing tools and repairing damage to vans and of lost work.

Wendy Morton: Does my hon. Friend agree that accepting the amendment is one way in which the Government could reach out to businesses and traders and show that they are on the side of local businesses and the people who get up every morning and go out to work—in effect, “white van man”—for whom tools are key to being able to do the job, as are the farm implements that are also subject to theft?

Mr French: I thank my right hon. Friend for her vital contribution. We must back the makers, not the law breakers, whether they are “white van men” or rural farmers who are having their tools stolen. The impact on their ability to go to work is significant, but it also has an impact on their families because of their ability to buy food and other goods. We must back the makers and not the law breakers.

Secondly, the Bill would impose tougher sentences on thieves by recognising the seriousness of the crime. Finally, it would require councils to create an enforcement plan to stop the sale of stolen tools at boot sales. These are all necessary changes to help stop tool theft across the country.

Tradespeople and industry cannot afford parliamentary dither and delay. As campaigners, tradespeople, policing experts and industry have told us, action is needed now. Every 12 minutes, a van is broken into and tools are stolen, costing tradespeople thousands of pounds, hurting their mental health and stopping them from earning a living.

Lincoln Jopp (Spelthorne) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just about thefts from vans? This is about people's whole livelihood and ability to work. Businesses can be struck down. Does he agree that this is therefore worthy of its own offence?

Mr French: I agree with my hon. Friend's vital contribution. I will come on to a couple of the larger impacts.

We often think about small businesses, but we have found from our roundtable that very large companies also suffer a lot of damage. For example, on average Openreach vans are hit three times a day, which delays the fibre rollout in rural communities. Over £2 million of surveying equipment was stolen from Balfour Beatty's vans in just three months, impacting HS2, which we have discussed today. If any MPs are unsure about the need to act now, they need to speak to Shoaib Awan, Frankie Williams, Sergeant Dave Catlow, PC Dan Austin and the teams at SelectaDNA, Checkatrade and On The Tools, among many others who have worked tirelessly on this issue. I thank them all, especially the Sidcup police team who are leading a lot of that hard work.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way; he is making a very eloquent speech. Will he acknowledge Alex Insley, from my constituency, who runs a podcast for tradespeople and who brought this issue to my attention?

Mr French: I applaud all the efforts by podcasters and tradespeople who are going online and sharing their experiences. Any hon. Member can look up the likes of Stolen Tools UK or the Gas Expert on Instagram and they will see cases, every single day, of people having their tools stolen and the damage that is doing to their financial and mental health. The impact of this on the wider economy is now so severe that we must act: Parliament must act across party to change the law—today, I hope.

I also thank the police and crime commissioners across the country who are getting stuck into the problem. I have highlighted examples from the Met of Sidcup and Havering police forces in particular, but I know that the PCCs in Kent and Sussex are also doing great work tackling this issue.

As I have highlighted, this is not a party-political issue and I appreciate the work of the hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Amanda Martin) in shining a spotlight on it. Today we can work cross-party and get the law changed now, and I hope, in all sincerity, that all MPs get behind this amendment and that the Government can help us change the law today, get on the side of the makers and tackle the lawbreakers.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of new clause 13 in my name and new clause 50 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel).

New clause 13 proposes to change the law on joint enterprise. For those who do not know, this is a centuries-old doctrine that allows multiple people to be convicted of a crime, usually murder or manslaughter, even if only one person committed the fatal act. Evidence demonstrates it leads to unjust convictions, disproportionately impacting young black and working-class people, with young black men 16 times more likely to be convicted under joint enterprise than their white counterparts. I thank all who supported my private Member's Bill that had its Second Reading in February 2024 and for their continued support for the campaign, particularly Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association.

As a result of a judicial review brought by Liberty and JENGBA, the Crown Prosecution Service conducted a pilot survey of joint enterprise cases, resulting in access to accurate data and highlighting the racial disparities that exist. Case law on joint enterprise was reversed by a Supreme Court ruling in 2016. The *Jogee* case identified how the law had taken "a wrong turn" for 30 years. The Law Commission is now undertaking a review of homicide and the sentencing framework for murder. It will examine the law on joint enterprise in light of the Supreme Court ruling on *Jogee*, with campaigners anticipating clear solutions on the disparities and inequality.

While I understand the Government have some reservations about my amendment, it is clear that there is recognition across the House that joint enterprise needs to be fixed. The prosecution of joint enterprise cases is flawed and racialised. The 2016 Supreme Court ruling did not resolve the key problems with the law. Speculative prosecution theories are accepted in place of strong evidence. This allows and encourages racist stereotyping, using gang narratives to imply collective intent, and using a person's taste in music as evidence of being in a gang, with police being called as expert witnesses on drill music, which is a conflict of interest.

Art not Evidence is making significant inroads in this space, proposing a criminal evidence (creative and artistic expression) Bill to limit the admissibility of evidence of a person's creative and artistic expression in criminal proceedings and for connected purposes. The Westminster Commission on Joint Enterprise is gathering evidence and will produce a report for the Government in 2026.

Reform of joint enterprise is long overdue. It has gone as far as it can in the courts, and it is now for Parliament to act; that is what the former Director of Public Prosecutions who is now the Prime Minister has said.

New clause 50 would enshrine the right to protest in law. The purpose of this amendment is to keep public authority powers proportionate and to uphold the right of our society to protest peacefully as a fundamental pillar of free and equal democracy. The right to protest and the freedom to express dissent goes back centuries and is championed across the political spectrum. From the peasants revolt to the suffragettes, we celebrate the great British tradition of direct action. So many of our freedoms have been won this way, including workers' rights. Most recently, we have seen the farmers protesting outside Parliament, the mass trespass organised by the Ramblers' Association in defence of our right to roam,

striking workers, anti-war protesters and beyond. Millions of people have marched peacefully against the genocide in Gaza. Thousands of disabled people have protested against proposed welfare and disabled benefit changes. We have seen protesters outside Parliament against the assisted dying Bill and yesterday pro-life protesters gathered outside this place.

The ability to protest and freedom of expression and assembly are protected by articles 10 and 11 of the European convention on human rights and are enshrined in UK law. The planned demonstration outside the BBC headquarters in January demanding impartial coverage of Israel's war in Gaza was banned by the Met police on the basis that the headquarters are in close proximity to a synagogue. This was after weeks of meetings and agreement of the route with the Met police. This is a serious infringement of our right to protest. If we cannot protest outside the headquarters of our public broadcaster, what does that say about our democracy? This should be of concern for all who believe in democracy and free society. The Government have a chance now to change course and roll back on these clampdowns for our rights and freedoms, for our democracy.

3.15 pm

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): I rise to speak in support of new clause 43 in my name and in the name of the Chair of the Select Committee on Home Affairs the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley) and of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy), both of whom I thank for their support. It is also co-signed by 100 Members from across the House representing our entire political spectrum from almost every party, including many Members of the Labour party.

New clause 43 seeks to do something very simple: to commence the Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023, which has already received Royal Assent. This Act simply criminalises the harassment of people in public based on their sex, but this is a crime that overwhelmingly affects women so this really is about the criminalisation of harassment of women in public.

The Act started life as a private Member's Bill laid by my constituency predecessor, Greg Clark. He was approached by a sixth-former in our constituency who said that she had been harassed while coming home from school. One third of schoolgirls in the United Kingdom say they have been harassed in their school uniforms. We should be ashamed of that statistic, and Greg was ashamed and he took action.

The 2023 Act, as passed, creates a specific offence of harassment on account of someone's sex. Like the new clause I rise to speak in support of, it received cross-party support, including, it must be said, from the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips), who is now the Minister for safeguarding and violence against women and girls.

The Act criminalises harassing, following and shouting degrading comments and making obscene gestures at women and girls in public with the deliberate intention of causing them harm or distress, and it carries a maximum sentence of two years. So I am quite disappointed and confused by the interactions that I have had with

[Mike Martin]

the Government on this issue. Every time I have pressed them for an update on commencement, I have not really received a substantive answer. For example, eight months ago I asked a question in this House and received a letter from the Government telling me that the Home Office is making all the necessary arrangements and that I would be contacted when a commencement date is confirmed. As a new MP, I thought this was quite promising. Five months ago, I tabled a written question and the Government responded saying that they would publish next steps at the earliest opportunity. Then two weeks ago I received a reply from the Government to a further communication stating that an update on commencement would be provided in due course. Each communication I receive from the Government is a little vaguer, a little bit less definitive about commencement.

Yesterday, at her instigation, I met with the Minister for VAWG and I thought, “Fantastic, finally we will get some answers.” But there was nothing, I am afraid—there was nada, zip. I gently ask the Minister present now—not the Minister for VAWG—what is the point in arranging a meeting if the Government are not going to say anything new to what they have previously said?

Lincoln Jopp: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, a fellow member of the Select Committee on Defence, for giving way, and I am proud to put my name to new clause 43 in his name. I also pay tribute to him for taking forward Greg Clark’s previous work in a very cross-party way for the benefit of the community. Does he share my frustration and slight bewilderment at the way in which the Government appear to be blocking commencement?

Mike Martin: In the Government’s defence, I do not think that this is a difference in policy; it is a difference in timing, but the timing seems to be very elastic. We seek a definitive time when the Act will be commenced—perhaps the Minister can respond at the Dispatch Box.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): As somebody who was incredibly proud to work with the hon. Gentleman’s predecessor on this legislation, having worked for many, many years to recognise misogyny in our hate crime framework, let me say that it will be two years in September since this House agreed to this legislation on a cross-party basis. It will be two years in September of the work being done, in theory, to be able to commence the legislation. Many of us on the Government Benches are proud of our commitment to recognising misogyny in hate crime, so will the hon. Gentleman join me in saying that we really want to understand what the barriers might be to getting on with the job that we know across this House will keep women and girls safer on our streets?

Mike Martin: I can actually give the hon. Lady a very specific time: it is 21 months to the day since this Act received Royal Assent. If the Minister would be so gracious, we might have from her either a time for commencement or, as the hon. Member for Walthamstow says, a specific problem that is stopping the Act being commenced, rather than some of the more general responses we have had to date.

I am doubly disappointed that although this Act was passed in a previous Parliament—expressing the unanimous will of Parliament, as it passed without a Division—it is entirely commensurate with the Labour Government’s policy to halve violence against women and girls. Harassment and violence are on a continuum and a spectrum. One of the things we are trying to do is to change the culture of men in how they act towards women; this Act is a part of that and really does contribute to the Labour Government’s priorities and manifesto. Indeed, the Minister for VAWG sat on the Public Bill Committee for the Act in 2023 and said that the Labour party would work with the then Conservative Government to ensure that the Bill passed without a Division, and so it did.

The Government have signalled that they will vote against new clause 43, which has been selected for a vote tonight. When the new clause has cross-party support and the original Act had unanimous cross-party support, why will the Government vote against the new clause? It seems to me that they are voting against their own manifesto and their own commitments while in opposition. That is difficult to understand, because I think we all want the same thing.

I will conclude. Implementing the Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act is an important step in helping the Labour Government to achieve their own manifesto commitments. Let this not be another speech without action. I urge hon. and right hon. Members to vote for new clause 43.

Dawn Butler: I rise to speak to new clause 47 in my name. This is a very simple new clause, in a way, about how we stop mobile phones that have been stolen from being reconnected to the cloud and sold on. If we can break that link, we can stop the proliferation of mobile phone theft, which has increased by 150%.

Some 200 mobile phones are snatched every single day, and there has been a marked increase in Westminster. I know that a number of MPs have had their mobile phones stolen—some of them are sat not too far away from me. The amount of money in this crime is incredible. I do not believe phone manufacturers are that keen to stop this crime, because I feel it is part of their business model: when somebody has their mobile phone stolen, they go and buy another mobile phone.

New clause 47 says that once somebody’s phone has been stolen and they report it to the police, the police must report it to Apple, Google, Samsung or whoever, which then stops that phone from being reconnected to the cloud. In effect, that phone would become inactive. If the manufacturer failed to do that within 48 hours, it would be fined £10,000. We need to ensure that the manufacturers take this issue seriously, because they are not. Here is the simple thing: if we want to stop mobile phones being stolen to order, we need to ensure that the manufacturers take the issue seriously. We need to ensure that IMEI numbers are easily accessible, and we need to ensure that thieves cannot reconnect the mobile phones.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: I rise to speak to new clause 121, which is tabled in my name and supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Stamford (Alicia Kearns) and, I am very pleased to say, by Members from both sides of this Chamber. It would extend the definition of extreme pornography to include depictions of non-fatal strangulation, known as NFS.

NFS was made a criminal offence in 2021 under the last Government, not because we think the Government should necessarily stick their nose into what people want to get up to in the bedroom, but because abusers use non-fatal strangulation without consent, as it leaves little visible injury and makes it hard to prosecute under domestic abuse cases. When a woman dies from strangulation, it is becoming increasingly common to use the defence that it was a sex game gone wrong.

Non-fatal strangulation has a life out there in the world of online porn. As we know, the UK is a large porn consumer. In any given month, more than 10 million adults in the UK will access online porn, and the vast majority of them will be chaps. That is up to them—we do not judge—but we know from research that online porn is so widespread that one in 10 children have seen it by the age of nine. Unfortunately, it is the guide that many young people use to learn about sex.

That is why I am extremely worried that non-fatal strangulation has been found to be rife on porn sites. Evidence has shown that it is directly influencing the sexual behaviour of young men, who are non-consensually strangling young women during consensual sex. Recent polling has suggested that 17% of 16 to 34-year-olds have been strangled without giving consent during consensual sex.

We are not being prudes in calling for this misogynistic act to be banned in online porn. Health experts warn that there is no way to strangle someone without risk, given that blood and airflow may both be restricted. A person can become unconscious within 10 seconds of being choked, and within 17 seconds they can have a seizure due to lack of oxygen. Death can occur within 150 seconds of being rendered unconscious.

Almost 20% of the women killed in the UK since 2014 were strangled by an intimate partner. Perpetrators who choke their partners are seven times more likely to kill them. I am sure the Minister will agree that it is alarming to hear reports of young men and boys seeking advice on how they can safely strangle their partner in bed and that girls are expected to accept that kind of behaviour. There was even a report last year, which the Minister may have heard about, of draft personal, social, health and economic education guidance from a Welsh local authority including safe choking during sex for a child sex education class. We need to send a signal that strangling your partner in bed is not safe—it can be a precursor to coercive, abusive behaviour. I know that the Government also want to send that signal, because in February they said, in their response to an independent review commissioned by the previous Government:

“The government will take urgent action to ensure pornography platforms, law enforcement and prosecutors are taking all necessary steps to tackle this increasingly prevalent harm.”

I therefore urge the Minister to support my new clause 121, which sets out one of the necessary steps referred to in the Government's response. We need to back this amendment, ban this harmful practice, and send out a very strong message that depictions of non-fatal strangulation in porn normalise something that is not normal and is not safe.

Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): I rise to speak to new clause 155, which stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Phil

Brickell) and is supported by the all-party parliamentary group on anti-corruption and responsible tax. I welcome the Bill for its clear and ambitious strategy to tackle antisocial behaviour and crime, but if we want truly safer streets, we must also step up our efforts to tackle financial and economic crime. That is the aim of our amendment, which is supported by at least 30 Members from across the House.

3.30 pm

Economic crime is now the most commonly experienced crime in the UK, accounting for more than 40% of all reported incidents, yet we invest just 0.05% of GDP in enforcement. That is not sustainable and these crimes are not victimless—they erode public trust, exploit our financial institutions, and hollow out high streets and communities.

In my constituency of Kensington and Bayswater, from Earl's Court Road to Queensway, Notting Hill Gate and Portobello Road, residents and small business owners are fed up with the proliferation of suspicious, cash-intensive businesses such as candy stores, low-grade souvenir shops, Harry Potter shops and barbershops. These businesses are more than just an eyesore; I hear persistent concerns about VAT evasion, rates avoidance, and even troubling links to serious organised crime and money laundering.

For those reasons, I was very encouraged by Operation Machinize, the National Crime Agency-led crackdown on barbershops suspected of laundering criminal funds earlier this year. I take this opportunity to put on record my thanks to the leadership of the NCA and the Serious Fraud Office, and to their frontline staff; they have engaged closely with the APPG on anti-corruption and responsible tax, which I chair. Those organisations are doing excellent work, but they cannot tackle this problem alone. We need proper cross-Government co-ordination and resources for enforcement.

New clause 155 would require the Government to assess the options for creating an economic crime fighting fund. It would be a pooled fund financed by a share of the assets already recovered through enforcement—confiscations, fines and deferred prosecution agreements. It would not be new money; that money is recovered by our enforcement agencies, but currently it is returned to the Treasury and often left unspent due to outdated annularity rules. In 2022, for instance, the NCA had to return £15 million of recovered criminal assets because it could not spend the money fast enough. That is inefficient and perverse. Such a fund would create a virtuous cycle, with more enforcement, more recovery and greater deterrence. The SFO returns £3 for every £1 invested, which is smart economics and a compelling argument for long-term, sustainable resourcing.

With the Financial Action Task Force review on the horizon, the UK needs to demonstrate that it has the financial and technical capacity to take this issue seriously. Otherwise, we risk falling behind our global partners in the fight against corruption and illicit finance. I look forward to the forthcoming publication of the Government's anti-corruption strategy, and I have valued the opportunity to work closely with the anti-corruption champion, Baroness Hodge, in shaping that strategy. The Foreign Secretary is also right to make it his mission to position the UK as the global capital of anti-corruption, and to

commit to a summit on financial crime next year. The ambition is clear, but we must now match it with resources, co-ordination and reform.

Very briefly, I will highlight an area in which this Bill will make a real difference. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) referred to new clause 5. Many residents of Kensington and Bayswater have contacted me about the dangerous and antisocial use of illegally modified e-bikes, especially by delivery drivers. That includes speeding, reckless pavement riding and off-road use. I am a cyclist—unlike the right hon. Gentleman, I am not a motorcyclist—and I support active travel and safe cycling, but what we are seeing is dangerous, and residents have had enough. As such, I am glad that the Bill will give the police the power to seize and destroy illegally modified e-bikes within 48 hours, building on powers that already exist under section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2022.

I thank the Minister for recently confirming to me that delivery e-bikes will be covered by the new provisions, and for taking into account the concerns of my community. I hope she will look kindly on our request for support in sustainably funding the fight against economic crime.

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): I rise to speak in support of Liberal Democrat new clauses 83, 84, 85 and 86, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart). I also commend my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mike Martin) on his new clause 43.

Representing one of the most rural constituencies in the UK, I know just how deeply rural crime affects my constituents' lives and livelihoods. I am not talking about the occasional petty theft from a property; the problem we face is calculated organised crime, and it is devastating North Cornwall's farmers, small businesses and entire communities in our rural areas. Take the farmer in St Kew who lost more than £3,000-worth of tools and equipment in a single night, or the farming couple in Blisland who had two of their quad bikes stolen, worth £15,000. In that case, the police did not even arrive until three days later. To this day, the couple have heard nothing more. That is not to blame our hard-working local constables, who are stretched to breaking point.

It is no wonder that 86% of countryside residents say that rural crime is harming their mental wellbeing, and these are not isolated incidents. They are all part of a growing pattern that successive Governments have allowed to thrive under their watch. New clause 83 would finally extend the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 to cover GPS units, which are some of the most commonly stolen pieces of farm tech. Separately, new clause 84 would establish a dedicated rural crime taskforce, on which the Liberal Democrats have long campaigned. It is working in Scotland and a handful of regional police forces, so it is time that the Government developed and rolled out a properly funded and equipped taskforce nationwide.

I am pleased that, after years of pressure from me and my Liberal Democrat colleagues, the Government have finally announced that they will be committing to a full rural crime strategy. I hope that the Minister can today update the House on its timing. Strategy alone, however, will not stop thefts; it must come with proper enforcement. That is why new clause 85 and new clause 86

matter. They would guarantee minimal levels of neighbourhood policing and ensure that every local authority area has officers exclusively dedicated to community-based work.

In Cornwall, the police are doing all they can, but when the force gets less money per head than almost anywhere else in England, it is not enough. Officers are overstretched and underfunded. We need boots on the ground, with officers who understand the rural landscapes they are serving. That is why I urge the House to back these amendments, for the tradesmen who have lost their tools, for the farmers who have lost their machinery and vehicles, and for every rural community that has lost faith that justice will ever be done.

Separately, new clauses 87 and 88 would make it a criminal offence for water companies to breach pollution performance commitments and would finally hold senior executives personally liable for their failures. In North Cornwall, my constituents are living with the consequences of systematic pollution for profit. In 2024, South West Water issued more than 3,000 sewage alerts in its region, including 540 during the official bathing season and a staggering 2,600 outside of it. This is a routine and preventable environmental harm. South West Water pledged to significantly reduce its sewage discharges, but freedom of information requests show that it increased its discharges by a shocking five times last year versus the previous year, and the human cost is real.

In Widemouth Bay, my three-year-old constituent Finley became severely ill with diarrhoea and vomiting after playing on the beach. A friend's child who was there that same day suffered similar symptoms, and I was contacted at one of my surgeries a few weeks ago by a teenage girl who required hospital admission after surfing in Harlyn bay. In St Eval, I dealt with residents reporting brown water coming from their taps. As a result of cracks at Bears Down reservoir due to South West Water's lack of maintenance, many had no water for days, and the compensation from South West Water was £50 a household.

The leadership behind these constant and shocking failures continues to be rewarded. Susan Davy, the chief executive of Pennon Group, which owns South West Water, was paid a total of £860,000 in 2024. That was a small increase of £300,000 from the year before. Our beaches, rivers and families are being failed and let down, especially by the last Conservative Government and now by this Government. That is why these new clauses offer a clear message—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I call Rachel Taylor.

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): On 30 April 1999, three nail bombs went off in London, killing four and injuring 140. One of them exploded at Brick Lane, the hub of London's Bengali community; one exploded in Soho, at the Admiral Duncan pub, the heart of London's gay district; and one exploded in Brixton, in an attack on south London's black community. The sick terrorist who committed those evil acts was motivated by hatred. He hated Bengalis and black people because of their race. He hated LGBT people because of who they love and how they live their lives. He hated those groups because they were different from him. He hated them because of who they are.

I raise that appalling incident to remind the House that hatred comes in many forms, but whoever in our society it is against, we must all stand equally strongly against it. We must have hate crime laws that show that whether the hatred is for someone's race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability, Britain is a country that will not tolerate it; that all hatred is equal; and that all those who commit vile acts of hatred will face the same grave consequences.

I regret to say that that is not currently the case. Today the law recognises five categories of hate crime—race, religion, sexual orientation, transgender identity and disability—but only two, race and religion, are treated as aggravated offences subject to stronger sentencing powers; the other three are not. That discrepancy cannot be right. We cannot say, as a society, that some forms of hatred are more evil than others.

I was at university when section 28 was introduced—I remember it vividly. It was more than a law; it was an attack on the right of people like me to live openly. It stigmatised lesbians, gays and bisexual people; and it pushed us out of public life. I went into politics to fight that cruel law and everything it represented.

Hate corrodes our entire society. It does not just harm the individuals who are targeted; it creates fear—fear to go outside, fear to speak up, fear to be seen. It silences people. It makes us all afraid. Research by Stonewall found that less than half of LGBT+ people felt safe holding their partner's hand in public. That is the impact that the fear of hatred has on people. It makes them afraid even to show the world that they exist.

Unfortunately, far too many recorded crimes never result in charges. Of 11,000 disability hate crimes recorded by police, 320 led to prosecutions. Of 22,000 homophobic hate crimes, 3,118 led to prosecutions. Of 4,000 hate crimes against transgender people, only 137 led to prosecutions. Behind those statistics are real people, whose scars may heal on the outside but who may never recover from the fear and trauma that they have suffered.

In 2024, a teenage far-right extremist was jailed for targeting and attacking a transgender woman. Along with another young man, he kicked her to the ground in a park in Swansea and hurled transphobic abuse at her. In 2022, Cassie, a PhD student and wheelchair user, was waiting outside a shop when two drunk men grabbed her wheelchair, pushed her down the road and made sexual comments. She had to escape by rolling into traffic.

We must fight back against this hatred. We must show that we are not content to stick with the status quo. The victims of these attacks deserve to live in a society that says that we take this hatred seriously and will not stand for it. Victims must be at the heart of our criminal justice system, and we must ensure that laws protect them. That is why my new clause 122 is so important.

LGBT and disabled people tell me that they do not feel as safe as they used to. We are seeing rising transphobia everywhere. Pride flags are being taken down at county halls, and some politicians are openly questioning whether disabilities are even real. I am proud that Labour, in our manifesto, committed to equalising our hate crime laws by making hate crimes against LGBT people and disabled people aggravated offences. I am proud to be bringing

forward that change through new clause 122. I hope that I can persuade all my parliamentary colleagues to support the new clause today, and to take this important step forward for equal rights.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Burton and Uttoxeter (Jacob Collier) and for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Dr Tidball) for standing shoulder to shoulder with me throughout this process, and I urge the House to support the new clause.

Mr Peter Bedford (Mid Leicestershire) (Con): As MPs, we receive a wide range of correspondence from constituents during some of the most difficult times in their lives, but the email that I received from Emma Johnson was perhaps one of the most harrowing that I have ever received. It is because of Emma's story that I have tabled new clause 51, and I will speak to it today.

3.45 pm

On 18 November 2022, Emma had just gone into labour with her youngest child. Mother and child were okay when she received a call informing her that her parents had been tragically killed in a car crash. The driver of the other vehicle had no licence and was uninsured. On what was supposed to be one of the happiest days of Emma's life, she instead had to identify the bodies of her parents, Ian and Gail. When the case came to court, the driver of the other vehicle was charged with the lesser offence of causing death by careless driving, rather than by dangerous driving. That reduced the sentence available to the court, even though he was swerving in and out of traffic, and drove without a licence or insurance. I put it to the House that this, by its very nature, is dangerous.

Since the verdict, Emma has been fighting—not for vengeance, but to make sure that no other family has to suffer the same injustice. She has sought justice not just for her parents, but for other people who face the same heartbreak. She is calling for a simple but vital change: any driver who kills while driving without a licence or insurance should automatically face the more serious offence of causing death by dangerous driving. Today I say directly to Emma, who I know is watching, that I fundamentally agree with you. Your dedication to the cause is commendable, and you are doing your late parents proud.

We know that road accidents happen, but if someone wilfully gets behind the wheel of a car when unlicensed and uninsured, and swerves in and out of traffic, that is not an accident; it is a dangerous choice to put others' lives at risk. New clause 51 would rightly treat such behaviour as seriously as driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. It would close a loophole in the current law and bring greater justice for victims. If the new clause does not progress today, I ask the Minister to meet me and Emma to ensure that her campaign continues.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of new clause 25, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter). It seeks to repeal the unnecessary and arbitrary police powers introduced via the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which introduced new powers to seize the homes of Gypsy and Traveller families, and to fine, arrest and imprison them. The

[Mary Kelly Foy]

powers contained in part 4 of the Act have had a devastating impact on Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities, and on a culture that is not only centuries old but protected by law. The Government have a legal and moral duty to facilitate this way of life, not to legislate it out of existence.

As we heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick, in May 2024 the High Court found certain provisions in part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act to be incompatible with the Human Rights Act. The Government have so far failed meaningfully to respond to that, let alone correct it. In issuing the declaration of incompatibility, the High Court recognised the lack of transit provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities across England, and the impact that the Act's powers have on Gypsy and Traveller families. If there is any doubt in people's minds about the state of transit provision in England, I refer them to the research published this year by Friends, Families and Travellers, which found that 92% of the 362 local authorities have no transit provision at all.

Notably, the introduction of the powers has an effect on the community's fears of being targeted and sanctioned. I will share the words of someone from the Romany community who has been directly impacted by these powers, which highlight the human consequences of these laws:

"This law adds to the knock-on effects we face daily with access to healthcare and education; being moved on constantly has been detrimental to my health, as sometimes I have to drive over 100 miles to see a GP. I could be made a criminal and lose my home, all because I have never known any different."

It is painfully obvious that what we need are not criminal sanctions for families who have nowhere to stop; the answer is, of course, to create laws which ensure there are enough places for people to stop—I might add that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill provides the perfect opportunity for that.

As I stand here today during Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, I urge the Government not to delay further. Let us repeal part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act through this Bill, and take a meaningful step towards justice, inclusion and respect for all communities.

Liz Jarvis (Eastleigh) (LD): I would like to start by paying tribute to Berney Hall, who is in the Gallery today and who has been campaigning for a change in the law to remove the 12-month limitation period for historic cases of rape of 13 to 15-year-old girls, when they occurred before 2004. It can take years for victims of abuse to come forward. Baroness Kennedy of Cradley tabled amendments to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill in the other place which sought to close this loophole, but they were not taken forward by the previous Government. That is why I have tabled new clause 160. I hope the Government will give all survivors of this terrible crime the closure and justice they deserve.

I am supporting several amendments today, including new clause 9 tabled by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). I recently met a mum from my constituency whose ex-partner was convicted of sexual communication with a child and put on the sex offenders register, but was then allowed to change his name.

Understandably, my constituent was horrified to learn that he could take on a new identity, and that other women might not be aware. New clause 9 would stop offenders avoiding monitoring measures that are important for public safety, as well as reassuring victims that perpetrators cannot dodge the repercussions of their actions.

I am also supporting new clauses 85 to 88, new clauses 121 and 122, and new clause 102. In addition, I support new clause 120, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding), which would strengthen protections for emergency workers by addressing hate-motivated offences committed against them in private dwellings. No one doing their job to protect others should face abuse. Whether on the street or in someone's home, hate-fuelled attacks on those who serve the public must be prosecuted with the seriousness they warrant.

Finally, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mike Martin) for tabling new clause 43, which would ensure the Government implement the Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023. No one should have to put up with sexual harassment and this change in the law is long overdue.

Jess Asato (Lowestoft) (Lab): I rise to speak to new clauses 102 to 105 in my name. First, I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) for her engagement on the issues I am about to discuss, and I pay tribute to UK Feminista, which runs the all-party parliamentary group on commercial sexual exploitation, to CEASE—the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation—and to Barnardo's for its steadfast campaign on tackling violence against women and girls, and the protection of children.

My new clauses reflect the recommendations of the very thorough recent review conducted for the Government by Baroness Gabby Bertin into online pornography. I am so proud that this Labour Government have made a commitment to halve violence against women and girls. I truly believe that regulating violent online pornography, which is viewed by nearly 40% of men once a week in the UK, will make a clear impact on that commitment.

As the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) has already powerfully argued, sexual strangulation is one of the most frequently found acts across all categories on mainstream pornography sites. Despite its dangers, it is portrayed as perfectly safe and a normal part of sex. In a Google search, CEASE found 30 million videos immediately for "choke her" porn. I want to share the story of Hannah, who met her killer, James Morton, on the day she died. Morton

"was reported as being obsessed with strangulation, frequently watching porn featuring strangulation of women. Although the judge said Morton had strangled Hannah 'without warning or permission', Morton claimed he began to lightly strangle Hannah...before more forcefully strangling her."

Women and girls are paying the price of both an industry that seeks to profit from the most violent kinds of content and laws that are not fit for purpose. Despite the clear evidence of a direct connection between viewing strangulation content in mainstream pornography and undertaking such acts, the law requires the removal of this type of pornographic content only if the threshold

of “life-threatening” is clearly met. New clause 102 would ban pornographic content depicting all strangulation and, with the requirement in the Online Safety Act 2023 to remove illegal content, would place a duty on platforms to remove strangulation videos or face sanction.

It is clear that we need stronger regulation. Offline, we have been regulating pornographic content since the Video Recordings Act 1984, which specifically prohibits offline content that the British Board of Film Classification would find unsuitable, yet our online regulation has not kept pace.

Of particular concern is content that depicts sexual activity with children. Known as “teen porn” or “incest porn”, this content features young-looking performers made to look under age through use of props such as stuffed toys, lollipops and school uniforms. Such content normalises children as objects of sexual desire and drives the demand for child sexual abuse material. Pornography producers have got around the ban on incest material by promoting porn videos in which there is step-incest. In a society where many of us have blended families, it is simply not right that step-daddy/daughter pornography is legal, no matter whether the actor is over 18 or not. New clause 103 would ensure that what is illegal offline is illegal online.

We must also ensure that all illegal pornographic content is regulated equally online, regardless of where that content is hosted. Duties under the Online Safety Act to combat illegal content apply only to pornography websites that host user-to-user interactions or user-generated content, and pornography websites that host only commercially produced pornography are exempt from illegal duties. We must not allow that to continue. New clause 104 would ensure that all pornography sites must adhere to illegal content duties.

Finally, it is important to remember that the acts of sexual violence I have spoken about today are perpetrated against real women and girls. This is not acting or performing. Women are often forced or coerced into this industry, and, once in it, even the most famous pornography performers are exploited. For example, Kate was trafficked from the UK to the pornography industry in America, where she suffered horrendous abuse and was forced to take part in dangerous and degrading sex acts on film. The consequences of what she endured have stayed with her despite her escaping the industry.

The truth is, there is no way of knowing whether the women who appear in pornography have given their consent, or whether they are even adults. New clause 105 would ensure that pornography websites accessed from the UK must verify the age and consent of every individual featured on their site and, crucially, enable individuals featured in pornography to withdraw their consent to its publication at any time.

I look forward to working with the Government and colleagues across the House to tackle the harmful impacts of this multibillion-pound industry.

Saqib Bhatti: I rise to speak to new clause 123 in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley).

I have to say, I am a little surprised that I am having to speak to this new clause today, and I implore the Minister to give it due consideration, not least because

it was presented on a cross-party basis in the previous Parliament by Baroness Harman. In fact, on the day it was debated, Baroness Harman, who had done all the work on it, was away due to a personal matter, and it was spoken to by the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips), who is, of course, now the Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls. The Minister will be aware that this issue directly concerns a constituent of mine, whose experience I will speak to later. I really encourage the Minister to give the new clause due consideration and, if it is not taken up, perhaps she can clarify in her remarks why there is a delay. Every engagement I have had with the Department has suggested that such a provision is well on its way, so I would be curious to know about that.

For the benefit of the House, the new clause seeks to remove the parental rights of convicted sex offenders. It is unconscionable to my constituents that children could be subject to living with a sex offender because the sex offender is their parent. It is reprehensible that the law allows that to happen. It allows convicted criminals who have committed the most heinous crimes to exploit the law, and it puts vulnerable children at risk.

4 pm

My right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands was incredibly generous to me when speaking about her amendment. The truth is that my constituents have driven me in this. I remember the first time that the parents of “Bethan” came to see me—I will use that name for the purpose of this speech. Frankly, as a father I do not know whether I would have kept my composure the way they did if I was in their position. They spoke about it in such an honest way, and they continue to do so. The other experience I had with the family was up in the Gallery with them when the amendment was debated, and I could see their sheer joy.

When Bethan’s daughter’s father was sentenced he was banned from any future contact with children, but he was not banned from contact with his own child. This critical amendment would stop that. It would give Bethan, and others in her position, the assurances she needs that her child cannot be contacted by a convicted paedophile. I know the Minister to be a very capable Minister and a good person, and I am sure she agrees that no parent should have to go through this. The amendment could save anguish for many thousands of parents and give them clarity.

Of further importance is that Bethan had to self-fund her case to severely restrict her daughter’s father’s parental rights, but that is not something that every parent will be able to achieve—and there are people without legal aid. Of course, the consideration most paramount is the safeguarding of the child and protecting the innocent victims, but this protection should not be available only to those who can afford it.

The proposal was also championed last year by the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley, who asked how an individual can be considered too dangerous to work with or be around other people’s children yet be allowed to have responsibility for a child’s life so long as that child is their own. I do not think that is a controversial statement to make, so I ask the Minister to give the amendment due consideration.

This is clearly something that is very important to me and my constituents. If the amendment is not passed today, I will push for further amendments on this issue and bring forward debates on it, as well as private Member's Bill. When I spoke to Bethan's family, they talked about how devastated they were that the amendment was not taken forward. I hope the Minister will recognise the anguish that this delay is causing.

Will Stone (Swindon North) (Lab): I rise to support new clauses 15 and 16 in my name. The amendments address two specific but crucial failings in our current road traffic laws: the absence of adequate penalties for driving without ever having held a licence and insufficient consequences for people who fail to stop after an incident.

The amendments are in honour of Harry Parker, a much-loved 14-year-old whose life was tragically cut short on 25 November 2022 on his way to school. I engage with the family regularly, and this has truly rocked Adam and Kelly. It is utterly devastating for them to have lost their child at such an early point in his life. I extend my deepest sympathy to Harry's parents, and I admire their courage in seeking change through their grief. The driver who killed Harry was driving without a licence, had no insurance and did not stop. Shockingly, all charges were dropped. The police and the Crown Prosecution Service followed the letter of the law, but that is why I am here. The law as it stands does not recognise the gravity of these offences when they are committed by someone who should never have been behind the wheel in the first place. That is why I have brought forward the two amendments.

New clause 15 on unlicensed drivers would amend section 87 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to introduce tougher penalties for individuals who have never held a licence. New clause 16 on the offence of failure to stop would amend section 170 of the 1988 Act to allow courts to impose unlimited fines, a custodial sentence and a disqualification from driving for up to two years. More importantly, it would allow the courts to impose any combination of those penalties.

No law can bring Harry back. No sentence will ease the pain of the family and friends. These amendments are about restoring the balance and sending a clear message: if someone chooses to drive without a licence and if someone runs from the scene of a crash, there will be real-world consequences. I appreciate that the amendments may not progress, but I ask the Government to take them seriously with a road safety strategy, which I hope we can push forward in future.

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): I rise to speak to new clause 156 in my name, which I bring forward because of Isabella, a 14-year-old girl who lives in my constituency. In May of this year, Isabella was hanging out with friends in Lyme Regis when she was lured to the cemetery. A group of young people were waiting. One of them had their phone out and was already filming her arrival. Moments later, another girl who Isabella knew launched a brutal assault. Her head was smashed against a concrete step, she was stamped on and kicked in the face again and again. While Isabella was being attacked, no one stopped to help; instead, they stood by and they filmed. They laughed and they demanded they be sent the video.

The attack was premeditated, but so too was the filming. The recording began before Isabella even arrived. It was not taken to provide evidence or to expose wrongdoing but taken deliberately to broadcast her humiliation and glorify the violence. I have seen the video; it is horrific. Isabella's mother has seen the video, her friends have seen the video and hundreds, and possibly thousands, of people have seen the video because it was intentionally and maliciously circulated on social media and in private WhatsApp groups in schools across West Dorset. Children who were not there and who do not even know Isabella saw her brutal attack play out on their phones. The violence did not stop when the attack ended. It was shared, it was forwarded, it was replayed and it was whispered about.

Isabella's attacker was charged with actual bodily harm. She received anger management classes and a six-month restraining order. That was bad enough, but the people who filmed it walked away entirely unpunished. The filming had started before the attack occurred, they knew the attack was coming, they planned to film it and then they proceeded to share the video while laughing. They did not walk away unpunished because there was no proof of what they did—the video was the proof—but because our law does not yet recognise such specific, premeditated and deeply harmful behaviour as the offence that it should be.

That is why I believe that new clause 156 is so important. It seeks to create a specific offence for premeditated filming and distribution of violent acts with the intent to humiliate, distress and psychologically harm the victims. It recognises what too many families already know: that this is not about a punch thrown or a kick delivered, but about the deliberate choice to film violence, broadcast it and humiliate the victim repeatedly for an audience that grows with every share, every click and every forwarded message.

We are not talking about evidence or journalism, or about someone catching wrongdoing to expose it. Indeed, new clause 156 makes it very clear and contains an explicit safeguard to protect public interest journalism and for footage being used as evidence. Yet where there is premeditation and where someone knowingly films or broadcasts an attack with the intent to amplify the victim's humiliation, that behaviour must face consequences. Isabella's case is not an isolated one.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman speaks with great passion about his constituent. Yesterday evening, I held a roundtable with parents in my constituency to talk about mobile phone use in schools. One of the parents was a GP and she spoke about how children who have been subject to such attacks have come to her surgery saying that they are contemplating suicide because of what they have faced. Does he agree that this goes well beyond mere humiliation and to some of the worst mental health problems our young people could face?

Edward Morello: I agree with the hon. Gentleman; we do not fully understand the lasting psychological damage, especially as this is a growing problem.

I have received further letters from other people, who have told me about similar incidents in other schools, other towns and other playgrounds. Nationally, the problem is rising. According to the Youth Endowment

Fund's 2024 survey, 70% of young people reported seeing real-world violence online in the past year and that most of that footage was of fights involving young people. It is happening in our communities right now and the law is failing to keep pace.

Our children already face enormous pressures from social media—from online bullying to apps designed to capture their attention and expose them to content far beyond their years. As parents, we do our best to protect them, but we cannot be everywhere. We have a duty to put proper deterrents in place where social media companies have continually failed us.

We have a duty to send a clear message that this behaviour is unacceptable, that it is dangerous and that it will not go unpunished. I will finish with the words of Isabella's mother, Sarah. She said:

"I have to live with the flashbacks of watching my daughter being beaten. I also have to live knowing that this video will be forever available on social media."

On behalf of Sarah and of Isabella, I hope that the Government will support a change to the law so that something positive can come from Isabella's experience.

Anneliese Midgley (Knowsley) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello) for his speech and for advocating for new clause 156. He is a powerful advocate for his constituent who suffered such horrific things, and I thank him for that.

I rise to speak in support of new clause 48, which stands in my name. It would create a new, stand-alone offence of assaulting a delivery worker. Before I begin, though, let me refer Members to my entry in the Register of Member's Financial Interests and my membership of the GMB Union.

Delivery workers are vital to our local economies. They link shops with homes, cafés with customers and communities with each other. They help keep our high streets alive and our homes supplied. But too often, they are abused, assaulted, and attacked just for doing their job.

Rolston, who rides for Deliveroo, has been verbally abused and threatened with violence on people's doorsteps for asking for ID when delivering alcohol, as the law requires him to do. Emiliana has been riding in Kent since 2018. She has had two motorbikes stolen and has been pelted. Sometimes it is far worse. Claudiu Carol Kondor was an Amazon delivery driver. He was killed in Leeds last year. A thief jumped into his van while he was delivering parcels. Claudiu tried to stop him, clinging to his vehicle for half a mile, pleading with the thief to stop. He was deliberately knocked off and killed. He had bought that van just three weeks earlier and was trying to protect his livelihood. Instead, he lost his life. No one should leave home to go to work and not come back.

Those are just a few stories, but they are not isolated incidents. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers has found that 77% of delivery workers for major retailers such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Ocado, Morrisons and Iceland have been a victim of abuse in the past year. A quarter have turned down deliveries because they feared for their safety, and 13% have been physically assaulted. And this is happening during an epidemic of retail crime. Shoplifting has nearly

doubled since the pandemic, and rose by 23% last year alone. In-store retail staff also face absolutely shocking abuse.

I welcome the Labour Government's commitment to protecting retail workers with a stand-alone offence, which USDAW, through its freedom from fear campaign, has campaigned on for years. It is the right move, because no one should feel unsafe, or face abuse—verbal or physical—just for doing their job.

Delivery workers are on the frontline, too. They work alone, often at night. They are public-facing and can be vulnerable. When something goes wrong—a delay, a missing item, or the wrong order—they are the ones who face the backlash. Too often frustration turns into abuse, violence, or worse. Delivery workers deserve the same protection that this Government are rightly offering to staff in stores. When Parliament places extra responsibilities on delivery riders to police much-needed laws on age verification, it should legislate to provide additional protections for them. New clause 48 is backed by the GMB Union, USDAW, Deliveroo, the British Retail Consortium and UKHospitality. Trade bodies and trade unions are campaigning together, because they know the reality. They see what delivery workers face every day. Since the covid pandemic, delivery riders have become a part of how we shop and we rely on them.

Ben Obese-Jecty: I wish to speak about new clauses 84 to 86 and return once again to policing and police funding. In new clause 86 on neighbourhood policing, the Liberal Democrats seek to address the Government's recently announced neighbourhood policing plan. The plan pledges to recruit an additional 13,000 police officers—a figure that still simply does not stack up. I spoke last week in Westminster Hall about the discrepancies in the Government's pledge, the lack of clarity around the baseline figure against which progress will be measured, the fuzziness around how the 3,000 officers transferred from other roles will be determined or implemented, and the fact that the 2,611 officers overcounted as being in neighbourhood roles by 29 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales means that the 3,000 officers the Government have announced this year is all but net neutral in terms of additional warranted police officers—it is an in-year increase of just 389 officers once the adjustment is taken into account.

4.15 pm

New clause 86 appears to misunderstand how operational control and deployment of police resources works. It makes no reference to the operational decision-making responsibilities of the chief constable, much as the Government have stipulated the redeployment of 3,000 officers without explaining how and where that will be implemented. Subsection (2) states:

"The Home Office must publish proposals detailing the additional funding that will be required to ensure that police forces can meet these requirements without reducing officer numbers in other frontline policing roles",

yet it fails to stipulate that funding is inequitable in the first instance.

I have spoken at length about the police allocation formula, so I ask the Liberal Democrats, and in particular my neighbour, the hon. Member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire (Ian Sollom), if they will join me in

leading calls for the Policing Minister to ensure that the police allocation formula is updated to reflect the population increase and redistribution that has occurred since the formula was first introduced. I am aware that the Policing Minister stated in Westminster Hall on 5 June that

“there is a White Paper coming in the next few months. I want to make clear to hon. Members this afternoon that, within that, there will undoubtedly have to be a discussion about finances and resources for policing.”—[*Official Report*, 5 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 227WH.]

I welcome that discussion, and I know that she will, if nothing else, be keen to address my concerns as a priority if only to get me off her back.

New clause 85 mentions funding within the context of “minimum levels” of policing. The Liberal Democrats are asking for every police force in England and Wales to maintain neighbourhood policing teams at a level necessary to ensure

“effective community engagement and crime prevention”.

Who stipulates that level? Is that at the chief constable’s discretion, or is it the police and crime commissioner, the metro mayor, the Policing Minister or the Home Secretary? Define “effective”. Furthermore, a ringfenced allocation of 20% for neighbourhood policing from future police grant reports would hamper the flexibility of operational budgets for chief constables when we should be allowing them the freedom of operation to be the arbiters of how their resources may be employed most effectively within their constabulary areas.

Lastly, new clause 84 is on the rural crime prevention strategy: an area that appears to have been all but overlooked by the Government in their recent announcements. I am sure that the national rural crime unit already has a strategy. It was established under the previous Government in 2023 and has recovered stolen property including agricultural machinery and vehicles worth over £10 million since its inception. It has also co-ordinated UK-wide operational responses resulting in multiple arrests as well as disrupting organised crime groups.

Cambridgeshire’s rural crime action team already punches above its weight. In 2023–24 alone, it recovered almost £1 million-worth of stolen property, seized 163 vehicles used in crime, attended more than 1,700 incidents and prosecuted 83 suspects. They work closely with the national rural crime unit, but, once again, despite their success, they are underfunded and under-resourced. Cambridgeshire is a large county with significant rural areas, yet we rely on just a small team of officers to take on everything from machinery theft to the real danger of the violent organised crime groups who conduct hare coursing: an issue that desperately needs to be tackled in Cambridgeshire.

The Government’s neighbourhood policing plan glosses over the need for greater police presence in our rural communities. West of the A1 in my constituency, there are dozens of villages that will, in theory, have a named officer—how will that prevent someone taking an angle grinder to a vehicle shed on an isolated farm at 3 am?

The Government have talked a good game on policing, but their numbers do not add up. Their strategy has holes all over it, and for all the talk of an uplift in police finances, senior police officers have repeatedly raised concerns about the police allocation formula remaining unchanged. On that last point, I expect the forthcoming White Paper to address the changes for which I have

repeatedly and consistently called, for Cambridgeshire constabulary to be funded fairly and for its officers to be properly resourced.

Kirith Entwistle (Bolton North East) (Lab): I rise to speak to new clause 44, otherwise known as Banaz’s law, tabled in my name and in memory of Banaz Mahmod. I am grateful for the cross-party support that I have received for the new clause from 54 Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members and for the opportunity to continue the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips), and the last Women and Equalities Committee; I am proud to be a member of the Committee.

Banaz was a young woman from south London. In 2006, she was murdered by her father, her uncle and five male cousins in a so-called honour killing. Her crime, in their eyes, was to leave an abusive husband, whom she had bravely reported for rape and violence, and to seek love with a man of her own choosing. Believing she had brought shame and dishonour upon the family, they convened what they chillingly called a council of war and plotted her death. Banaz’s body was found months later buried in a suitcase in a back garden in Birmingham.

This horrific injustice did not begin with her murder, however. Banaz went to the police five times. She reported rape, she named her abusers, she predicted her own death and still her cries for help were dismissed. An investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission into the police handling of Banaz’s case later found multiple serious failings. This was not only a family crime; it was a community crime. Police estimated that as many as 50 men were involved in plotting the murder, covering it up or encouraging this honour narrative. Banaz’s uncle called her death “justice”. Others called him a hero.

Banaz’s case is not unique. Shafiea Ahmed, Somaiya Begum, Raneem Oudeh, Khaola Saleem and Fawziyah Javed were all women subjected to honour-based abuse. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner estimates that at least 12 honour killings take place in the UK every year. More than 7,000 incidents of honour-based abuse are recorded annually, but the true scale is almost certainly greater.

While I fully support the important steps this Bill takes to tackle violence against women and girls, I am concerned by its insufficient focus on honour-based abuse and I am grateful to the Minister for Victims, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), for taking the time to meet me. However, I must stress that subsuming honour-based abuse within extant law does not adequately contend with these issues and is not sufficiently capable of yielding the change promised by Banaz’s law.

My new clause calls for honour-based abuse to be recognised in law as an aggravating factor in sentencing. It also calls for victim-survivors who act in self-defence or under coercion after years of abuse to have that context recognised as a mitigating factor. With this new clause, statutory guidance across the criminal justice system could be given so that police, prosecutors and courts could be trained to recognise and respond to this high-risk, often collective, form of abuse.

I want to pay tribute to the Bekhal Mahmod, Banaz’s sister. Her courage and the tireless work of Southall Black Sisters have brought us to this point. I will not be

pressing my new clause to a vote today, but I hope that Ministers will take this opportunity to reflect on the need to take further action against all forms of honour-based abuse, because the need for reform is undeniable.

Esther McVey: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I think the hon. Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle) just ran out of time. I remember that I too raised Banaz's case as a Back Bencher.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I rise to speak in support of six of the new clauses that go to the heart of our responsibilities as legislators—safeguarding children, restoring public confidence in the law and defending free expression—although due to the lack of time, I will not be able to go into them all in detail.

New clause 45, standing in my name, seeks to ensure that where an individual under the age of 18 has been cautioned or convicted of a child sex offence, the police must notify any organisation that that child is involved in, where they are with other children, or an organisation that that person is seeking to join. This new clause stems from a real case in my own constituency and would close a dangerous and demonstrably harmful safeguarding loophole, which I have already discussed privately with the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips). I hope that the Government will look at this as they take this legislation through the other place.

New clause 46, also standing my name, addresses another gap in legislation: a person's ability to buy a car without providing any form of verifiable ID, or indeed proving that they can actually drive. This is in memory of Andrew Rowlands, with the support of his family, and it would make it harder for criminals and reckless drivers to use untraceable vehicles with impunity and kill people, as happened in Andrew's case.

New clause 108, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy), seeks to reaffirm the right to speak freely about religion or belief, including criticism, satire and dissent, by restoring clarity to our public order laws. I know he will be speaking to it later, and I wholly support it. It is closely aligned to new clause 7, which is being put forward by the Opposition Front Bench today. We need to start addressing some of these non-crime hate incidents, which I think are becoming a pernicious attack upon freedom in our society.

More broadly, it was great to hear the hon. Member for Lowestoft (Jess Asato) speak about pornography and some of the amendments she has put forward. I support new clause 103. In fact, I have been doing some work recently with the British Board of Film Classification because there are clearly major issues between what is allowed to be broadcast and age rated within traditional broadcast settings and what is available online. There is a growing body of evidence linking violent and abusive pornography with increased rates of sexual aggression, especially towards women and girls. I fully support the new clause and hope that the Government pay attention to what the hon. Member proposed.

I support new clause 150 relating to cousin marriage. I am glad that the Opposition Front Bench has put it forward, and I spoke at length about the matter earlier

in Westminster Hall. This is not a knee-jerk reaction; it represents the next logical step in a serious and ongoing effort to protect the vulnerable and promote social cohesion. I have already introduced a private Member's Bill in this Session on the marriage element, following the successful challenge banning virginity testing and hymenoplasty in the last Session, because when it comes to protecting women and men from outdated, coercive and harmful practices, this House must not look the other way.

This is not about race or religion; it is about freedom, societal cohesion and health. It is about freedom because consent is meaningless when extended families can pressure young men and women into cousin marriages that they do not want. We must stand up for those without a voice and give them the legal backing to say no. It is about cohesion because multigenerational cousin marriage often fosters huge issues around social segregation, locking individuals into closed systems of authority. When countries like Norway and Denmark have acted decisively, there is no excuse for this country to lag behind others with progressive credentials. It is about health because there is a real risk. The Born in Bradford study, which has been going on for many years, has found the real societal implications, and we still do not know the full side effects of multigenerational first cousin marriages.

We rightly prohibit relationships where power distorts consent—between teachers and pupils, doctors and patients, and within close family settings. The same logic clearly applies here as well. This new clause is rooted in compassion, not condemnation. It speaks to freedom, especially for women, and the courage to legislate where silence simply causes harm.

Each of these amendments addresses a different risk—child safety, public accountability and freedom of expression—but they are united in the common principle that the law should protect the vulnerable, demand responsibility, and preserve the freedoms on which a healthy and confident society depends.

Dr Marie Tidball (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I rise to support new clause 122, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire and Bedworth (Rachel Taylor).

In 2007, Fiona Pilkington drove herself and her 18-year-old daughter, Francessca Hardwick, to a lay-by near her home. She also took the family's pet rabbit to soothe her daughter, who had severe learning disabilities. She then set the car on fire, killing them both. An inquest two years later heard how the family had been kept virtual prisoners in their home by youths who threw stones, flour and other objects and kept up a relentless stream of abuse. At the time, the Independent Police Complaints Commission concluded that one of the police's main failings was in not identifying the abuse as hate crime.

The case prompted wider concern that many police forces were failing to properly identify hate crimes motivated by disability, and thus treating them as low-priority antisocial behaviour—something disability campaigners say too often remains the case. I am proud that last year our Labour manifesto

"committed to championing the rights of disabled people and to the principle of working with them, so that their views and voices will be at the heart of all we do."

[Dr Marie Tidball]

I support my hon. Friend's new clause 122, which would implement our manifesto commitment to protect LGBT+ and disabled people by making all existing strands of hate crime an aggravated offence. The new clause would finally place the Law Commission's recommendations on a statutory footing. As the commission has said:

"It is undesirable for the current law to give the impression of a 'hierarchy' of victims."

The Bill will be powerful in delivering the Government's safer streets mission and plan for change. It will help to tackle the crimes that matter most to communities but that have been ignored for too long, after 14 years of the Tory dereliction of duty on law and order.

4.30 pm

Disability hate crime is one such example. Under the Conservatives, there was a staggering increase of nearly 700% in police-recorded disability hate crime between 2012 and 2023. As chair of the APPG on autism, I am particularly concerned about the impact on autistic people and those with learning disabilities.

"Hate crime can wreck lives. It creates a huge mental health problem for people with learning disabilities and autism—people who often don't have the ability to understand or cope with it."

Those are the words of Mark Brookes, the hate crime ambassador for the Dimensions charity, who was part of the "I'm with Sam" campaign for no more learning disability and autism hate crime.

Aggravated offences currently exist only for offences involving racial or religious hostility. The higher maximum penalties available for aggravated offences are perceived to have a more powerful symbolic and deterrent effect. Higher maximum penalties mean that aggravated offences are often pursued in the Crown court rather than the magistrates court. As the hate crime charity Galop has argued, the Crown court is a more appropriate forum for dealing with the gravity and victim impact of hate offences, and it has superior facilities for victims.

I have researched the experiences of disabled people in the criminal justice system over the past 14 years, so I know that this opportunity to legislate to strengthen the law on hate crime offences must be seized. Disabled people enrich our society. New clause 122 would foster respect and equality for all by ensuring justice for disabled victims of hate crime.

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): Let me start by highlighting my support for new clauses 85 and 86, which deal with neighbourhood policing. They would ensure that police forces are required to practise community policing

"at a level necessary to ensure effective community engagement and crime prevention".

It is a shame that the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty) is not in his place to intervene for a definition on that. It is about engaging with local communities and ward panels to define the appropriate levels in their areas—which I am sure he would support—rather than taking a top-down view. The new clauses would compel the Secretary of State to produce an annual report on the state of community policing.

We have outlined a way of funding that too: 20% of future police grants would be ringfenced for community policing activities, literally making crime pay—in the

reverse of the manner in which that phrase is normally used—by allocating funds recovered from the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to community policing. That is important, because commitments to policing numbers mean little without serious action to reverse the scale of forthcoming cuts, such as the cuts of 1,419 officers and staff that we in London are about to experience this year. Indeed, as the Metropolitan Police Commissioner recently told the BBC,

"ambition and money go alongside each other".

I urge Members across the House to support those new clauses.

I will now turn to my new clauses 95 and 96. It is good to see the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips), in her place to continue a conversation that we have had many times on stalking. Stalking is a heinous crime: it throws lives into chaos, leaves victims in life-changing and near-constant terror, and too often goes unpunished. The current legislation forces too many victims to meet an improbably high bar of evidence, forcing them to jump through hoops to be a perfect victim, just to prove the scale of the threat against them.

I have heard from victims in my Sutton and Cheam constituency who have had their lives completely upended by their stalkers, and who are completely at their wit's end after facing so many obstacles to getting justice. It is clear that the two relevant sections of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 are the root of those obstacles. The distinction between a lesser section 2A offence and a more severe section 4A offence is failing victims and fails to recognise the total scope of stalking.

Successful prosecutions of section 4A offences are far too hard to achieve. The burden of proof is placed so heavily on the victim.

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): Even celebrities such as Emma Raducanu, and others in the public eye who have been affected by stalkers, feel unsafe and unprotected by existing legislation. Does the hon. Member agree that is clear additional evidence that the law needs strengthening?

Luke Taylor: The hon. Member provides a clear and visible example of how the legislation is not working, if somebody with such a high profile and with additional security protection cannot be protected from stalkers. I thank him for his apt intervention.

The burden of proof means that many victims withdraw from the process completely and give up on gaining justice. My new clauses would compel the Secretary of State to publish a review into the two clauses within six months of the Act receiving Royal Assent, and to make time for that review to be properly considered in the House upon its completion. They would also compel the Secretary of State to launch a review into the effectiveness and adequacy of the stalking awareness guidance provided by public bodies in England and Wales, and to make similar provision for proper consideration and debate in this House. I know that aim is supported by the Minister, so I would like to hear how it is being brought forward.

New clause 43, tabled by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mike Martin), is incredibly important and deserves the support of the House.

The new clause automatically commences the Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023 when the Crime and Policing Bill receives Royal Assent. That he has managed to corral together such luminaries in this House as the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley), my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart), and the hon. Members for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy), for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry) and for Clacton (Nigel Farage), to support the measure is a triumph in itself.

We spoke about new clause 130 in Committee, and I very much support its measures on tool theft. It would add the theft of tools from tradesmen to the list of aggravating factors in the Sentencing Act 2020, and present a way forward towards more sensible regulations of temporary markets, where too many stolen tools are often sold out of car boots. I recently visited the Kimpton industrial estate in Stonecote in my constituency, where I heard more about the awful impact of that kind of theft from tradespeople, who too often are left with their livelihoods wrecked and very little proper recourse to getting their lives back on track, other than to fork out huge amounts to buy new tools, which in many cases are later stolen again. It is a horrible cycle, which I also heard about at the Stop Tool Theft rally on the streets outside this Chamber earlier this year.

The measures set out in the new clause provide a good path forward but will not solve the issue alone. Without the kind of commitment to restoring community policing that I mentioned in reference to new clauses 85 and 86, police forces will remain too overstretched to mobilise the resources to investigate these crimes in the first place.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): My hon. Friend talks about community policing and getting police officers back into the community, so does he support my new clause 157, which seeks to streamline the way police case files are prepared and submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service? It is a common-sense approach that would reduce red tape and, most importantly, get police back out supporting victims and building the community trust that they need?

Luke Taylor: My hon. Friend's words have convinced me and hon. Members across the House about her new clause.

The Met police recently responded to a freedom of information request about tool theft, which revealed that nine in 10 tool thefts in the last five years in London went unsolved, which shows the scale of the problem and the importance of supporting new clause 130 today.

I would like quickly to draw attention to some other amendments. New clauses 87 and 88, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove, would hold water company executives to account properly for the first time, and that would mark a huge step forward in tackling the sewage crisis we face in this country. Those individuals should be held liable for their carelessness and fixation with raising bills, while running companies into the ground and ruining our rivers. I wish I had more time to outline my reasons for supporting the clauses, but I refer the House to my many prior contributions on the subject.

New clause 44, tabled by the hon. Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle), would mark a step forward in providing support to victims of honour-based violence and murder.

New clause 122, tabled by the hon. Member for North Warwickshire and Bedworth (Rachel Taylor), would strengthen the law on hate crimes directed at disabled, LGBT+ people, and rightly seeks to protect people who are victims of hate crime because of their association with individuals in those groups, and I wholeheartedly support it.

In contrast, new clause 7, tabled by the official Opposition, would weaken hate crime legislation in this country, and I fear it is motivated by a complete lack of respect for the decades of progress we have made in recognising the types of discrimination faced by people the length and breadth of this country. For this Bill to push us forward, and not drag us backwards, that new clause must be rejected.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, as a proud member of the trade union movement.

No one should go to work with the uncertainty each day that their safety might be put at risk. We as a Government clearly support that for emergency workers, and of course we are legislating for retail workers too. New clause 48, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Anneliese Midgley), addresses delivery workers, and today I stand to speak for my new clause 11, which would do the same for transport workers.

Every day, transport workers face verbal abuse, sexual harassment or physical assault, whether on bus, tram or ferry. Transport workers, alongside their trade union, the RMT, are calling for new measures to protect them at work: first, the introduction of a specific offence of assaulting or abusing a transport worker; and secondly, an extension in the maximum sentence, from six to 12 months—not least if sentences are now to be served in the community.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): I had meant to speak to my amendment 120 today, but that intention was superseded by the Government's movement on this, which I really welcome. It will close a loophole so that it will now be an offence to abuse an emergency worker on the grounds of race, religion or sexual orientation in somebody's private dwelling. I congratulate the Government on that.

Rachael Maskell: I welcome the hon. Member's intervention. This just goes to show the extent to which our public servants put themselves in harm's way, often running towards danger on our behalf. When people are serving us—our constituents—day in, day out, they deserve the protections that we are aiming to introduce in this legislation.

Let us look at the scale of the abuse our transport workers are facing. Transport for London says that 10% of workers are physically assaulted, with 90% verbally abused and 60% experiencing violence at work, and that is just in the last 18 months. In fact, 10,493 TfL workers had incidents of violence or aggression perpetrated against them. More widely, the British Transport Police highlighted in 2024 that 7,027 offences were committed, and just in the last year there were 7,405 crimes, with 3,650 violent crimes. And there has been a 47% increase since 2021.

Our transport workers will not be safe unless more measures are included in this legislation. We are also hearing from other groups of workers, so we need to

[*Rachael Maskell*]

look holistically at the threats they are facing and how we can put those protections in place to ensure that specific measures are available to help keep them safe. That would also be better for the public.

We should also look at the work the RMT has done. It has surveyed its women workers, and 40% of transport workers who are women have been sexually harassed in the last year, and that, too, is on the rise. Two thirds of RMT members have experienced abuse, violence or antisocial behaviour, but 40% have not reported it as they are not confident that they will get the recourse they need. This is having an impact on their health and wellbeing. The level of post-traumatic stress disorder experienced by transport workers is double that of the general population. That is why they are calling for legal protection for all public transport workers—because of the scale and the prevalence. Moving forward with this will also deter perpetrators and support workers. It will improve action and response times and the support that is available.

We in this House need only think back to the covid pandemic. Belly Muinga was spat at while working at Victoria station and, sadly, lost her life. She was there serving faithfully as a sales clerk during that period. Her union, the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, has said:

“While we remember Belly today, our union continues to fight for safe and healthy workplaces for all of our members.”

That is why I am here today: to fight for them alongside the trade unions, the British Transport Police, the rail industry bodies, the Rail Delivery Group, Network Rail and all of the transport unions—standing together, saying they need more measures to keep workers safe on our transport systems.

We often hear about other safety risks that transport workers place themselves in, but today it is about their own personal safety, and I am sure this House will hear it. So I am asking for clear support for new clause 11, but of course I am willing to meet the Minister to discuss how we can advance the cause of transport workers and hope that, if we cannot make these amendments today, we will be able to do so in the other place.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): Before I turn to my new clause, I welcome in particular new clause 7, on non-crime hate incidents, and new clause 150, proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Holden), which would ban sexual relationships between first cousins.

This Bill presents an opportunity for the Government to support my new clause 108 to protect freedom of expression. That is urgently needed, because existing legislation has been manipulated to create a blasphemy law for the protection of Islam from criticism and protest. As I said in my speech last week, I am not a Muslim, and I reject any attempt to tell me that I cannot say what I think about any religion. No ideas or beliefs should be above criticism or scrutiny.

4.45 pm

The transformation of the Public Order Act 1986, which has become Britain’s de facto blasphemy law, needs to be reversed. Sections 4 and 5 of the Act are

now used to prosecute individuals for expressing legitimate opinions. The law is being twisted, making the protester responsible for the potentially violent reaction of those who cannot deal with criticism of their beliefs.

The introduction of offences for religious hatred back in 2006 raised enough concerns about free speech from parliamentarians across the spectrum to lead to section 29J of the Public Order Act. The legislation protecting freedom of expression states clearly:

“Nothing in this Part shall be read or given effect in a way which prohibits or restricts discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents”.

That was very welcome, but it applies only to part 3 of the Act. That is why my amendment would extend section 29J to the whole of the Public Order Act, to section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988 and to section 127 of the Communications Act 2003.

People from across the country have written to me expressing their support for my new clause, as I introduced it in a similar form in a ten-minute rule Bill last week. I thank in particular Fiyaz Mughal from Tell MAMA for his support. Some have expressed concern for my safety in making this case; in so doing, they reinforce just how grave the crisis of our freedom of expression has become.

It has been encouraging to receive cross-party support for my new clause, but I am disappointed, although not terribly surprised, that not one Member from the Liberal Democrats has supported it or voiced their opposition to the revival in this debate and recently of blasphemy laws. That is not very liberal, not very democratic and not very appropriate for the party of Gladstone.

This Government and political leaders in general must be much braver and more honest about how we deal with the threat to free speech from the threat of violence, but we see the opposite. When I have asked questions about this issue, Ministers have stuck to their lines to take, insisting that we

“do not have a blasphemy law”—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 168.]

in this country, when everyone knows that actually, in effect, we do. Even worse, the Government plan to impose a definition of Islamophobia on us that would stop criticism of Islam and Islamic practices, clamp down even more firmly on free speech and empower extremists while letting down the pluralists and moderates in the British Muslim population.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a really impassioned speech. In some ways, I agree with elements of what he is saying; I was involved in extensive discussion with the humanists recently about exactly this issue. A gentleman was prosecuted for burning a Koran, and he just wanted to express his displeasure to the Turkish Government. Does the hon. Gentleman not think it would be preferable to ensure that the law is being adhered to correctly by those who administer it in the courts, rather than trying to bring in an additional law that could damage religious relations in some way?

Nick Timothy: I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution, but the point is that the courts are interpreting the law as they see it. If we in this place believe that interpretation to be wrong, it is our job to correct it through legislation, and I think the appropriate way to do so would be to extend section 29J of the Act in the way I have described.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jess Phillips): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Nick Timothy: I do not know whether the Minister is allowed to intervene, but she would be welcome to do so. *[Interruption.]* She has been here longer than I have.

Jess Phillips: We did discuss whether or not I was allowed to intervene. I have been involved with cases of harassment and malicious communications involving antisemitism and anti-Jewish hatred. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that criticising Jewish people should be allowed?

Nick Timothy: No, I think the Minister has misunderstood my point. Actually, I was about to move on to a related issue, which is that hating people and discriminating against them on the basis that they are Muslims, or indeed members of different religious groups, is already a crime. If someone were harassing Jewish people in the way that the Minister has just described, that would be a criminal offence, even if my amendment passed. However, as I was saying, Islamophobia is a made-up and nonsensical concept that elides the protection of individuals from hatred with the protection of ideas and beliefs, and—in my view—is therefore completely unacceptable in principle.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): Can I ask the hon. Gentleman what he would like me to tell the family of Mohammed Saleem, the 80-year-old grandfather who was stabbed simply for being a Muslim?

Nick Timothy: That was obviously an appalling crime—I remember it very well—but I do not think it has anything to do with what I am saying in this debate.

In a free and pluralistic society, we have to be free to criticise ideas. There are laws to protect people, but we cannot have laws that protect ideas from scrutiny or criticism. However, the Government are pressing on with their work on Islamophobia. Only this week, on the very day that Baroness Casey said that the rape gangs were often not prosecuted because of the ethnicity of the perpetrators, Ministers launched a consultation on the new Islamophobia definition. That consultation is open only to carefully selected, invited organisations; it will last for only four weeks; and it allows contributors to remain anonymous. In other words, as lots of people have put it to me, it is rigged, and that is completely unacceptable. Parliament repealed blasphemy laws years ago, and trials for blasphemy had stopped many decades back in any case, but they are with us once more. Parliament must act to restore our freedom of expression.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): Briefly, I would like to express my support for new clause 11. I declare my interest, as I am chair of the RMT parliamentary group and this issue is part of our campaigning, particularly given the rising number of assaults on bus drivers at the moment. I also express my support for new clause 13, and congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson) on her determined campaign on the joint enterprise initiative. Of course, I also support new clause 50, which deals with the right to protest, and who could not support new clause 122 after the speeches we have heard from Labour Members today?

I want to raise an anomaly that has arisen in debates about terrorism legislation since 2020. I do not want to go into too much technical detail, but basically, section 69(3) of the Sentencing Act 2020 gave the Crown Prosecution Service the power to allege a terrorist connection

“if the offence... (a) is, or takes place in the course of, an act of terrorism, or (b) is committed for the purposes of terrorism.”

The implementation of that legislation meant that if an offence was determined to have a terrorist connection, the sentences became aggravated and harsher restrictions were imposed, both within prison and on release. I believe that had cross-party support—there was no problem with it.

However, in 2021, the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act came along. The powers in the Sentencing Act related to schedule 1 offences such as murder, kidnapping and hijacking—things that we would naturally consider to be terrorism. The Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act extended the use of that definition to an offence that is

“punishable on indictment with imprisonment for more than 2 years”.

By moving away from a schedule of offences, almost any offence before the Crown court meeting that definition was brought into consideration. For example, protest cases involving damages of more than £5,000 became interpreted as terrorist-connected cases.

When we have had discussions about terrorism, we have always had problems with definition. Lord Carlile did a report for us way back in 2007, and he said that jury trial is one of the guards that can assist in protecting us from the misinterpretation of the range of definition. He said that

“jury trial provides an important protection against prosecutions the public find unreasonable or arbitrary.”

The problem is that the use of this section of the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021 does not involve juries. Such things are not brought before a jury; it is applied only by the judge at sentencing.

As a result, we have found that since late 2024, the provisions in the 2021 Act have been deployed for the first time against protesters. Someone who has possibly committed criminal damage, aggravated burglary or, yes, violent disorder in a protest activity now finds themselves with a terrorist connection allegation. That will never be brought before a jury, because it will be applied only at sentencing. Amnesty International has expressed its concern about direct action protests being subject to the UK’s overly broad definition of terrorism laws, which are

“open to misuse and abuse”.

Four UN rapporteurs have expressed their concerns to the Government about the misuse of the terrorism legislation in this instance. They have said that the legislation is being used against political prisoners, which is raising concerns about the potential infringement of their fundamental rights.

I raise that issue here because an increasing number of cases are being trapped by a misinterpretation of the legislation that we brought forward in 2020 and 2021. That is resulting, I think, in injustices and miscarriages of justice, an anomaly which we will have to address at

[John McDonnell]

some point if we do not address in this Bill, to correct a crucial misinterpretation of what this House intended back in 2021.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): The speaking limit is now reduced to four minutes.

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): I will not be able to speak to all the amendments that Members have worked so hard on and that I have supported so many times by putting my name to them, but the Members know that I support them. New clauses 21, 25, 13, 18, 10, 43 and, in particular, new clause 122 are all important proposals that the Government should listen to. I do not support new clause 7 from the official Opposition, and I cannot support new clauses 2 and 3, as I do not believe there is any evidence that those measures would help make sex workers safer. We have to respect evidence and listen to sex workers and their voices on these issues.

Principally, I rise today to speak to my new clauses 26, 27, 109, 30 and 49, and new clause 50 from the hon. Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel). First, new clause 26 would require the Home Office to publish quarterly data on antisocial behaviour orders, including the number of times that stop-and-search powers were used prior to such orders being issued and the protected characteristics of individuals who receive those orders. That is important scrutiny to make sure the powers are being exercised fairly.

New clause 27 would enable regulations to vary the ability of police forces to use stop-and-search powers. Specifically, it would require the Government to suspend the use of those powers by any police force subject to Engage status under His Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services. If a force has reached the point of requiring formal monitoring due to systemic issues, it is right that the most intrusive and abused police powers are subject to heightened scrutiny or even suspension.

New clause 30 would prohibit the deployment and use of certain forms of "predictive" policing technologies, particularly those that rely on automated decision-making, profiling and artificial intelligence, to assess the likelihood that individuals or groups will commit criminal offences. My hon. Friends will recognise that danger. Such technologies, however cleverly sold, will always need to be built on existing, flawed police data, or data from other flawed and biased public and private sources. That means that communities that have historically been over-policed will be more likely to be identified as being "at risk" of future criminal behaviour. As I have always said in the context of facial recognition, questions of accuracy and bias are not the only reason to be against these technologies. At their heart they infringe human rights, including the right to privacy and the right to be presumed innocent.

5 pm

My new clause 49 and new clause 50, tabled by the hon. Member for Leeds Central and Headingley (Alex Sobel), are intended to preserve our right to protest. My new clause would remove the definition of "serious disruption" from the Public Order Act 2023.

That new concept was extremely broad and led to arbitrary application and confusion, with police imposing criminal sanctions and other anti-protest measures on actions that simply did not qualify. Liberty recently won a judicial review case in the Court of Appeal related to the Public Order Act 1986 (Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community) Regulations 2023. The regulations sought to define the phrase "serious disruption", but the court sided with Liberty. However, because the same wording as that which was challenged was used in section 34 of the Public Order Act, the definition remains in force.

Leaving it in place is legally confusing, and could breach our obligations under articles 10 and 11 of the European convention on human rights.

I therefore urge my colleagues to support the new clauses.

Michael Wheeler (Worsley and Eccles) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and my membership of the trade union USDAW.

I rise to support new clause 48, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Anneliese Midgley). Before becoming a Member of Parliament, I was proud to campaign for many years alongside retail workers as part of USDAW's Freedom From Fear campaign, which successfully highlighted the epidemic of abuse and violence faced by retail workers and brought together workers, employers and sectoral bodies. For years there has been consensus outside this place that something needs to be done, but here there has been no consensus. Warm words did not lead to the necessary action from the last Government. The sacrifices made by retail workers during the pandemic were quickly forgotten, and given that the latest figures from USDAW show that one in 10 retail workers and one in eight delivery drivers have been assaulted at work in the past 12 months, it is well past time for us all to remember that these are frontline workers providing a vital service. That is why the introduction of a new stand-alone offence of assaulting a retail worker is so vital and so welcome.

Too many workers have suffered life-changing injuries while simply trying to enforce the law or provide a service. Upholding age-restricted sales is a key part of their role, bringing with it unique challenges. It is not a small responsibility, but a legal duty that often acts as a flashpoint for abuse. Failure to comply carries serious consequences for the worker, including disciplinary action or prosecution. We in this Chamber put that duty on them, we hold them accountable, and we need to give them the protection that they deserve. The new stand-alone offence will provide a clear deterrent, give prosecutors better tools, and send a powerful message to offenders that abuse will not be tolerated.

Rachel Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for supporting the new clause and for signing it, along with other Members. Does he agree that our hard-working delivery drivers in the freight and logistics sector also need such backing, given that they often face attacks at knifepoint while delivering what our country needs?

Michael Wheeler: I welcome my hon. Friend's intervention, but I do not need to interrupt my speech, because I am about to deal with exactly that point.

New clause 48 would create a specific offence along similar lines to cover delivery workers, which is incredibly welcome. These workers deserve protection just as much as in-store staff. They, too, are required to enforce the law and conduct age checks, and this Bill places additional requirements on them regarding the delivery of knives. But unlike in-store staff, they carry out their work without the safety net of colleagues, security or familiar surroundings. As is the case in Scotland following the passage of the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021, home delivery drivers must be included. It is only right that delivery workers in England and Wales receive equal protection, which must not stop at the shop door.

We should never underestimate the important contributions of retail workers. They serve our communities, bring essentials to our doors and keep the nation fed. Without them, the country would grind to a halt. New clause 48 provides the opportunity to give retail workers the protection they so obviously deserve, and I urge hon. Members to take that opportunity and to send a clear message from this place that abuse is not part of the job.

Esther McVey: I rise to support new clause 144, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton West (Matt Vickers). On Monday, the Government hastily came to the House to deliver yet another U-turn and to announce a national inquiry into rape gangs. It is apparent that this U-turn was forced on them, because whenever any member of the public or Member of Parliament said that they wanted a national inquiry, the response from the Government was that they were “far right”, “jumping on a bandwagon” or even blowing a “dog whistle”—those were the words used by Ministers on the Front Bench.

This was a hasty U-turn. In fact, those on the Government Front Bench were somewhat taken aback, as it appears that the Prime Minister had appointed Baroness Casey of Blackstock in the hope that the whole thing would go away and that the inquiry would not happen. She said that she changed her mind because of the weight of evidence that confronted her. Her words were, “I think I have surprised people in Downing Street and beyond.” She did, and the clincher was that the local inquiries were inadequate, because local authorities could decide whether they were going to commission an inquiry and the Government would not intervene. She also said that of the five local inquiries, only one came forward—that was in Oldham. There was reluctance from local areas to face up to the facts and to accept their failings. Denial ran through absolutely everything.

Denial is like a poisonous thread: it weaves its way through all public bodies, strangles the truth and stops justice coming forward. It is essential that an investigation is held into all the failings of the police, local authorities, prosecutors, charities and political parties. The Prime Minister himself was in denial until Saturday, when the U-turn was forced upon him. He often brandishes his credentials as the former director of public prosecutions, and in 2014 he penned an article for the *Guardian* in which he acknowledged that there were at least 1,400 victims, but he did nothing until the U-turn was forced upon him.

We need to ask questions about the statutory inquiry, because the public need to know the answers. Who will chair the inquiry? What type of inquiry will it be?

It already seems to have been watered down. Will it be independent, a national inquiry or, as it now seems, a national commission? What are the terms of reference? It is not good enough to say that we will hear “in due course”. What are the inquiry’s powers? That is unclear. Will there be judicial powers to subpoena people to give evidence?

Iqbal Mohamed: I welcome the inquiry and the investigation into who was responsible for helping this scourge to continue unabated, but does the right hon. Lady agree that the 20 recommendations of the Jay review urgently need to be implemented and that the inquiry should not delay the implementation of those recommendations?

Esther McVey: The inquiry should not delay that, but the inquiry needs to be done with speed and haste, not be watered down and not brushed under the carpet, because it is essential that the victims’ voices are heard and that they have justice.

The House also needs assurance there will be no exemptions from prosecution in exchange for evidence. It needs to know if witnesses can be compelled to produce documents protected by public interest immunity. When will that happen? It is not good enough that the Home Secretary was saying that it would be three years away, close to a general election. It needs to be done as soon as possible. I also wonder why it will be a statutory inquiry, not a criminal inquiry. Is it because a criminal inquiry can lead to arrest, charges and criminal prosecutions, whereas a statutory inquiry tends to make a series of recommendations to then be acted on? At the end of this inquiry, will we see prosecutions? Will we see deportations?

Time and again, we heard that community cohesion was put above working-class girls. That cannot ever happen again. That issues were not investigated for fear of people being labelled racist cannot ever happen again. If somebody does wrong, the colour of their skin or their religion do not matter: they have done wrong. If they have committed a criminal act it is right that they are brought to justice. This Government will not get away with a watered-down national inquiry. They have been dragged kicking and screaming to deliver a national inquiry. That national inquiry needs to be delivered.

Jacob Collier (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): I rise to speak in strong support of new clause 122, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire and Bedworth (Rachel Taylor). I am proud to be the first signatory to it, as I believe it represents a vital step forward in the protection of some of the most marginalised people in our society.

New clause 122 would amend the Crime and Policing Bill to create aggravated offences where the underlying crime is motivated by hostility because of a person’s sexual orientation, transgender identity, disability or perceived identity. It would align the legal treatment of those forms of hate with the framework that already exists for racially and religiously aggravated offences. It delivers on a promise, a promise that we in the Labour party made in our manifesto to the British people: that we would act to close the gap in our hate crime laws and provide equal protection to LGBT+ people and disabled people in the criminal justice system. It is about living

[Jacob Collier]

up to our values. Labour is the party of equality, fairness before the law and standing with those whose voices have too often been ignored. That is why I joined the Labour party and this amendment is rooted in that tradition.

It is also fitting that we are tabling this new clause in Pride Month and in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling which has caused so much anguish among the trans community. We know the scale of the problem. Hate crimes based on sexual orientation have risen by 112% over the last five years. Against trans people, that figure is 186%. The charity Galop, which supports LGBT+ victims of abuse, saw a 60% increase in referrals in the last year alone. In the year ending March 2024, 11,719 disability hate crime incidents were reported. Shamefully, just 1% of that hate crime involving violence resulted in a charge.

And yet, still, the majority of incidents go unreported. Too many victims still believe the system is not on their side. New clause 122 gives us the opportunity to change that. It would give police and prosecutors a clearer route to charge and convict offenders in a way that truly reflects the nature of these crimes. I know what it means to think twice about how you walk down a street, to pause before holding someone's hand, and to wonder whether that shout from across the road is something that you can ignore or that you cannot afford to ignore. And I know I am not alone in that. I have spoken to my constituents and to people from far beyond, who tell me they do not feel safe reporting hate when it happens. They do not believe they will be taken seriously. There is a profound failure of trust, one that we in this House have a duty to repair.

This is also about dignity. It is about recognising that, whether you are a trans teenager being punched in a park, a gay couple being spat at on the tube, or a disabled man being harassed on his way to work, all people deserve the full protection of the law. They deserve to know that this country is on their side, and that if they are targeted for who they are, justice will not look the other way. New clause 122 would provide vital protection for disabled people, who remain far too invisible in the public conversation around hate crime despite facing damaging harassment, violence and abuse every single day.

This change is recommended by the Law Commission and supported by Stonewall, Galop and Disability Rights UK. I am proud that it is backed by 104 right hon. and hon. Members across the House. People are simply asking to live their lives in peace and have the right support when things go wrong. I hope we can take a step forward in advancing LGBT+ rights and disability rights today.

5.15 pm

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I am proud to follow the hon. Member for Burton and Uttoxeter (Jacob Collier), who made an incredibly powerful speech.

If people do not feel safe in their neighbourhoods, those neighbourhoods will not thrive; children are denied their independence because parents fear letting them walk to school or play in the park, while businesses suffer

from not only the financial impact of shoplifting and worries about the safety of their workers, but the reluctance of customers—especially the elderly—who do not feel safe going out to those shops. When trust between different parts of our community breaks down, the very fabric of our society is weakened. To lead good lives, we all need to feel safe. I therefore welcome the Government's mission for safer streets and the commitment in their manifesto, which rightly stated:

“Visible neighbourhood policing was the cornerstone of the British consent-based model. In too many areas it has been eroded, leaving the police a reactive service focused on crisis response, rather than preventing crime.”

However, actions speak louder than words.

While the promise of thousands of extra police officers is welcome, the National Police Chiefs' Council has made clear that the amount

“falls far short of what is required to fund the Government's ambitions”

and maintain the existing workforce. It fully supports the Government's drive to cut crime and grow officer numbers, but says that for those goals to succeed,

“investment in policing must live up to the ambition.”

Let me bring this closer to home. Dorset is one of the lowest-funded police forces in the country, and I, too, am sad that the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty) is not present to hear me say that I agree with his concerns about the funding formula. I am pleased that Dorset's crime levels are lower than in many other areas, and accept that areas that face daily serious crime need the investment. However, our small, semi-rural towns and villages often feel completely forgotten.

In communities across Mid Dorset and North Poole, organised shoplifting is now on the rise. Offenders know the chances of being caught are slim. I welcome the Bill's inclusion of the offence of assaulting a retail worker on behalf of Michelle, Nicola and Lewis, who have all written to me. One was told by a shoplifter who had been apprehended in her shop,

“I know where you live.”

However, this new offence is meaningless without enough police officers embedded in our neighbourhood. Another retailer told me:

“We have extensive CCTV, headsets, alarm systems, panic buttons and ANPR cameras”

but the individuals involved have no

“respect or fear of police action.”

They realise that the police are not equipped to tackle it, and do not believe the Government think it is “politically important”.

Dorset is home to award-winning beaches, a world heritage coastline and many historic towns and villages. We are less than two hours from London, the home counties and the midlands. Our population swells in the summer, putting huge pressure on police services, yet there is no recognition in police budgets of the need to boost police numbers to reflect the seasonal demand. That is why I support new clauses 85 and 86 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart), which would require minimum levels of neighbourhood policing. Towns like Wimborne and Wareham should not have their resources stripped to support larger coastal towns.

I am also proud to support new clause 122, which would make offences aggravated when motivated by hostility towards sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability. We live in an increasingly divided society, and division and hate in the virtual world are fuelling real-world crime. LGBT+ people are four times more likely to experience violence than their straight counterparts; disabled adults are three times more likely to experience domestic abuse; and half of all transgender people have been sexually assaulted at least once in their lifetime.

That is why I cannot support new clause 7, which would remove the recording and retention of non-crime hate incidents. If we stopped recording those incidents, what would I say to my constituent Samreena, who told me:

“I fled domestic violence. I am a practising Muslim and wear a hijab. Since the day I arrived, I have faced...problems because of my religious identity”?

She says that going to parks, taking the bus and going shopping all feels like a “war zone”. We want safe streets and safe homes, but they will be safe only if they are safe for everyone.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I intend to start Front-Bench speeches at around 5.25 pm.

Paul Davies (Colne Valley) (Lab): It is completely unacceptable for anyone to face abuse, harassment or discrimination due to their race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender identity. Hate crimes have a profound and lasting impact on their victims, as they target the very essence of who a person is.

In the year ending March 2024, over 26,000 hate crimes based on sexual orientation and nearly 5,000 targeting transgender individuals were recorded in England and Wales. These are not just statistics. These are real people, and they represent real trauma and a systemic failure to protect some of the most marginalised members of our society. We have seen this in my constituency with an appalling homophobic attack on a young man outside a local pub only this April. That is why I strongly support new clause 122, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire and Bedworth (Rachel Taylor).

The new clause would create statutory aggravated offences for crimes motivated by hostility towards a person’s sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability—or even the perception of these characteristics. It would also extend protection to those targeted because of their association with individuals from these communities. This amendment is a vital step in recognising the specific harm caused by hate-motivated offences. It ensures that perpetrators of such crimes, whether they involve physical violence, harassment or criminal damage, are held fully accountable under law. It sends a clear message that hate has no place in our society, and that the law will reflect that.

While the amendment strengthens the legal framework, we must acknowledge that legislation alone cannot dismantle prejudice. We must go further. First, we must improve reporting mechanisms. Many LGBTQ and disabled individuals do not report hate crimes due to the fear of being dismissed or retraumatised. Police forces must build trust through community engagement and training that reflects the lived experience of those most affected.

Secondly, we must invest in education. Hatred is not innate; it is learned. Schools must be empowered to deliver inclusive curricula that promote empathy, respect and understanding from an early age. Education is our most powerful tool in preventing hate before it takes root.

Thirdly, we must ensure that support services for victims are fully funded and accessible. That includes mental health support, legal aid and safe spaces for those recovering from trauma. Victims must know that they are not alone and that help is available.

My message is clear: everyone has the right to feel safe, and we must collectively adopt a zero-tolerance stance against hate crime. This amendment is not just a legal reform but a moral imperative, and for us it is a manifesto promise. It reflects the values of the Labour party and wider society, which consist of dignity, equality and justice for all. Let us pass this amendment and continue the work of building a country where everyone can live free from fear and hatred.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Shockat Adam to make the final Back-Bench speech.

Shockat Adam: I would like to speak briefly to the issue of live facial recognition and new clauses 21 and 22 in my name. New clause 21 calls for a ban on live facial recognition because it is not safe, lacks legal legitimacy and is an attack on the fundamental democratic rights of the British people. It is the choice of authoritarian states and dictators and should have no place in British policing, which I remind the Minister is still by consent.

The technology is not safe. It was described by the Court of Appeal as “novel and controversial”. Academics have shown that the technology makes mistakes in the recognition of darker-skinned women in 21% to 35% of cases, yet 99% of light-skinned men were identified correctly. Caucasian females are also not safe—just ask Danielle Horan, who was escorted out of not one but two Home Bargains stores due to an apparent facial recognition mix-up. It is no wonder that the Court of Appeal, in striking down the south Wales experiment, ruled it a breach of public sector equalities duties in failing to recognise possible bias in the algorithms.

Facial recognition lacks legal legitimacy by operating under vague common law powers, unlike DNA or fingerprints. It is also an attack on hard-won democratic rights, undermining the principle that people should not be forced to identify themselves to police without suspicion. It has been used to monitor protesters, thus deterring lawful participation and threatening free assembly, which are some of our most important and enshrined civil liberties. Just ask the protesters picked up in Russia’s underground train stations or protesters and Uyghurs in China. The Government must think again.

New clause 22 calls for broader safeguards on automated decision making to ensure that law enforcement does not solely rely on AI algorithms and that there is always human review of its use. The new clause also calls for transparency, for the rights of people both to know what information is held about them and to contest decisions made by any AI, and to stop abuse by putting in the necessary checks. Those checks must meet high global standards, recommended by human rights organisations, and the best practice standards of our neighbours in the EU. Without human safeguards, the Government are

[*Shockat Adam*]

ushering in a “Minority Report” world—a potential dystopia where the computer simply says no and there is nothing we as individuals can do about it.

Unamended, the Bill is dangerous and intrusive and breaks the fundamental contract between the British people and the police, along with the fundamental right to be considered innocent until proven otherwise. For those who think that that will never happen here, please take a look across the Atlantic. It certainly can happen here. It is time for the Government to admit that they have got this wrong. It is a sign of a strong, not a weak, Government if they listen to the evidence and change course as a result. Live facial recognition is not the answer and will cause more problems than it claims to solve. It needs to go.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): Our communities have been plagued by crime and antisocial behaviour for too long. Change is clearly needed after the former Conservative Government failed to get even the basics right on stopping and solving crime. More than 4,500 police community support officers have been taken off the streets since 2015, and more than 2 million crimes went unsolved across England and Wales in 2024. Even though there are many measures that we welcome in this wide-ranging Bill—we have heard some impassioned speeches today and I look forward to voting in favour of some changes—it remains the case that opportunities for the Government to take real action in a number of areas, from cracking down on sewage dumping and rural crime to supporting a real return to proper neighbourhood policing, have not been taken.

I will focus my remarks on the amendments in my name. The previous Conservative Government let water companies get away with pumping sewage into our rivers and on to our beaches for years, creating an environmental crisis and a public health emergency while the companies’ executives handed themselves huge bonuses. This Government have taken some steps in the right direction, but in our opinion, they have not gone nearly far enough. Everyone deserves the right to enjoy clean, safe rivers in their local communities, yet our waterways have been polluted, often with impunity, by water companies that operate under weak regulation and with the complicity of a negligent Conservative Government, who voted time and again throughout the last Parliament against tougher action on sewage dumping.

The scale of the crisis is undeniable. According to the Government’s own data, there were more than 500,000 sewage spills in 2024 alone, releasing 3.6 million hours’ worth of sewage into our rivers and coastal waters. Today, just 14% of rivers and lakes in the UK are in good ecological health, and despite that environmental failure, water company executives pocketed £20 million in pay and bonuses in the 2023-24 financial year. That is a damning reflection of a system that rewards pollution and punishes the public with higher bills and dirtier rivers. In my Hazel Grove constituency, sewage discharges into water bodies last year cumulatively lasted for almost 200 days. At the Otterspool Road outflow alone, sewage flowed into the beautiful River Goyt for more than 1,000 hours.

The Liberal Democrats have pushed, and will continue to push, to hold the companies and their leadership to account. I particularly commend my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Charlie Maynard) for his efforts in holding Thames Water to account for its failures. Last year, a Liberal Democrat amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill suggested creating an offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels, but it was defeated by the Conservative Government. As we have scrutinised this Bill, it is clear that we are again witnessing a Government that do not go far enough to reform a broken water industry or hold polluters to account. Lib Dems have a plan to do exactly that.

With new clause 87, we would create a new offence of failing to meet pollution commitment levels, while new clause 88 would create senior manager liability for failure to meet those commitment levels. If this Government are serious about ending the national scandal of sewage dumping, they really should stop shielding those responsible and start delivering real accountability.

5.30 pm

The people in our local communities have a right to feel safe walking their streets, but the previous Conservative Government demolished community policing, slashing police community support officer numbers and leaving more crimes than ever unpunished. Our communities massively value the excellent work done by local police teams, so they acutely feel this loss.

I am sure that I am not alone in hearing from constituents about a rise in shop theft—whether it is from pet shops, nail salons or even charity shops—and we have seen that in my own constituency in recent months. I am also sure that I am not alone in hearing reports of people on illegal off-road bikes intimidating residents and causing serious accidents, as they do in Offerton and High Lane in my patch.

Liberal Democrat new clauses 85 and 86 would help to restore community policing—the visible, trusted bobbies on the beat. These new clauses would guarantee minimum levels of neighbourhood policing and require every local authority in England and Wales to have a dedicated team assigned solely to community-based duties.

Luke Taylor: Was my hon. Friend as surprised as I was to hear the contribution from the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty), who seemed to ridicule the concept of having a minimum level of policing for communities, which would surely protect them and help to prevent thefts of farm equipment, which was the example he gave in his speech.

Lisa Smart: I do not know why anybody would be against a minimum level of neighbourhood policing. It was in this Government’s manifesto that they wanted to see a proper restoration of neighbourhood policing. It is the model that has the most trust and the most support from my community—and, I am pretty sure, everybody’s community—and it seems daft, frankly, to oppose such a measure.

Ben Obese-Jecty: At no point did I say that I was against minimum levels of neighbourhood policing. I merely pointed out that the Liberal Democrats’ new clause is simply not good enough in articulating that point. This is where I would encourage the Liberal Democrats to put pressure on the Policing Minister to change the police allocation formula.

Lisa Smart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for timing his arrival to the Chamber so beautifully—that is a skill. I agree with him about the importance of neighbourhood policing. I also agree that the funding formula should put enough weight behind neighbourhood policing so that all our communities that need that strong neighbourhood policing get it. *[Interruption.]* I cannot hear the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy), who is speaking from a sedentary position, but I would be delighted to take an intervention.

Nick Timothy: I was inviting the hon. Lady to withdraw what she and her colleague said about my hon. Friend, because it was incorrect.

Lisa Smart: I do not recall mentioning the hon. Member's hon. Friend; I said that somebody saying that it was incorrect to have minimum levels of neighbourhood policing was daft, and I hold to that belief.

New clauses 83 and 84 relate to rural crime. In rural areas, organised gangs target farm machinery, vehicles and GPS equipment, the cost of which soared to more than £52 million in 2023, according to the National Farmers' Union. And I heard for myself, when I met local farmers recently, about the impact that organised fly-tipping and equipment theft have. I must applaud the work of my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Ben Maguire), who has been remarkably effective in pushing the Government on this area. In particular, he secured from the Home Secretary a commitment to establish a new rural and wildlife crime strategy, which of course is welcome. Liberal Democrat new clauses 83 and 84 would extend the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 to explicitly include the theft of GPS equipment and establish a rural crime taskforce to ensure that the new rural and wildlife crime strategy can be as effective as possible.

Something that is discussed often in this House is a duty of candour, and its introduction is a commitment that I welcome from this Government. Justice must be accessible to all, and survivors should never have their trauma compounded by Governments and courts that fail to uncover the truth and hold those responsible to account—as happened after the Hillsborough disaster. It continues to be deeply disappointing to see how slow this Government have been in implementing a legal duty of candour.

New clause 89 would ensure that police officers must be open and honest in all investigations and oversight processes, sharing relevant information proactively and truthfully. Failure to do so would lead to misconduct charges, including serious consequences for intentional or reckless breaches.

Too many police officers are struggling to access the mental health support they need, with a growing number on mental health leave as a result, so new clause 90 seeks to deal with that issue. We would require every police force to ensure that all police get proper training on how to deal with that.

I will conclude by commending my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mike Martin) on his work on new clause 43. He is dressed in the colours of all parties, representing the cross-party work he has carried out to get support for it. I urge the Government and colleagues across the House to back

that new clause and the changes that I have outlined so that our communities get the action they so urgently need.

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

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): I may have said it yesterday, but it cannot be said enough: once again, I pay tribute to the hard work of police officers, PCSOs and police staff across the country. They put themselves in harm's way every day to keep our streets safe, under immense pressure. I hope that every Member across the House will join me in thanking them for their service.

Yesterday I mentioned the Opposition's support for many of the measures in the Bill, although given that the vast majority are carried over from the previous Government's Criminal Justice Bill, it is probably no great surprise. Enforcing the Bill will require resources. I have already outlined concerns about funding for our police forces and the devastating impact that will have on frontline police numbers. I asked that question of the Minister yesterday, and I am not quite sure I heard an answer. Will the Minister confirm whether there will be more police officers at the end of this Parliament than the record high levels achieved by the last Government in March 2024? *[Interruption.]* Yes, the highest number on record.

I turn to new clause 130, which relates to tool theft, and I declare an interest as the son of a builder.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: Not a toolmaker?

Matt Vickers: He is not a toolmaker, no.

Tool theft is completely out of control, and I know the impact it has on people's lives. Research from Direct Line shows that 45,000 tool thefts were reported to the police in a single year, amounting to one every 12 minutes. This country is built on the back of our tradesmen—they are the small businesses that make a huge contribution to our economy and literally build the world around us. Just imagine getting up at daft o'clock to go to work and earn a living, leaving the house only to find your van has been completely raided and all the tools stolen. The ability to work is stolen as well. The impact is huge: it is not only the cost of replacing the stolen tools, but days of lost work and disappointed customers, many of whom may have taken a day off work themselves. The issue is made worse still when tradesmen go to car boot sales only to see stolen equipment being sold in broad daylight, with no action taken by the authorities.

In recent months I have been campaigning alongside tradesmen for real action on this issue. Just last week the Leader of the Opposition and my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) met tradesmen, businesses and the police to hear at first hand about the impact. We heard from campaigners, including the gas expert Shoaib Awan and Frankie from On The Tools, alongside affected businesses such as Checktrade, Balfour Beatty and BT Openreach.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): If the Conservatives had won a 15th year in government, would they have started to tackle this epidemic?

Matt Vickers: One of the things we were doing was putting record funding into policing and putting a record number of police on the streets. The one thing we were not doing was taxing our police forces off the streets. We were making huge progress.

I would also like to mention Sergeant Dave Catlow of the Metropolitan police, who joined us last week. He is doing great work on this issue.

New clause 130 proposes three key changes. First, fines for perpetrators would equate to the cost of replacing equipment, repairing the damage caused and the loss of work. Secondly, theft of tools would be treated as an aggravated offence, meaning tougher sentences for the crooks who steal tradesmen's vital equipment. Finally, councils would be required to put in place an enforcement plan to crack down on the sale of stolen tools at car boot sales.

I will also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Amanda Martin) for her campaigning on this issue. I know how much she, too, wants to see action on tool theft. As the Minister knows, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) brought the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 through the House. It could make a real difference on this issue. Will the Minister confirm when the Government will table a statutory instrument to put it into action?

I turn to non-crime hate incidents. New clause 7 would change legislation and guidance to remove the recording and retention of non-crime hate incidents. The use of non-crime hate incidents has spiralled out of all control and well beyond its originally intended purpose. The deal should be simple: if the law is broken, justice must be served. But non-crime hate incidents are a different beast—you did not break the law; you just said something daft and ended up logged on police records like a criminal. We need our police on the streets, not policing hurty words on Twitter. We have all seen the utterly barmy story of a nine-year-old who insulted another pupil in the playground. Is that unkind? Yes, of course it is. But instead of a quiet word with a teacher or a call to the parents, the police were brought in. I appeal to Members across the House—would they want that happening to their child, or would they rather give them a proper telling-off at home?

This also has a bigger effect. Our police officers are being tied up documenting playground spats and Twitter comments, treating childish jibes like national security threats, while real crimes such as burglary, robbery and even violent offences are being pushed to the back of the queue. In fact, research from Policy Exchange has found that, nationally, over 60,000 police hours are being spent on non-crime hate incidents. Our police need to get back to keeping our streets safe, not policing silly words or childish playground issues.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to draw the House's attention to some of the Opposition's other amendment that could protect our communities and keep our streets safe. We would have been voting today on new clause 144 to secure that national statutory inquiry into grooming gangs—a scandal that is our country's shame. Child sexual exploitation ruins lives; preying on the most vulnerable in our communities, exploiting them for horrific sexual acts and often coercing them into a life of crime. A national inquiry is what the

victims wanted, so I am glad that the Prime Minister has finally U-turned, given into the pressure and joined what he described as the far-right bandwagon of people who wanted a national inquiry.

As the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, we must not have another whitewash. The national inquiry must ask the hard questions and leave no stone unturned. Criminal investigations must run in parallel to the inquiry. It must look at the whole system—Whitehall, the Crown Prosecution Service, the police and local authorities—and wherever there is wrongdoing, there should be prosecutions. Foreign perpetrators must be immediately deported, and the inquiry must be fully independent, with statutory powers covering all relevant towns. Local councils simply cannot be left to investigate themselves.

New clause 125 aims to reinstate people's confidence in policing. We have recently seen the perverse anti-racism commitment issued by the National Police Chiefs' Council. It calls for arrest rates to be artificially engineered to be the same across racial groups. Advice to treat black and white suspects differently is morally indefensible. It is, by definition, two-tier policing. It undermines trust and confidence in our police. This new clause would give the Home Secretary the power to amend or require the withdrawal of any code of practice intended to direct policing practices.

New clause 139 makes provisions in relation to off-road bikes. I know many Members across the House know the havoc being caused by them in local communities. The issue has been raised by Members on both sides of the House numerous times in Westminster Hall and in this place, and the tweak in approach that features in this Bill will simply not be enough. Using alternative legislation, the police are already able to seize off-road bikes without notice. The new clause would remove the prohibition on the police entering a private dwelling to confiscate an off-road bike and ensure that police destroyed seized bikes rather than selling them back into the market. I urge the Minister—in fact, I beg her—to look again comprehensively at how we tackle the scourge of off-road bikes.

I would also like to draw the House's attention to new clause 131, which would introduce mandatory deportation for foreign nationals found in possession of child sexual abuse images. These sick paedophiles have no place in our country and they, along with all foreign offenders, should be deported.

To conclude, the British people want our police to be able to focus on putting real criminals behind bars—the thieves who nick our hard-working tradesmen's tools—not spending time policing playground squabbles and treating them like crimes. Our Opposition new clauses are common-sense changes that I hope the whole House will get behind, protecting victims and restoring policing to what it is meant to be: tackling crime on our streets.

The Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention (Dame Diana Johnson): I thank all hon. and right hon. Members, including the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley), and the Chair of the Justice Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter) who have taken part in the debate, and in particular those who have brought forward new clauses. There are well over 100 new clauses in this group, so I am sure the House

will appreciate that, sadly, I will not be able to cover them all. I will do my best in the time remaining to respond to as many as I can.

5.45 pm

Let me start with the new clauses put forward by my hon. Friends. On new clauses 2 to 4 and 19 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), I fully recognise the concerns she raises and I am deeply sympathetic to the need to disrupt those who profit from the prostitution of mainly women, including through online platforms, to tackle demand for prostitution and to strengthen support for people who have been sexually exploited.

Regarding online platforms, the recently implemented provisions of the Online Safety Act 2023, the ongoing work between law enforcement and Ofcom, and the new powers in this Bill for law enforcement to suspend IP addresses and domain names for up to 12 months will all help tackle online sexual exploitation. We know we need to go further, and the Government are working closely with law enforcement and frontline support services to build an evidence base on how we can tackle online exploitation more effectively.

My hon. Friend will know that, in 2015, the Street Offences Act 1959 was amended to apply the offence of loitering or soliciting only to adults. However, those who were convicted or cautioned for the offence while under 18 still live with the consequences, including reduced employment opportunities. In line with the commitments we made earlier this week arising from the Casey report, I can therefore commit to bringing forward amendments in the Lords to introduce a new disregards and pardons scheme for anyone convicted or cautioned as a child for the offence of loitering or soliciting. Although the offence is rarely used today, I am mindful that on-street prostitution continues to have an impact on local communities, so I cannot commit to the complete repeal of the offence proposed in the new clause until there has been an opportunity to consult properly with communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lowestoft (Jess Asato) and the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) have put forward similar new clauses—102 and 121—that seek to amend the offence of possession of extreme pornographic images. I pay tribute to them for their work on the matter. There is absolutely no place for violent, misogynistic and harmful content online that perpetuates violent views against women and girls and has the effect of doing them great harm. We know that the increasing prevalence of the kind of content outlined in these amendments is fuelling violent sexual encounters. There are issues with the drafting for both new clauses, but the Government support their underlying aim. Accordingly, I am pleased to say that we will bring forward amendments in the Lords to criminalise pornography depicting strangulation and suffocation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lowestoft also has new clauses 103 to 105, which seek to implement other recommendations of Baroness Bertin's pornography review. The sentiment behind the new clauses is important to us all—tackling violence against women and girls is a defining mission of this Government. While we cannot

support new clause 103 today, I reassure her that there is ongoing work in this area and that we will report back on that.

Moving on to new clause 122, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire and Bedworth (Rachel Taylor) for putting forward the new clause and for all her work campaigning in this space. We heard many excellent speeches from hon. Members on this issue. The new clause would make all existing strands of hate crime an aggravated offence. Crimes targeted at disabled, LGBT+ and transgender people are disgraceful, and the shocking figures that she referenced, including the steep increase in hate crimes towards transgender people, cannot be tolerated. She knows that the Government support this change, as we set out in our manifesto last year. I can confirm to the House that in Committee in the Lords we will bring forward a suitable Government amendment to give effect to that commitment.

Let me turn to the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). I want to state first of all my ongoing admiration for her tenacity and persistence in always seeking to protect victims, the voiceless and survivors. The House owes her a huge debt of gratitude for her work in this area. We will consider her excellent contribution today. On new clause 18, I reassure her that the detailed statutory guidance on the new child criminal exploitation offence, which will be used by the police to apply the legislation based on the practical circumstances of cases that they deal with, will include the definition of “child criminal exploitation”, setting out in layman's terms the conduct captured by the offence that amounts to CCE.

I turn now to new clause 43, tabled by the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mike Martin), who referred to his meeting with the Minister for Safeguarding, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips) just yesterday. I reassure him that tackling public sexual harassment is an important part of our mission to halve levels of violence against women and girls in a decade. We are continuing to consider measures to address sex-based harassment, including the commencement of this legislation. The new violence against women and girls strategy will set out improvements in the way that we will tackle sexual harassment. The strategy is due to be published before the summer recess. His new clause would tie commencement of the Act to the timelines of this Bill, however, when it is important that it is brought into force following the conclusion of our work with the police and other agencies, so that its introduction is managed effectively. It therefore needs to be commenced by regulation, in the normal way.

I turn now to new clause 44, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle). She will be aware that the independent domestic homicide sentencing review undertaken by Clare Wade KC, which considered the issue of honour-based abuse, will lead in due course to a number of changes in legislation, particularly on aggravating factors related to controlling or coercive behaviour. We expect those changes to cover many of the instances of honour-based abuse that my hon. Friend wants to address through her new clause. As she will be aware, the Lord Chancellor has asked the Law Commission to undertake a wholesale review of the sentencing framework for murder, as well as of the law relating to homicide offences.

I turn now to the new clauses tabled by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Stockton West (Matt Vickers). He has tabled no fewer than 30 new clauses, which have given me a distinct sense of déjà vu given that we saw them in Committee, where I or my hon. Friends responded to them at length. I am pleased that he tabled new clause 130 for debate today—he made a powerful case for it. I completely acknowledge the importance of taking stronger action against the theft of tools from tradespeople and against the reselling of those stolen tools—a view that he and many other hon. Members set out. We know that it robs tradespeople twice, both of the value of their equipment and of the ability to earn a living.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Amanda Martin) is working closely—

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Dame Diana Johnson: Happy to.

Amanda Martin: I thank the Minister for acknowledging how tool theft affects people's lives. Does she agree that this is not just about police on our streets and arrests, but about sentencing, and will she work with me, across Departments, to ensure that the aggravated circumstances powers that the courts already have reflect the real cost of such crime?

Dame Diana Johnson: Yes, I am very happy to do that. I congratulate my hon. Friend on taking this campaign forward and on being such a worthy advocate for it. We take the issue very seriously and we are fully committed to implementing the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023. We are finalising our plans for commencement and we will update the House in due course.

Nick Timothy: On that point, will the Minister give way?

Dame Diana Johnson: I am going to keep going, because I am conscious that I do not have much time.

To reiterate to the shadow Minister what I said in Committee, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been clear that a consistent and common-sense approach must be taken with non-crime hate incidents. Accordingly, it has been agreed with the National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing that they will conduct a review of this area. I say to the shadow Minister that it was the shadow Home Secretary, when he was the Policing Minister, who introduced the current code of practice and police guidance on non-crime hate incidents. He said:

"The Government fully recognises the importance of ensuring that vulnerable individuals, groups and communities continue to be protected by the police; indeed, this is the purpose of non-crime hate incident recording. We are confident that the code does precisely this."

It seems odd that he said that the approach was right at that stage, but now he wants to scrap it.

On new clause 144, I was disappointed that the right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) seemed to have missed the announcement made by the Home Secretary on Monday, which answered a number of her questions. The shadow Minister did not seem to be aware of the announcement either. Using existing legislation in the Inquiries Act 2005, the independent commission will be

set up under a national inquiry with full powers to compel individuals to testify, with the aim of holding institutions to account for current and historic failures in their response to group-based child sexual exploitation. The Home Secretary was clear that she is accepting all the recommendations from Baroness Casey.

Esther McVey: On that point, will the Minister give way?

Dame Diana Johnson: No, I am going to carry on.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) mentioned new clauses 87 and 88. This Government have been clear that water companies must accelerate action to reduce pollution to the environment. The Water (Special Measures) Act, which received Royal Assent earlier this year, significantly strengthens the power of the regulators and delivers on the Government's commitment to put failing water companies under special measures. Among other measures, the Act introduced automatic penalties on polluters and banned bonuses for water company executives if they fail to meet adequate standards.

Esther McVey: On that point, will the Minister give way?

Dame Diana Johnson: No.

On new clauses 85 and 86 about neighbourhood policing, it is clear that this Government are starting to implement our neighbourhood policing guarantee.

On new clause 13, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson), the Government recognise the serious consequences that can result from joint enterprise convictions. However, joint enterprise ensures that those who act together in committing a crime are all held responsible. We saw that in the cases of Ben Kinsella and Garry Newlove, as well as many others. We are aware of the concerns raised by my hon. Friend and we will continue to look at that.

I apologise to right hon. and hon. Members for not being able to get through all 100 amendments that were tabled. I also need to leave time for the person whose new clause leads the group to respond.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the new clause.

New clause 2, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 7

ABOLITION OF NON-CRIME HATE INCIDENTS

"(1) Non-crime hate incidents as a special category of incident to be recognised by police authorities are abolished. Reporting, recording and investigation of such incidents should occur only in the limited circumstances provided for in this section.

(2) For the purposes of Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR, section 35 of the Data Protection Act 2018 ("the Act") and Article 8 of the Law Enforcement Directive, the processing of relevant data by a police authority is unlawful.

(3) In this section, "relevant data" means personal data relating to the conduct or alleged of a data subject which is unlikely to constitute criminal conduct and which has been perceived by another person to be motivated (wholly or partly) by hostility or prejudice towards one or more persons who have or who are or have been perceived to have one or more relevant characteristics and with that hostility or prejudice arising due to that or the perception of those protected characteristics.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (3), the following are relevant characteristics—

- (a) race,
- (b) religion,
- (c) sexual orientation,
- (d) disability,
- (e) transgender identity.

(5) Subsection (2) does not apply in respect of the processing of relevant data—

- (a) pursuant to an ongoing criminal investigation or prosecution,
- (b) for the purposes of the internal administrative functions of the police authority.

(6) Subsection (2) does not apply in respect of the retention of a record (a “non-crime perception record”) of relevant data where a police officer (the “certifying officer”) of the rank of inspector or above certifies that in their opinion the retention of the non-crime perception record is likely materially to assist in the detection or prevention of criminal conduct which may occur in the future.

(7) Where a certifying officer certifies the retention of a non-crime perception record pursuant to subsection (6)—

- (a) the certifying officer must include in the record a description of the future criminal conduct they have in mind and the reasons they believe that the retention of the record may assist in its detection or prevention,
- (b) the relevant data which may be retained as part of the record may be no more than the certifying officer believes is likely materially to assist in the detection or prevention of criminal conduct,
- (c) a copy of the record must be expeditiously provided to the data subject unless an officer of the rank of superintendent or above certifies that—
 - (i) the provision of the record to the data subject may interfere in the detection or prevention of criminal conduct, or
 - (ii) the officer is satisfied that it is not reasonably practicable to provide a copy of the record to the data subject.

(8) If the data subject objects to the retention of the non-crime perception record, subsection (6) does not apply unless a police officer of the rank of superintendent or above certifies that in their opinion the retention of the non-crime perception record is likely materially to assist in the detection or prevention of criminal conduct which may occur in the future.

(9) No police authority or police officer can be held under any circumstances to be under any duty to undertake the retention of any relevant data.

(10) After subsection 113B(3) of the Police Act 1997 insert—

“(3A) An enhanced criminal record certificate must not give the details of a relevant matter to the extent that doing so would result in the disclosure of relevant data as defined in section (The retention by the police of non-crime perception records) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025.”

(11) For subsection 39A(3) of the Police Act 1996 substitute—

“(3) No part of any Code of Practice issued by the College of Policing may be in a form which could be issued by the Secretary of State pursuant to section 60 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.”

(12) Section 60 the 2022 Act is to be amended as follows—

- (a) the cross heading to be changed to “Non-crime perception records”,
- (b) the section heading to be changed to “Code of practice relating to non-crime perception records”,
- (c) in subsection (1) leave out from “by” to the end of the subsection and insert “of relevant data”,
- (d) omit subsection (2),

(e) in subsection (3)(a), leave out “personal data relating to a hate incident” and insert “relevant data”,

(f) in subsections (3)(b), (c), (d) and (e), for “such personal data” substitute “relevant data”,

(g) in subsection (4)(a), for “personal data” substitute “relevant data”,

(h) in subsection (4)(b), leave out “personal data relating to the alleged perpetrator of a hate incident” and insert “relevant data relating to the alleged perpetrator”,

(i) in subsection (7), at end, insert “relevant data” has the meaning given by section (The retention by the police of non-crime perception records) of the Crime and Policing Act 2025”.

(13) Any code of practice previously issued under section 60 of the 2022 Act is deemed to be withdrawn.

(14) Within three months of the commencement of each calendar year, each police authority which is retaining non-crime perception records must—

- (a) undertake a review of the relevant data by an independent person to ensure that any retention of such records is in compliance with the provisions of this section.
- (b) publish a report in respect of the review prepared by the independent person including setting—
 - (i) the total number of non-crime perception records retained by the police authority;
 - (ii) the total number of data subject to which those records relate; and
 - (iii) the equivalent numbers of those records added in the previous year.

(15) In this section—

- (a) “a police authority” means—
 - (i) a person specified or described in paragraphs 5 to 17 of Schedule 7 of the Act,
 - (ii) a person acting under the authority of such a person,
- (b) the terms “data subject”, “processing” and “the UK GDPR” have the same meanings as under section 3 of the Act,
- (c) “the Law Enforcement Directive” means the Directive (EU) 2016/680 of the European Parliament,
- (d) “the 2022 Act” means the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.”—(*Matt Vickers.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 102, Noes 390.

Division No. 234]

[5.59 pm

AYES

Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 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
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Burghart, Alex
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Cleverly, rh Sir 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
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John

Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 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
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McMurdock, James
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pochin, Sarah

Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Rankin, Jack
 Reed, David
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Andrew Snowden and
David Simmonds

NOES

Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Adam, Shockat
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Aquarone, Steff
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)
 Bell, Torsten
 Bennett, Alison

Berry, Siân
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brewer, Alex
 Brickell, Phil
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Buckley, Julia
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Cane, Charlotte
 Carling, Sam
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Carns, Al
 Chadwick, David
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Chowns, Ellie
 Clark, Feryal

Coghlan, Chris
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Collins, Victoria
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Darlington, Emily
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Dean, Bobby
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla
 Dickson, Jim
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Farron, Tim
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Foster, Mr Paul (*Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers*)
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Franklin, Zöe
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan

George, Andrew
 German, Gill
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldman, Marie
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gordon, Tom
 Gosling, Jodie
 Grady, John
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Harding, Monica
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jermy, Terry
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Clive
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Ayoub
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyle, rh Peter
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lake, Ben

Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 MacCleary, James
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 MacNae, Andy
 Maguire, Ben
 Martin, Amanda
 Martin, Mike
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayer, Alex
 Maynard, Charlie
 McAllister, Douglas
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty
 Medi, Llinos
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moon, Perran
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
 Morden, Jessica
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morris, Joe
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Murray, Susan
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Olney, Sarah
 Onn, Melanie
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren

Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Sarah
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sabine, Anna
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slade, Vikki
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sollom, Ian
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Jamie
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Luke
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam

Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Voaden, Caroline
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew

Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilkinson, Max
 Williams, David
 Wilson, Munira
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Wrigley, Martin
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Young, Claire
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Anna McMorris and
 Martin McCluskey**

Question accordingly negated.

6.13 pm

Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 17 June).

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

New Clause 43

COMMENCEMENT OF THE PROTECTION FROM SEX-BASED HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC ACT

“(1) Section 4 of the Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023 is amended as follows.

(2) Leave out subsections (3) and (4) and insert—

‘(3) Sections 1, 2 and 3 come into force on the day that the Crime and Policing Act 2025 receives Royal Assent.’—
(Mike Martin.)

This new clause automatically commences Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023 when the Crime and Policing Bill receives Royal Assent, removing the need for regulations to bring the Act into force. The Act criminalises the public harassment of individuals where that harassment is based on an individual’s sex.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 147, Noes 305.

Division No. 235]

[6.14 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Blackman, Bob

Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cane, Charlotte
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Cartledge, James
 Chadwick, David
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chowns, Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cocking, Lewis
 Coghlan, Chris

Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Gareth
 Denyer, Carla
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farron, Tim
 Foord, Richard
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Franklin, Zöe
 French, Mr Louie
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Green, Sarah
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Khan, Ayoub
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, Peter
 Lamont, John
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lowe, Rupert
 MacCleary, James
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Martin, Mike

Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 McMurdock, James
 Medi, Llinos
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murray, Susan
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Olney, Sarah
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Reed, David
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Sabine, Anna
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Simmonds, David
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stone, Jamie
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swann, Robin
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Voaden, Caroline
 Wilkinson, Max
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bobby Dean and
Mr Will Forster

NOES

Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara

Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas

Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Buckley, Julia
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Clark, Feryal
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris

Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul (*Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers*)
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen

Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor

Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, Emma
 Rhodes, Martin
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Sarah
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie

Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad

Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Anna McMorris and
 Martin McCluskey

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 88

SENIOR MANAGER LIABILITY FOR FAILURE TO MEET POLLUTION PERFORMANCE COMMITMENT LEVELS

“(1) A person (‘P’) commits an offence where—

- (a) P is a senior manager of a water or water and sewerage company (‘C’),
- (b) C commits an offence under section [Offence of failing to meet pollution performance commitment levels], and
- (c) P has failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent that offence being committed by C.

(2) For the purposes of this section—

- ‘senior manager’ means an individual who plays a significant role in—
 - (a) the making of decisions about how C’s relevant activities are to be managed or organised, or
 - (b) the actual managing or organising of C’s relevant activities;

(3) Where P is charged with an offence under this section, it is a defence for P to show that P was a senior manager of C for such a short time during the relevant period that P could not reasonably have been expected to take steps to prevent that offence being committed by C.

(4) Where P is guilty of an offence under this section, P is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction, to a fine;
- (b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine.”—(*Lisa Smart.*)

This new clause creates senior manager liability for failure to meet pollution performance commitment levels.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 178, Noes 313.

Division No. 236]

[6.26 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat	Burghart, Alex
Amos, Gideon	Cane, Charlotte
Anderson, Lee	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Anderson, Stuart	Cartlidge, James
Andrew, rh Stuart	Chadwick, David
Aquarone, Steff	Chamberlain, Wendy
Argar, rh Edward	Chambers, Dr Danny
Atkins, rh Victoria	Chope, Sir Christopher
Bacon, Gareth	Chowns, Ellie
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Cleverly, rh Sir James
Barclay, rh Steve	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Bedford, Mr Peter	Cocking, Lewis
Bennett, Alison	Coghlan, Chris
Berry, Siân	Collins, Victoria
Bhatti, Saqib	Cooper, Daisy
Blackman, Bob	Cooper, John
Bool, Sarah	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Costa, Alberto
Braverman, rh Suella	Coutinho, rh Claire (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)
Brewer, Alex	Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Cross, Harriet

Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Gareth
 Denyer, Carla
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dyke, Sarah
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farron, Tim
 Foord, Richard
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Franklin, Zöe
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Anna Sabine*)
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Green, Sarah
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Khan, Ayoub
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kruger, Danny
 Lake, Ben
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 Lowe, Rupert
 MacCleary, James
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Martin, Mike
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 McMurdock, James

McVey, rh Esther
 Medi, Llinos
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Olney, Sarah
 Paul, Rebecca
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Reed, David
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Sabine, Anna
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Simmonds, David
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Wild, James
 Wilkinson, Max
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bobby Dean and
Mr Will Forster

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Buckley, Julia
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Clark, Feryal
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul (*Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers*)
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire

Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh

Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, Emma
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Sarah
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Jamie
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel

Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie

Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Martin McCluskey and
Anna McMorris

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 121

AMENDMENT OF POSSESSION OF EXTREME PORNOGRAPHIC IMAGES

“(1) Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (possession of extreme pornographic images) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (7) after paragraph (a) insert—

“(aa) an act which affects a person’s ability to breathe and constitutes battery of that person.””.—(*Dame Caroline Dinenage.*)

This amendment would extend the legal definition of the extreme pornography to include the depiction of nonfatal strangulation.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 114, Noes 310.

Division No. 237]

[6.37 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)
 Berry, Siân
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bool, Sarah
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Burghart, Alex
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartlidge, James
 Chowns, Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir 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, Ann
 Davies, Gareth
 Denyer, Carla
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard

Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Khan, Ayoub
 Kruger, Danny
 Lake, Ben
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 Lowe, Rupert
 Mak, Alan
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McMurdock, James
 McVey, rh Esther
 Medi, Llinos
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)

Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Reed, David
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Andrew Snowden and
Gregory Stafford

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Buckley, Julia
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Clark, Feryal
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily

Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul (*Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers*)
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran

Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)

Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, Emma
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Sarah
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo

Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Martin McCluskey and
Anna McMorris

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 130

THEFT OF TOOLS: PREVENTION OF RE-SALE AND PROSECUTION OF OFFENCES

- (1) The Equipment Theft Act 2023 is amended as follows.
- (2) In section 3 (Enforcement), subsection (2) at end insert “equal to—
- (a) the replacement cost of the equipment,
 - (b) the cost of repairing any damage caused during the theft, and
 - (c) the trading losses incurred by the offended party.”
- (3) In section 3 (Enforcement), after subsection (3) insert—
- “(3A) An enforcement authority must put in place an enforcement plan to enforce regulations made under section 1 at temporary markets in their area.”

(4) The Sentencing Act 2020 is amended as follows.

(5) In Chapter 3, Aggravating Factors, after section 72 insert—

‘72A Theft of tools from tradesmen

- (1) This section applies where the court is considering the seriousness of an offence specified in section 7 of the Theft Act 1968.
- (2) If the theft was of tools from a tradesman, the court—
 - (a) must treat that fact as an aggravating factor, and
 - (b) must state in open court that the offence is so aggravated.”—(*Matt Vickers.*)

Brought up,

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 178, Noes 313.

Division No. 238]

[6.48 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bool, Sarah
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cane, Charlotte
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Cartlidge, James
 Chadwick, David
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Chowns, Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cocking, Lewis
 Coghlan, Chris
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy*
vote cast by Joy Morrissey)
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Gareth
 Dean, Bobby
 Denyer, Carla
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Dineneage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver

Duffield, Rosie
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dyke, Sarah
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farron, Tim
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Franklin, Zöe
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Green, Sarah
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast*
by Joy Morrissey)
 Khan, Ayoub
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kruger, Danny
 Lake, Ben
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia

Lowe, Rupert
 MacCleary, James
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Mak, Alan
 Martin, Mike
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 McMurdock, James
 McVey, rh Esther
 Medi, Llinos
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Olney, Sarah
 Paul, Rebecca
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pochin, Sarah
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rankin, Jack
 Reed, David
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua

Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Wild, James
 Wilkinson, Max
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
David Simmonds and
Mr Andrew Snowden

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)
 Bell, Torsten
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Buckley, Julia
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke

Clark, Feryal
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul (*Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers*)
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah

Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabab
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam

Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reynolds, Emma
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Sarah
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh

Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Anna McMorris and
 Martin McCluskey

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 166

POWERS TO MAKE CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS ETC

Amendments made: 102, page 186, line 8, at end insert—

“(c) section 99.”

This amendment enables the Scottish Ministers to make amendments in consequence of clause 99 (which provides for new offences in relation to dangerous cycling etc) that are within Scottish devolved competence.

Amendment 103, page 186, line 8, at end insert—

“(c) section 127(3) and Schedule (Confiscation orders: Scotland).”—(*Dame Diana Johnson.*)

This amendment enables the Scottish Ministers to make amendments in consequence of NS2 (which contains provision about confiscation orders in Scotland) that are within Scottish devolved competence.

Clause 167

REGULATIONS

Amendments made: 104, page 186, line 36, after “55(1),” insert

“(Causing internal concealment of item for criminal purpose)(9),”

This amendment makes regulations under the Secretary of State’s power to amend the list of specified items in NC56 subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

Amendment 105, page 186, line 36, after “55(1),” insert “59(6),”

This amendment makes regulations which amend the list of child sexual exploitation and abuse offences specified for the purposes of clause 59 subject to the affirmative Parliamentary procedure.

Amendment 106, page 186, line 36, leave out “or 112” and insert

“112, (Section (Extraction of online information following seizure of electronic devices): interpretation)(2)(a) or (b) or (Section (Extraction of online information following seizure of electronic devices): confidential information)(7)”

This amendment provides for the regulation-making powers in NC65 and NC66 to be subject to the affirmative procedure.

Amendment 107, page 186, line 36, at end insert

“or (Meaning of “law enforcement employer”)(1)(k).”—(*Dame Diana Johnson.*)

This amendment provides for regulations specifying additional “law enforcement employers” for the purposes of NC71 to NC76 to be subject to the affirmative procedure.

Clause 169

EXTENT

Amendments made: 108, page 188, line 2, at end insert—

“(ba) section 37(2)(d);”

This amendment provides for clause 37(2)(d) (which amends the Armed Forces Act 2006) to have UK extent.

Amendment 109, page 188, line 2, at end insert—

“(ba) sections 38 and (Proving an offence under section 38);”

This amendment provides for clause 38 and NC54 to extend to Scotland and Northern Ireland (as well as England and Wales).

Amendment 110, page 188, line 3, at end insert—

“(ca) section (Secretary of State guidance);”

This amendment provides for NC57 to have UK extent.

Amendment 111, page 188, line 4, at end insert—

“(da) section 64(2);”

This amendment provides for clause 64(2) (which amends the Armed Forces Act 2006) to have UK extent.

Amendment 112, page 188, line 14, at end insert—

“(na) sections (Extraction of online information following seizure of electronic devices), (Section (Extraction of online information following seizure of electronic devices): supplementary), (Section (Extraction of online information following seizure of electronic devices): interpretation), (Section (Extraction of online information following seizure of electronic devices): confidential information) and (Section (Extraction of online information following seizure of electronic devices): code of practice);”

This amendment provides for NC63 to NC67 to have UK extent.

Amendment 113, page 188, line 14, at end insert—

“(na) section (Extraction of online information following agreement etc);”

This amendment provides for NC69 to have UK extent.

Amendment 114, page 188, line 15, at end insert—

“(oa) sections (Law enforcement employers may not employ etc barred persons) to (Special police forces: barred persons lists and advisory lists) and Schedule (Special police forces: barred persons lists and advisory lists);”

This amendment provides for NC71 to NC78 and NS3 to have UK extent.

Amendment 115, page 188, line 17, at end insert—

“(r) paragraph 17 of Schedule 9.”

This amendment provides for paragraph 17 of Schedule 9 (which amends the Armed Forces Act 2006) to have UK extent.

Amendment 116, page 188, line 22, after “sections” insert “(Department of Justice guidance),”

This amendment provides for the guidance provision inserted by NC58 to extend to Northern Ireland only.

Amendment 117, page 188, line 22, after “160” insert “, and paragraphs 4(3) and 5(5) of Schedule 16,”

This amendment of the extent clause provides for the transitional provision in the Schedule about confiscation orders in Northern Ireland to have Northern Ireland extent.

Amendment 118, page 188, line 22, at end insert—

“(6A) Section 127(3) and Schedule (Confiscation orders: Scotland) extend to Scotland.”

This amendment of the extent clause is consequential on amendments 88 and NS2.

Amendment 119, page 188, line 34, at end insert—

“(ja) sections 114 to 116;”

This amendment provides that amendments made by clauses 114 to 116 (which were inserted into the Bill at Committee stage) have the same extent as the provision amended.

Amendment 120, page 188, line 34, at end insert—

“(ja) section (Extraction of online information: ports and border security);”

This amendment provides for the amendments made by NC68 to have the same extent as the provisions they amend.

Amendment 121, page 188, line 34, at end insert—

“(ja) section (Lawful interception of communications);”

This amendment provides for any amendment made by NC70 to have the same extent as the provision amended.

Amendment 122, page 188, line 36, at end insert—

“(la) section (Ports and border security: retention and copying of articles);”

This amendment provides for the amendments made by NC81 to have the same extent as the provisions they amend.

Amendment 123, page 188, line 36, at end insert—

“(la) section (Extradition: cases where a person has been convicted)”

This amendment is consequential on Amendment NC82.

Amendment 124, page 188, line 37, at end insert—

“(ma) Schedule (Amendments to Chapter 3 of Part 2 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022);”—
(*Dame Diana Johnson.*)

This amendment provides for any amendment made by NS1 to have the same extent as the provision amended.

Clause 170

COMMENCEMENT

Amendments made: 125, page 189, line 20, leave out “52” and insert “(Secretary of State guidance), (Department of Justice guidance)”

This amendment provides for the guidance provisions inserted by NC57 and NC58 to commence on Royal Assent.

Amendment 126, page 189, line 21, after “sections” insert

“(Causing internal concealment of item for criminal purpose),”

This amendment makes the Secretary of State’s power to amend the list of specified items in NC56 come into force on Royal Assent.

Amendment 127, page 189, line 26, at end insert—

“(aa) section (Removal of limitation period in child sexual abuse cases);”

This amendment provides for NC59 to come into force two months after Royal Assent.

Amendment 128, page 189, line 26, at end insert—

“(aa) section 114;

(ab) section 116;”

This amendment makes clauses 114 and 116 (which were inserted into the Bill at Committee stage) commence two months after Royal Assent.

Amendment 129, page 189, line 39, at beginning insert

“Sections 38 and (Proving an offence under section 38), and”

This amendment provides for clause 38 and NC54 to come into force, so far as extending to Scotland or Northern Ireland, by order made by the Scottish Ministers or the Department of Justice respectively.

Amendment 130, page 190, line 6, at end insert—

“(za) section 56(2), (3) and (4)(c) so far as relating to an offence under section 38;”

This amendment provides for certain provisions of clause 56 which contain supplementary provision for Northern Ireland for offences under clause 38 to come into force in accordance with an order made by the Department of Justice.

Amendment 131, page 190, line 8, at end insert—

“(8A) Section 127(3) and Schedule (Confiscation orders: Scotland) come into force on such day as the Scottish Ministers may by order appoint.”

This amendment of the commencement clause provides that the Scottish Ministers may bring into force the provision about confiscation orders in Scotland which is added to the Bill by amendments 88 and NS2.

Amendment 132, page 190, line 9, leave out “or (8)” and insert “, (8) or (8A)”

This amendment of the commencement clause enables transitional or saving provision, and different provision for different purposes, to be included in an order bringing into force the provision about confiscation orders in Scotland which is added to the Bill by amendments 88 and NS2.

Amendment 133, page 190, line 12, after “(7)(a)” insert “or (8A)” —(*Dame Diana Johnson.*)

This amendment of the commencement clause is consequential on amendment 131.

7.1 pm

*Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order 17 June).**Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83E),*

That the Bill be now read the

Third time.

*The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 95.***Division No. 239]****[7.1 pm****AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Bell, Torsten
 Berry, Siân
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bishop, Matt
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Buckley, Julia
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Chowns, Ellie
 Clark, Feryal
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul (*Proxy vote cast by Lorraine Beavers*)
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy

Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Imran
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Chris
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, Emma
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Sarah
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Swards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Siddiq, Tulip

Simons, Josh
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Stainbank, Euan
Stevens, rh Jo
Stewart, Elaine
Stone, Will
Strathern, Alistair
Strickland, Alan
Sullivan, Kirsteen
Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Swallow, Peter
Tami, rh Sir Mark
Tapp, Mike
Taylor, Alison
Taylor, David
Taylor, Rachel
Thomas, Gareth
Thompson, Adam
Thornberry, rh Emily
Tidball, Dr Marie
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Toale, Jessica
Tufnell, Henry
Turley, Anna

Turmaine, Matt
Turner, Karl
Twist, Liz
Uppal, Harpreet
Vaughan, Tony
Vince, Chris
Wakeford, Christian
Walker, Imogen
Ward, Chris
Ward, Melanie
Webb, Chris
Welsh, Michelle
Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Wheeler, Michael
Whitby, John
White, Jo
White, Katie
Williams, David
Witherden, Steve
Woodcock, Sean
Wrighting, Rosie
Yang, Yuan
Yasin, Mohammad
Yemm, Steve
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Anna McMorrin and
Martin McCluskey

NOES

Adam, Shockat
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Bacon, Gareth
Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi
Barclay, rh Steve
Bedford, Mr Peter
Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bool, Sarah
Braverman, rh Suella
Burghart, Alex
Cartlidge, James
Chope, Sir Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Cooper, John
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Cross, Harriet
Davies, Gareth
Dewhurst, Charlie
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Evans, Dr Luke
Fortune, Peter
Fox, Sir Ashley
Francois, rh Mr Mark
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mark
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Alison
Harris, Rebecca

Hayes, rh Sir John
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, rh Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Holmes, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hussain, Mr Adnan
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenrick, rh Robert
Jopp, Lincoln
Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Khan, Ayoub
Kruger, Danny
Lam, Katie
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lopez, Julia
Lowe, Rupert
Mak, Alan
Mayhew, Jerome
McMurdock, James
McVey, rh Esther
Mohamed, Iqbal
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Morrissey, Joy
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Norman, rh Jesse
Obese-Jecty, Ben
O'Brien, Neil
Paul, Rebecca
Philp, rh Chris
Pochin, Sarah
Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Rankin, Jack
Reed, David
Robertson, Joe

Rosindell, Andrew
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Smith, Greg
Smith, rh Sir Julian
Smith, Rebecca
Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
Stafford, Gregory
Stephenson, Blake
Stride, rh Sir Mel
Sultana, Zarah
Swann, Robin

Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Thomas, Bradley
Tice, Richard
Timothy, Nick
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Whately, Helen
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wood, Mike

Tellers for the Noes:
David Simmonds and
Mr Andrew Snowden

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Lucy Powell relating to Estimates (Liaison Committee Recommendation).—(*Anna Turley.*)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

PROCEEDS OF CRIME

That the draft Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) (Threshold Amount) (Amendment) Order 2025, which was laid before this House on 13 May, be approved.—(*Anna Turley.*)

Question agreed to.

ESTIMATES (LIAISON COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 145(3)),

That this House agrees with the Report of the Liaison Committee of 17 June:

(1) That a day not later than 5 August be allotted for the consideration of the following Estimates for the financial year 2025–26: Department for Education; Department of Health and Social Care; and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; and

(2) That a further day not later than 5 August be allotted for consideration of the following Estimates for the financial year 2025–26: Ministry of Justice, in so far as it relates to criminal justice; Ministry of Defence, in so far as it relates to the remit of the National Armaments Director; and Department for Transport.—(*Anna Turley.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Anti-Stab and Anti-Slash Protective Gear in Prisons

7.13 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Gateshead South) (Lab): I rise to present this petition in the light of recent horrific attacks on prison officers by inmates. Debate about whether prison officers should all be

provided with anti-stab and anti-slash gear has been brought to the forefront of political discussion recently. We know that attacks can happen in any prison, as it did to my very brave constituent Claire Lewis, who as a result set up a Change.org petition calling for mandatory protective gear—it currently has 32,000 signatures. We must ensure that this is available to all officers, not just those working in high-security prisons.

The petition states:

“The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take into account the concerns of the petitioners and take immediate action to ensure that all prison officers are equipped with mandatory anti-stab and anti-slash protective gear to keep them safe from violent prisoners.

And the petitioners remain, etc.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the constituency of Washington and Gateshead South

Declares that the government and prison authorities should make anti-stab and anti-slash protective gear mandatory for all prison officers. There is also a separate online petition on this issue, which has generated over 32,000 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take into account the concerns of the petitioners and take immediate action to ensure that all prison officers are equipped with mandatory anti-stab and anti-slash protective gear to keep them safe from violent prisoners.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P003083]

Post-industrial Towns

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Anna Turley.)

7.14 pm

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): The post-industrial towns of the red wall areas are dying on their feet. Our young people are moving away, never to return, to the cities, to London and to the surrounding commuter towns, for good jobs, skills and higher pay. The good apprenticeships are too few, and we have low-skilled populations who are growing older, with higher health demands on our NHS and care services. Aspiration levels have plummeted and there is a collective mindset that says people have to move out in order to get on.

All too often such towns have been ignored by successive Governments when wealth building or investment initiatives have been brought forward, and disregarded because they are on the “too difficult to do” list. This Government are the first in over a generation to be rebuilding our economy through the development of a strategic plan. This is the end of the free market being allowed to run free, with patchy Government intervention and growth ambitions reliant more on hope and prayers. The left-behind towns in red wall areas, such as Bassetlaw, will have their locked-in potential unleashed and will become wealth builders only through a national industrial strategy that aligns itself to their future.

As deputy leader with responsibility for regeneration at Bassetlaw council at the time, I remember the last attempt to develop a strategy, under Prime Minister Theresa May. We heard lots of warm words at all levels of government, including mine, but then there was silence—it went nowhere. Now is our opportunity to define a strategy that aligns itself to our national priorities and feeds into the ambitions and vision of local areas such as Bassetlaw.

Alex Ballinger (Halesowen) (Lab): The Black Country forged the steel that built Britain. Places such as Cradley Heath in Halesowen still have that pride and passion in their towns. Does my hon. Friend agree that the industrial strategy should focus on aerospace, defence and manufacturing so that places like ours can be revitalised because of this Labour Government?

Jo White: I agree with my hon. Friend. We have to invest in areas like his and mine to rebuild those jobs and our industry. Such areas in our constituencies must become the engines of the future.

In Bassetlaw we have just welcomed the award of £2.5 billion for the development of fusion energy in north Nottinghamshire. In addition, £30 million has been committed to Doncaster airport to kick-start it as it reopens. The closure of Doncaster airport in November 2022 was devastating for the city and surrounding areas. The commitment from this Government will get the airport reopened, attract businesses to the area and see the economy grow, meaning there will be new jobs across the region, including in Bassetlaw.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): My hon. Friend tempts me to intervene because she knows how passionate and driven I am to see Doncaster-Sheffield airport open, revitalised and ready to take flights in the near future. That will bring new jobs,

[Lee Pitcher]

prosperity and longer-term ambition for the young people who live in the area. Does she agree that the Government support to help develop skills in the local area, around aviation, logistics and green technologies, is exactly what we need?

Jo White: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. I want young people in my constituency to think about the wider opportunities, including what is happening at Doncaster airport. Approximately 800 jobs were lost, which impacted people who live in Bassetlaw, but I am very supportive of what is coming forward.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Steve Yemm (Mansfield) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that further education is integral to turbocharging the skills revolution that we need? Every area in the country should have strong provision in further education, particularly, as is the case in my constituency, through providers such as West Notts college, rather than solely relying on universities?

Jo White: I very much agree and will refer to that later in my contribution. For too long people have moved away to university and never come back. We need good apprenticeships aligned to our local FE colleges. They have to be a part of the engine of the future and our industrial strategy has to focus on that as well as where businesses go in the future.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): My community in East Cleveland was once home to the ironstone mines and the steelworks that helped build this great country, but I often speak to steelworkers who say that when they left school they had a guaranteed job for life and this is not the case any more. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a role for our combined authorities to play not just in creating jobs but in having a skills strategy that guarantees decent, well-paid jobs for our young people years into the future?

Jo White: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. He very much reflects my priorities, and we must have a skills strategy that aligns with an industrial strategy so that our young people know clearly where their futures are.

Lillian Jones (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): My constituency has a proud industrial heritage and is renowned for the rich diversity of its industrial output during the 19th century. We had the world famous Johnnie Walker whisky plant which was linked to Kilmarnock for more than 190 years, Saxone, a shoe manufacturing and retail company, Massey Ferguson, producer of tractors and combine harvesters across the world, and BMK, a major carpet manufacturer which played a prominent role in Kilmarnock's industrial landscape, even producing the red carpet for Queen Elizabeth's wedding in 1947 and carpets for the movie "Titanic". Does my hon. Friend agree that while these industries have, sadly, gone, post-industrial towns across Ayrshire do have a bright future and that there is potential for exciting developments in aerospace, renewable energy, AI and data centres to name just a few sectors, driven by a modern industrial strategy to support long-term sustainable growth?

Jo White: I again agree: the industrial strategy has to impact the whole of Great Britain, not just the red wall areas, because if it is to be successful, Members must see new opportunities and industries come to their constituencies so that we all share in the future.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for securing this debate. I spoke to her beforehand and know exactly what she is after, and we all support her in that. The remnants of factories—I think of my old crepe weavers factory in Newtownards and Strangford as one example—are a reminder of the decline of industrial units in the textile sector in particular, and the impact of that on the local economy. Does the hon. Lady agree that greater investment in rebuilding these vacant spaces must come? We welcome the Labour Government's commitment to that strategy, and does the hon. Lady also agree that making the change that really matters must come from here at Westminster?

Jo White: I totally agree. This Government are making the change. We are being strategic and we know what our future is. We cannot rely on the market as we move forward. It is absolutely essential that we think about growing the economy, ensuring that wealth lies in the hands of the people who live in those communities so that we can build our lives back again.

I want to agree with all the interventions that have just been made—

Mr Speaker: That makes things easier.

Jo White: Absolutely. [Laughter.] We are going to have no disagreement whatsoever because what we need is a Government who will deliver the jobs and skills that have already been identified. While the investment into STEP—spherical tokamak for energy production—fusion in north Nottinghamshire has the potential in time to unlock new skills, jobs and opportunities that will completely change the industrial landscape of my area for years to come, my demand of Government is an industrial strategy that encompasses and prioritises the left-behind areas.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend agree to include post-industrial towns in places like Cornwall which used to mine and have been post-industrial for longer than many other towns in this country? Now, with opportunities in renewables and critical minerals, they could be rich again under this new industrial strategy.

Jo White: I totally agree. It has been too easy to invest in our metropolitan and city areas, so areas such as ours have missed out time and again. The fact that my hon. Friend's constituency is in the far corner of England has made it far too difficult for previous Governments and industries to think about her communities and what they need in order to be strong again. I am so delighted that we have a Labour Government who are focused on the same priorities that we all share.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): While the hon. Lady is talking about the south-west of England, I would hate for her to forget Axminster, which still has a flourishing carpet maker, but it does not have quite the same level of employment that it did in its heyday.

Does she agree that Government can help by investing in superfast broadband, given that Axminster is in the 10% of places in the country with the least superfast broadband?

Jo White: The development and growth of our infrastructure must include superfast broadband, so that we can all benefit from it. Too many areas are missing out, particularly remote, rural areas.

We need a strong economy that includes superfast broadband, AI and energy provision to ensure that we are supercharged for the future. The announcement made by the Government yesterday that British railways will use British steel is a welcome example. That commitment must be replicated in every infrastructure project across the country, in our nuclear ambitions, roadbuilding, munitions, prisons and hospital-building projects. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that the industrial strategy gives priority to British companies while addressing our ambitious infrastructure commitments?

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): The towns of my constituency, Dewsbury and Batley, lie at the heart of West Yorkshire's heavy woollen district. We have a proud history of textiles, and we were the centre for recycled wool textiles called shoddy and mungo. Today, we are actually the UK's capital, if not the European capital, of putting people to sleep—that is, making beds. However, there has been very little investment from Government to help the furniture industry in my constituency. Does the hon. Member agree that, as well as technological investments, the Government should look to revitalise the workforces and niche industries in all parts of our country and help them to expand, grow and overcome the Brexit barriers?

Jo White: Again, I thank the hon. Member for his contribution. We all have our localised industries that we are proud of, but we need a Government who recognise that and enable local businesses to thrive and survive. This is about how we invest and encourage new businesses to invest in our local economies, which is an essential element of the industrial strategy.

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that a targeted industrial strategy for post-industrial towns and cities such as ours will lead to more highly skilled jobs to lift the ceiling of average earnings in our constituencies, so that they have real opportunities for secure, good and well-paid jobs and apprenticeships?

Jo White: Again, I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution. We need to build wealth in our local areas, and we need to stop young people having to make the horrific choice of whether to move away. By building wealth locally, we are actually able to build good houses, we have people spending money in the local economy, and we support the new independent businesses that come along. It is a circular thing, and we as a Government have to invest in that. Whether this Government focus on investment zones, improved infrastructure or high-performing colleges that turn people out who are work-fit and raring to go, they have the ability to target growth into areas where the engines that once powered our economy stopped running too many years ago.

Alan Strickland (Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor) (Lab): My constituency had the Stockton and Darlington railway, which began the passenger railway. Since the election, after years of Tory dither and delay, we are proud to have had £800 million put into a world-class train factory. Does my hon. Friend agree that, with the right investment by an active Labour Government, the industrial areas that powered our past can really power our future?

Jo White: I totally agree with my hon. Friend—that is the way in which we supercharge our constituencies. It is about recognising their strengths and working with the local community, local government and our MPs to ensure we get the investment we need.

We also have to focus on the fact that previous Governments have consistently relied on Treasury methodology to determine their priorities, applying a cost-benefit analysis framework that always results in the cities and huge conurbations scoring highly, opening up waves of funding for infrastructure and investment. It is a formula that is applied across Government, influencing a wide range of decisions, including where flood alleviation schemes go and where sports provision and support for heritage and the arts end up. It is not just red wall areas that are impacted by that methodology, and I welcome the fact that hon. Friends from Scotland and Cornwall are in their places.

Jim Shannon: And Northern Ireland as well.

Jo White: And Northern Ireland, of course. I will never forget the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Speaker: It goes without saying.

Jo White: The Treasury's use of that formula is the simple explanation for why we have left-behind towns across the whole of the UK. I value and welcome the fact that the Government have listened, and have resolved to overhaul the Green Book and use a place-based analysis as an integral element of the formula in future. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Andy MacNae) for his work with Ministers on this issue. That change is fundamental, because being left behind means failure. We had a Government who were only interested in the easy solutions, and were willing to see parts of the country become no-go areas for new industry and new opportunities.

Andy MacNae (Rossendale and Darwen) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for the acknowledgement. The Green Book review has rightly identified issues of capacity and capability when it comes to business case development in certain areas, and of course the spending review allocated lots of money to areas with high capability, such as Manchester and Liverpool. That highlights the opportunities that devolution will eventually bring to places such as Lancashire, which have been left behind for too long, but does my hon. Friend agree that we cannot wait? We need to see proper investment in developing the capacity and capability that Lancashire needs to bring forward its own business cases now.

Jo White: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. This is absolutely urgent, which is why we stood to be MPs and why we are championing at the bit for change—it is why we are all in the Chamber tonight.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, and I think the fact that so many Members are in the Chamber for an Adjournment debate shows the importance of this subject.

While she is talking about the immediate outputs needed, can I make my usual plea to Members on the Treasury Bench via you, Mr Speaker? When the industrial strategy—which is so important to all our communities—comes, it must address the chronic, crippling effect of industrial energy prices, which are hurting so many of the manufacturing sectors we have mentioned today. Whether it is in Bassetlaw, in Stoke-on-Trent or even in Chorley, there will be businesses that are struggling. I know that my hon. Friend agrees, but when the Minister addresses us later, I hope she will be able to confirm that industrial energy prices will be dealt with in the industrial strategy, to benefit us all.

Jo White: I have heard from all my hon. Friends from Stoke-on-Trent, who are currently seeing the demise of the ceramics industry. That cannot go on, and the cause is high energy prices.

Dr Allison Gardner (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): The most recent data, from 2023, showed that 25% of manufacturing jobs in Stoke-on-Trent were in ceramics. Ceramics—especially advanced ceramics—is critical to strategic industries such as defence, nuclear energy and steel. Does my hon. Friend agree that the industrial strategy must recognise the foundational industry of ceramics, which is vital for the future not only of Stoke-on-Trent but the country?

Jo White: I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution. I hope that Ministers are listening, as the products produced in the three constituencies of my hon. Friends from Stoke-on-Trent are critical for our industrial future.

My challenge to Government is to bring forward an industrial strategy that allows the whole nation to grow, but also resources and targets the towns that are crying out for change. I begin by demanding a skills revolution in our post-industrial areas. For much of the past century, areas such as mine were dominated by key industries. In Bassetlaw, we had thousands of men working down the pits while their wives, sisters and mothers headed into the big textile factories. The history of key industries is not exclusive to Bassetlaw—there are vital and historic British industries with their roots in many red wall areas. Ceramics, fishing, automotive, steel and shipping all dominated the midlands and the north of England. While some still remain, they are struggling, fighting an ongoing international race for cheap labour and parts, with successive Governments failing them time and again.

In Bassetlaw, as the mines closed and the textile factories moved to countries with cheap labour, the employment opportunities shifted, with warehousing and logistics springing up on the old pit sites. At that time, skills provision, under the auspices of the Manpower Services Commission, developed into a simplistic system. It was literally controlled by the main employers, who wanted to mould the workforce into their own needs from age 16. In Bassetlaw, it was Tony Wilkinson of Wilko and Richard Budge of Budge Mining who ran the system. For a small number, skills training was via

the university route, with most never returning. The middle ground between the two was a low priority for Government, and the lazy solution has been to import the skills we need. That is the history of the past 14 years, where cheap imported skills have been used to meet industry's short-term needs, methodically sidelining local young people and adding to soaring legal migration. We have the kernel of an alternative, with high-skilled apprenticeships, but they are not yet ingrained across the system or the country.

Mr Adnan Hussain (Blackburn) (Ind): As Chorley, Rossendale and Darwen have had a mention, I feel it is only right that the Member for Blackburn should speak. Does the hon. Member agree that we need to invest in our people, in local business and in small businesses? Our people in Blackburn and the surrounding areas have the ability and the creativity. All they need is a bit of investment, a bit more support and a push.

Jo White: I totally agree with the hon. Member. An industrial strategy has to support the SMEs, because they have to be part of the supply chain. They have to be part of that engine of growth, because they are an integral part of all our communities. I want to see them benefit when there is big industrial investment. They are part of that chain, and they can grow with it.

David Williams (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The final intervention.

David Williams: On the point of skills, there is a risk with non-mayoral areas that we do not get the same level of investment as goes into city mayoral areas. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that we see that money flow into all our communities across the United Kingdom?

Jo White: Again, I totally agree with my hon. Friend. I am fortunate, as I have a new mayor, the Mayor of the East Midlands. I can already see the benefits of having a mayoral combined authority. That partnership with local government, the mayor and me is critical for investment. I had a conversation with her on Saturday and talked about my hon. Friend's area, because areas like his will get left behind if they do not have the opportunity to have a combined authority and mayor. It makes an incredible difference, and my ask of Government is to move fast and get that sorted. *[Interruption.]* I need to wind up, I am being told, so I will go to the end of my speech to give the Minister the opportunity to wind up.

Luke Myer: As the debate is winding up, I just want to give the good people at *Hansard* an opportunity to record the fact that not a single Conservative or Reform MP was here in the Chamber to listen to this important debate.

Mr Speaker: Come on. This debate is far too important to start scoring party political points at this stage.

Jo White: I will finish by saying that time is running out. It is not handouts we are asking for, or sympathy; our demand is strategic investment. My ask of the Minister is give us the tools. Is it little Britain or Great Britain? Is it little Englanders looking over their shoulders or Great Britons looking out to the future?

7.39 pm

Imogen Walker (Hamilton and Clyde Valley) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Jo White) for initiating this important debate.

My constituency contains both rural communities and towns with a proud industrial history. Members will be familiar with New Lanark, which is famous throughout the world as the place where Robert Owen championed better working conditions. He showed that productivity does not need to come at the expense of workers' rights, and we have built on that legacy in this Parliament. Further west, Hamilton was a proud coalmining area for 200 years, with textiles and heavy industry making the town an economic and industrial force to be reckoned with. However, our towns are showing the neglect of 15 years of the Tories and 18 years of the Scottish National party. The work of the people who built our nation was not respected or rewarded by either Government, and the impact is there for all of us to see in the boarded-up shops in our high streets.

But when it comes to demonstrating what our priorities are, what a difference a year makes! Following the spending review, the UK Government are providing £50.9 billion a year for the Scottish Government—the biggest settlement in the history of devolution—and there is more: there are trade deals, investment zones, city and growth deals, direct investment, and the strategic defence review. My constituents have told me time and again that they do not understand why they see services being rebuilt south of the border but not at home, and sadly I know the answer. Bad loans, bad deals, bad investments and bad decisions have taken money from where it needed to be.

I see that no SNP Members are in the Chamber this evening, and I am sorry to say that does not surprise me, but it does send a clear message to my constituents. I know what my communities are capable of, given the chance, and that is why what we have done in just under a year of government is so important. The work of change has already begun, and we are here to see it through.

7.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rushanara Ali): I have only a few minutes in which to speak, but I should be happy to write to Members to provide further details.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Jo White) on securing this important debate. The turnout and the contributions from other Members demonstrated their strongly held views and passionate commitment to their constituencies, and illustrated the challenges facing our post-industrial areas, which are deep, structural and long-term.

My hon. Friend drew attention to regional inequalities that have been exacerbated in recent decades. We have a responsibility and a duty to turn that around, and the Government are committed to doing so. The devolution agenda is central to that work and is one of the key areas on which my Department is leading, devolving power and budgets so that local areas can shape their future and enable all communities to benefit, and ensuring that those historic inequities are addressed. The Government have already given local authorities an additional £3.4 billion in grant funding, and we are also developing a long-term housing strategy. We have committed ourselves to billions of pounds of investment in housing, and are investing £1.5 billion in our plan for neighbourhoods.

My hon. Friend, and others, raised a number of issues related to the industrial strategy. I know that the Business Secretary will be following closely the points that have been raised about support for the ceramics industry and broadband and ensuring that the industries in these communities are harnessed. Members rightly raised the subject of steel, and they will be aware of the work that the Business Secretary has done in that regard. The investment zones are key to economic growth and development, and the industrial strategy is, of course, vital. The last Government made many promises of an industrial strategy, but it did not happen, and we are determined to address that.

As we announced last week, the Government have committed a record £2.5 billion of investment for fusion energy, including support for a prototype fusion energy plant located in my hon. Friend's constituency. That project alone will generate more than 10,000 jobs. This Government are committed to renewing our economy, tackling regional inequalities, supporting—

7.44 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 18 June 2025

[DAME SIOBHAIN McDONAGH in the Chair]

Future of the Gas Grid

9.30 am

Josh Newbury (Cannock Chase) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered the future of the gas grid.

It is a pleasure to lead a Westminster Hall debate for the first time with you in the Chair, Dame Siobhain, in particular given that it is my birthday today. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] Thank you, everyone.

I thank colleagues from across the House for joining me in this important discussion about the future of Britain's gas grid. First, I pay tribute to the men and women who work in our gas industry, from extraction and refining through to transmission and product engineers. They literally keep the lights on and our houses warm—not that we need a lot of assistance with heating in the month of June, but of course we rely on gas heating for much of the year.

Tom Collins (Worcester) (Lab): I take this opportunity to wish my hon. Friend and office mate a very happy birthday. This is a very important debate, and I am grateful to him for securing it. I am looking forward to the discussion and I have much to share later, but for now I emphasise how timely the debate is as we face uncertainty in national security and a huge energy transition that will create opportunities as well as challenges.

Josh Newbury: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and I pay tribute to him for all his years of work in the gas industry and for the knowledge that he brings to the House and indeed to this debate. I look forward to hearing from him later.

Previously, I worked for the Energy and Utilities Alliance, which is a trade association primarily representing companies in the gas heating industry. Recently, however, I had a heat pump installed at home, so I will not be using gas at all in future. I am certainly not a believer in silver bullets or dominant solutions. That heat pump cost £15,000, though, and the installation was fraught with complications, so it is fair to say that I have mixed views in this space.

Gas is an essential part of our energy system, accounting for 40% of the UK's total energy consumption and about a third of total electricity generation. Crucially, it provides vital flexibility to make up for peaks and troughs in generation from renewables, which should of course be our focus—but they cannot be the whole solution for the foreseeable future. Indeed, the Government's clean power by 2030 mission foresees a role for gas power stations as flexible generation for up to 5% of demand, but it will take a huge amount of energy storage to enable us to reduce our gas usage for power generation even to that level.

Looking ahead, the National Infrastructure Commission and the Climate Change Committee have recognised that gas, in one form or another, will continue to play a

vital role in the energy system for decades to come, as a crucial component of a diverse and secure energy supply. All realistic projections for the UK's energy transition envisage a continued role for gas, alongside carbon capture and storage and hydrogen, which I will come on to.

A key area of interest to me—and, I am sure, to every Member wishing to contribute to this debate—is the role of gas in domestic heating. Nationally, the gas grid serves more than 24 million homes and half a million businesses. It carries three times more energy than the electricity grid does annually and, on peak winter days, that figure rises to five times as much. Eighty-three per cent of homes rely on mains gas, and in my Cannock Chase constituency 95% of households are on the gas grid. Meanwhile, 6,460 households in my towns and villages live in fuel poverty.

Given that gas heating is clearly the cheapest form of domestic heating we have today, the future of the gas grid is not just a technical issue, but a cost of living issue. Heat pumps are a potential solution for many homes, in particular those off the gas grid, but we have to be honest about the persistent cost barriers. With the average heat pump installation coming in at about £13,000 and only just over half of that paid for by the £7,500 boiler upgrade scheme, heat pumps are clearly still the preserve of able-to-pay households and niche house builders.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): The Government are doing really important work on social justice and the environment, but my constituency is similar to my hon. Friend's in terms of fuel poverty. Is he aware that, of the £300 million spent on the boiler upgrade scheme over the past few years, only 3% of grants in Cambridgeshire went to Peterborough, the poorest constituency? As we advance and develop these schemes, we need to root social justice alongside carbon reduction.

Josh Newbury: I could not have put it better myself. My hon. Friend must have been reading my mind, because I was about to come to that point about my neck of the woods.

My fear is that, without a substantial shift in the cost barrier and a clear focus by the Government on inequality, as my hon. Friend said, decarbonisation inequality will widen. That inequality is apparent in the number of boiler upgrade scheme vouchers issued in the three years to March this year. That stood at just 27 for my Cannock Chase constituency but 316—nearly 12 times as many—in North Devon.

One solution that is not spoken about as much as it perhaps should be is the hybrid heat pump—the combination of a combi boiler with a smaller heat pump. Those systems typically use the heat pump for space heating and hot water production almost exclusively for most of the year, with the gas boiler supplementing it on cold days or when a boost of heat is needed.

Deirdre Costigan (Ealing Southall) (Lab): I wish my hon. Friend a happy birthday. My constituency has very small houses with not much space, and heat pumps might not always be an option. There are lots of flats with no outside space. Does he agree that other technologies, such as heat batteries, might also be an option, and that it would be worth the Government's considering whether

[Deirdre Costigan]

they should be included in the boiler upgrade scheme and assessing whether the current VAT situation is the most useful?

Josh Newbury: Absolutely. That was a topic of huge discussion when I worked in the sector. I go back to my point that there are no silver bullets or dominant technologies, or at least there should not be. We need to ensure that each household—smaller properties, in particular, of which there are many in my constituency—has the right solution. She is right that we need to consider a range of options, and I am sure the Minister will touch on that.

Hybrids were the topic of discussion at a fascinating all-party parliamentary group for energy studies meeting last night. We heard from a Dutch energy expert who explained that hybrids are the norm in the Netherlands. Three provinces have told households that they will not be able to install heat pump-only systems, due to a lack of capacity on the electricity grid. Overloading of the grid is paralysing development in some areas of Holland. With our Government's ambitious house building target, the message from our Dutch friend was, "Please make sure that Britain doesn't end up where we are."

The Dutch are finding that gas demand from households that have installed a hybrid heat pump is down by around 75%, while the increase in electricity demand is minimal. Given that our highly developed electricity and gas grids are very reliably serving the nation, that would seem to be a sensible balance for the UK, too. Substantially reduced gas demand opens the door for zero carbon gases such as biomethane and hydrogen to play a much bigger role in our energy future.

The main barrier to hybrids in the UK is a policy one. The policies we inherited from the previous Government are inconsistent on hybrids. The energy company obligation fully pays for a hybrid installation and the clean heat market mechanism gives 0.5 credits for a hybrid system, but the boiler upgrade scheme does not allow for hybrids at all. I hope the Minister can say something about the Government's view on hybrids.

Our gas grid stretches over 275,000 km and its operation and maintenance provide highly skilled, well paid, often unionised jobs. It is estimated that the oil and gas sector supports one in every 160 jobs nationwide. Significantly for Scottish colleagues, that figure is around one in 20 jobs in Scotland. We are fortunate to have hundreds of thousands of some of the most skilled energy sector workers in the world. A gradual transition that leverages that as an advantage will help us maintain those good jobs, as well as our technological edge.

Gas is clearly a critical industry for many other sectors in the UK, such as glass, cement, ceramics and paper. Those sectors employ more than 1 million people and support essential supply chains, including in defence. Around a third of gas-reliant businesses say they cannot electrify due to technical or economic constraints. Again, those jobs are often in the high-skilled, high-wage sectors that we need more of. Hard-to-abate sectors such as ceramics, which as a Staffordshire MP I have to single out, depend on parliamentarians to navigate a way to net zero that does not leave them behind, and I believe that low-carbon gases could be the answer.

So what does the future look like? It starts with blending hydrogen into our existing network—a step our European neighbours are already taking. Blending even small amounts can kick-start demand in the hydrogen economy, lower the cost of the fuel and give the industry confidence to invest. I welcome the Government's backing for the creation of a core hydrogen network and the repurposing of parts of the existing gas transmission system to carry 100% hydrogen to industrial clusters, power stations and storage sites across Britain. The Chancellor's recent vote of confidence in Britain as a leader in carbon capture, utilisation and storage puts rocket boosters under that and will, of course, enable huge emissions reductions in some of the most greenhouse gas-intensive industries.

We also need to talk about the role of renewable gases, such as biomethane, which already contribute about 1% of our gas supply and have plenty of room to grow. Supporting the domestic production of low-carbon gases strengthens our energy security, supports rural economies and reduces emissions. In the light of the introduction of weekly food waste collections across England next April, our anaerobic digestion capacity will be more important than ever, so I ask the Minister to confirm that the green gas support scheme, which was extended to 2028 in the final weeks of the last Parliament, will be maintained at least until then, if not beyond.

What is required for us to decarbonise our gas grid, as other nations, such as the Netherlands, are doing? The replacement of our old iron mains is nearly complete, so that major hurdle is already being cleared. Other core infrastructure will need to accommodate hydrogen, but work is under way. For example, National Gas has already invested £350 million in hydrogen blend-ready compressors, and has demonstrated through its FutureGrid project at RAF Spadeadam that blending up to 20% hydrogen, and even operating at 100%, is both safe and feasible.

As has been discussed many times before, clear regulatory frameworks that enable innovation and investment are critical, as is public engagement, which we often overlook in these technical discussions about the energy sector. We need conversations with the public to be honest and inclusive, and to address concerns about safety, jobs, cost and fairness.

An energy system is only as resilient as the storage capacity that backs it up. When I first entered the energy sector way back in 2016, the Rough gas storage facility in the North sea was threatened with closure, and one of my first tasks was to furiously campaign for it to be rescued by the then Government. Sadly, they did not heed the dire warning from the industry, and Rough closed. It was able to reopen five years later, but only partially. With geopolitical events being what they are, we are suffering the effects of the previous Government's short-sighted inaction. I am proud to be part of a Government who not only talk about gas storage but actively value it as a critical piece of national resilience.

I ask the Minister to strongly reject the inflammatory rhetoric around the transition that needs to take place in our gas grid, which is often designed to frame the issue in solely negative terms. Talk of ripping out boilers is as inaccurate as it is worrying for consumers. I also ask the Department to drive forward as quickly as possible the opportunities presented by hydrogen produced

by carbon capture and storage and renewable energy. This transformation offers real opportunities, thousands of skilled, well-paid jobs, greater energy security by reducing our dependence on volatile international fossil fuel markets, and of course the chance to lead the world in green technology and innovation. The future of the gas grid is not about choosing between the past and the future; it is about building a bridge to a very British net zero.

9.43 am

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Dame Siobhain. I thank the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) for securing this important debate and for his excellent and very well-informed contribution. I wish him not only a happy birthday but success with his new heat pump.

The future of the gas grid will impact all these islands. Gas is a critical component for more than half a million businesses across the country and all the workers that they employ. Research by Robert Gordon University suggests that if Scotland is successful in delivering its 2030 energy ambitions, the workforce—currently about 80,000—will increase by 25%. However, if it is unsuccessful, the workforce could fall by about 40%, with the loss of key skills, capabilities and associated supply chains.

A green future offers the possibility of new jobs by creating certainty for industry and investors. According to the UK Government's 2021 hydrogen strategy, transitioning to green gases could create 12,000 jobs by 2030 and 100,000 by 2050. That would contribute to a thriving UK economy, increased production, improved public services and global leadership on the climate agenda.

New jobs and the associated economic growth will also complement electrification. Many workers in the gas industry have the very skills needed to secure a net zero future, and that future will be built in, and with, communities with a rich energy heritage, especially those in Scotland, as former fossil fuel jobs are replaced with green jobs.

Low-carbon hydrogen is required for all net zero scenarios. The UK needs to act fast and at scale to ensure energy security and independence to meet decarbonisation targets and achieve its legally binding net zero 2050 commitments. I appreciate that the Minister fully understands these matters.

Existing gas infrastructure can be adapted to deliver low-cost and low-impact net zero solutions. As the hon. Member for Cannock Chase mentioned, renewable biomethane gas can play a significantly larger role in the transition to net zero, reducing the overall cost of the transition and benefiting energy customers. Many of our European counterparts are already making very significant progress in these areas, and we need to catch up.

The Scottish gas network is already fuelling 10% of households in Scotland on their network with biomethane, and there are plans to grow that to 1 million homes by 2031. The prize on offer is not only a green gas that can sustainably decarbonise energy-intensive industries and retain jobs, but the growth of a new sector that will add up to 12,000 jobs by 2030 and £13 billion in gross value added.

A word about Peterhead power station in my constituency: commissioned in 1982, the power station continues to play a critical role in our energy supply, and also has the potential to play a major role in our future systems. The Peterhead carbon capture power station is a joint venture with Equinor, and the plan is to build a new 900 MW power station that will use technology to capture a minimum of 90% of carbon emissions. As I say, that is a minimum: SSE tells me that it could be as much as 95%.

The station would connect to a shared infrastructure being developed by the Scottish cluster, meaning that CO₂ captured from the power station will be safely transported and stored offshore at the Acorn storage site. The existing station directly supports 80 full-time employees, three graduates, 13 apprentices and 30 contractors, but with the new development we could be talking about 1,000 new jobs during construction and 240 new jobs on an ongoing basis. I will come back to the issue of sustainability, because construction is one thing but sustaining jobs into the future is quite another.

I want to acknowledge the role of SSE Thermal in my local constituency in supporting local community projects. They are very important to local communities, particularly young people, schools, and businesses, as well as the environment.

Lastly, I will turn to Acorn. As the Minister knows, £200 million was announced last week to support the Acorn carbon capture and underground storage project in my constituency. I am sure that others have heard in the Chamber that it has the potential to capture and store the amount of carbon gas emitted since before the industrial revolution—that is the scale of the project.

The £200 million represented a start, but it is small compared with the £9.4 billion earmarked in the spending review for carbon capture, usage and storage before 2029. The investment is very welcome, especially in the context of the previous Government's needless delays, but I also want to mention in connection with Acorn how important the connectivity with Grangemouth will be. Some of my colleagues asked me how many pipes there are between Acorn and Grangemouth. There are five, so there is no problem with the infrastructure. We do not need to spend billions of pounds building this thing; it is already there. That is really important to understand.

Given what is at stake for the north-east—jobs, supply chain opportunities and our green industrial transformation as part of climate action and economic growth—Scotland must be given our fair share. Two hundred million pounds is a start, but we want to see that figure climb very quickly, once the final investment decision is made, to the scale of the £22 billion already invested in England. As this debate has shown, the future of the gas grid is about working in tandem with projects such as Acorn, so the availability and implementation of funding is something that we should all push for.

I want to make one final point, from the workers' perspective. I have spoken about the massive construction opportunities that will come with these projects. However, if we take a project such as the Viking project in the far north of Scotland, in Shetland, we are talking about 2,000 jobs during construction and a very small number—perhaps 200—afterwards, so it is fine to construct the projects, but we need to have solutions that work for

[Seamus Logan]

people in the longer term. We need sustainability; we need regulation, so that workers are not taken advantage of; and we need to implement the Labour Government's vision for better contractual terms and conditions.

I look forward to a very bright future for the north-east of Scotland, playing its role in our transition to a new future for the gas grid.

9.51 am

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dame Siobhain. I think this is my second Westminster Hall debate, so I am still learning the ropes. Let me put on the record my GMB membership and the support that it has given me; and my previous role, before the election, as deputy general secretary of the Prospect trade union, covering workers in the gas and energy sector.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) for securing this debate. I have learned this morning that he shares his birthday with the legend who is Derrick Stone, who also happens to be my dad and who is celebrating his 87th birthday today.

Debates about the nation's energy security are always of the highest importance, but given the ongoing events in the middle east and uncertainty around the world—as my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Tom Collins) said—debating the future and resilience of our energy system has become all the more necessary. The UK runs on gas; 40% of our energy comes from gas. Today every part of our country and economy still depends on it. Our national gas network collectively connects more than 30 large gas power stations, 24 million homes and half a million businesses. That includes several critical heavy industries—to name just a few, glass, chemicals, heavy machinery production, and sugar production and British Sugar around my constituency, in the east of England. They all need gas to produce their products for the British people and for us to sell to the world. We need those industries—and the 1 million jobs that depend on them—not only to stay in the UK, but to grow and thrive here and create more prosperity during the transition.

Our gas grid, with our world-leading national transmission system as the backbone, will play a leading role in the transformation of our energy network. As the Climate Change Committee recently said, many industries—such as those that I have just named—simply cannot fully electrify; they will always need a form of gas to keep their operations running. The discussion on the future of the gas grid is not about whether it will continue to exist, but about what will flow through it—natural gas, as we see today, or clean, home-grown forms of gas, such as hydrogen, in the future.

I am a passionate advocate for clean power and supporter of this Government's green ambition. It will usher in industrial renewal and breathe new life into neglected towns and cities such as mine—Peterborough. It has the potential to create jobs, bring in new investment and deliver the long-term energy security that our country needs.

This is not just wishful thinking or some hypothecated plan for 10 or 20 years' time. It is happening right now in places such as my constituency. Peterborough is fast

becoming the King's Cross of hydrogen—a hub where innovation, infrastructure and ambition meet. At the Peterborough gas compressor station, the crossroads of our national transmission system, National Gas, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase said, has already announced £350 million to install new, state-of-the-art hydrogen-blend-ready turbines—an investment that initially will create 100 jobs and apprentices in Peterborough, with the potential to grow more across the UK. That investment not only will help locally to create jobs, boost the economy and grow our skillset, but will be vital in delivering the Government's green growth mission nationally. Today that compressor station moves natural gas across the country to fuel heavy industry and power stations, but it is now able to move hydrogen instead, starting with a blend, and eventually moving to 100% hydrogen if we get there and decarbonising the country while protecting jobs in industry in all parts of the United Kingdom. That is the role Peterborough is playing in the green transition, and it is the future of the gas grid. Such projects show that hydrogen has a critical role to play in the future of British energy. I am proud that my constituency is playing a key role in supporting this Government's ambitions and that transition.

However, to really kick-start that revolution there are some quick, easy actions that the Government can take. I have a few questions, which I hope the Minister will be able to expand upon in his remarks. Can the Minister confirm when we might see the release of the consultation on hydrogen blending into the gas transmission system, which was promised by the last Government and, we are told, may be coming shortly? That would help kick-start the hydrogen economy and unleash a wave of investment in Britain. What are the next steps in the Government's plans for a core hydrogen network, as recommended by the Climate Change Committee and others, and how will that build on the exciting and excellent steps we have seen in recent days with Cadent and others through the Government's announcements around hydrogen? Finally, what assessment can the Minister give us of the skills need and skill potential in communities such as mine that are crying out for good, decent, unionised opportunities that the gas transition could provide, not just in Peterborough but throughout the UK?

It has been a pleasure to speak with passion about my constituency again this morning, and also with passion about this Government's drive to deliver us the green transition. Gas networks have helped build our industrial past and our current prosperity. Our gas networks of the future have the ability to power our transition and movement to net zero, while bringing communities with us.

9.56 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, as always, Dame Siobhain. I give special thanks to the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) for leading today's debate. We were counting down the last 10 seconds before the debate and the hon. Gentleman walked in on No. 8—well done! He may have been a bit breathless. I wish him a happy birthday and thank him for his contributions in this House during the time that he has been here. They are always on subject matter that we are all interested in.

If we want to be progressive and visionary in this House, which we do, we need to look to the future for the things that are important. All areas of the United Kingdom are adapting their own strategies to contribute to net zero. Northern Ireland has set a target of net zero emissions by 2050, and developing renewable energy will be a key part of those plans. It is very important that we play our part. The hon. Member for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes) referred a number of times to the whole of the United Kingdom. He is right, because like me and others in this Chamber, with one exception, we are committed to this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and what we can do better together—not that we are better than anyone else, by the way. We see the advantages and it is important that we look forward.

I welcome the Minister to his place. I always enjoy the Minister's responses to our questions. He seems relaxed no matter how hard the questions are. I will not ask any hard questions; it is not in my nature to do so, but I do ask questions to hopefully progress the debate. The Minister knows that my questions will come from a Northern Ireland perspective. He has always answered in the past on what we want to do and what our strategies are back home. I look forward to his contribution. It is also nice to see the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy), in his place and I look forward to his contribution as well.

Only last year Northern Ireland's gas operators took their biomethane case to Stormont. There are two operators, but I want to focus on Phoenix Gas. It has been stated that adding biomethane to the gas network could cut Northern Ireland's carbon emissions where we have ambitious, but very much achievable, targets. Doing so would deliver significant benefits and create hundreds of new jobs. It is where the potential is. Northern Ireland wants to play its part because the spin-offs for us all are quite significant. Arguments for that include that biomethane is almost identical to natural gas and can be transported through the existing gas pipelines, as the hon. Member for Cannock Chase mentioned. As we have already seen, it has been successfully injected into the gas network at Granville Ecopark in Dungannon. There is a strategy in place and significant progress there, but there is still a lot more to do.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): My hon. Friend talked about Phoenix, and the other company is Firmus Energy. Consumers want to see more competitive pricing. In Northern Ireland, there is some degree of competitive pricing, but because the two companies operate in separate parts of Northern Ireland, they do not compete directly with each other. Consumers want prices to be driven down, but it seems to take a long time for Phoenix and Firmus to reduce their prices—they do not always change rapidly—when international gas prices fall.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is right to highlight that issue. Yesterday, in the hydrogen aviation debate, we talked about how costly energy is at the moment. In the past, we had the tidal wave and sea project in the Narrows in Portaferry in my constituency. The pilot scheme was successful in showing that it could be done, but it did not provide a cheaper price. Today, however, it could. I am quite confident that with a better understanding,

and better offers for the supply of gas grid in Northern Ireland, we could ensure that prices would drop—I am confident that they will.

The operators pointed to research by the Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy Research, which shows that biomethane has the potential to supply 6,000 GWh a year, equal to about 80% of the current gas distribution network demands. That shows the potential, and that it can be done. It would reduce Northern Ireland's CO₂ emissions by some 845,000 tonnes per annum, a fantastic contribution to net zero targets. That shows how Northern Ireland and the UK can work better together and contribute to net zero targets collectively, with advantages for us all. What is done here in England helps us in Northern Ireland, and vice versa.

Yesterday, I spoke in Westminster Hall on the potential benefits of hydrogen in aviation, as I referred to earlier. There are numerous sectors in which hydrogen could play a key role in the transition. The UK Government aim to establish up to 100 GW of low-carbon hydrogen production capacity by 2030. The national gas grid is leading efforts to develop a hydrogen transmission backbone that will repurpose existing gas pipelines to transport hydrogen. Those visionary projects, which can deliver much for us all, are well in hand, but there is a lot more to do.

I look forward to hearing and witnessing how those developments play out in the future. There is so much that the devolved Administrations and institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can do to play a role in the transition to net zero, and this is one of those ways. I ask the Minister very kindly to engage, as I know he does, with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment back home to ensure that we can be leaders in our green and net zero plans together. Within this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, we can do that. Even our friends in Scotland can benefit and help us to benefit. That is the goal I try to achieve in this place.

Seamus Logan: I cannot let the hon. Gentleman get away with these continual references to Scotland. Of course, whatever the future constitutional arrangements—they are in some doubt—the gas network on this side supplies not only Ireland but, as I understand it, Belgium and part of the Netherlands. There is already a shared international context in how the grid operates.

Jim Shannon: Of course there is. The hon. Gentleman is a product of Northern Ireland, as his accent shows—although he is now very much a Scottish nationalist—and I believe he recognises the importance of working together. Whether that is within the United Kingdom or further afield is not the issue. I never want to see Scotland moving away from us, because he is my Gaelic cousin, and together with many others, we have the same history and culture; we just have a different idea about the constitution. The people of Scotland, of course, have already spoken on the constitution and, although I know that is a different debate, I say very clearly that we are always better together.

10.5 am

Tom Collins (Worcester) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dame Siobhain. What better birthday present could my hon. Friend the Member for

[Tom Collins]

Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) have than debating such a crucial and timely topic? I anticipate that perhaps, as he blows out the candles on his cake, as someone who cares deeply about the energy transition, he might wish for something remarkably similar to a clean and green national gas network.

Electrification is inevitably going to be a go-to tool for decarbonising many parts of our economy, but it is equally clear that it cannot do everything. First, gas can do things that electricity cannot. Industry needs it: around half a million businesses in the UK currently rely on gas for their operations, and around 30% of those say that electrification is simply not feasible for them, technically or economically. Those businesses are spread across our nation, not just in clusters, so a national gas system is the only way for UK industry to not only survive but thrive.

Secondly, our national security depends on us having a multi-vector energy system. The UK has always ensured that homes, businesses and critical infrastructure have multiple energy sources available, typically electricity and either gas or oil fuels. As the world becomes increasingly uncertain and dangerous, now is not the time to roll back on the essential principles of security and resilience.

Thirdly, as we face the challenge of rapidly delivering an energy transition, gas provides us with vital flexibility and optionality, which means that we can make it over the finish line in our target time. Industry, transport and heat are all transitioning with uncertainty about the final mix of technologies. Government can secure the successful transition not by picking technologies to win or lose but by specifying a clear set of core energy vectors for the transition and investing in their core infrastructure. I put on record that those might be, for example, electricity, hydrogen and ammonia.

As a case in point, my hon. Friend mentioned that his installation of a heat pump was fairly typical, costing around £15,000. My discussions with industry indicate that the installation of a hybrid heating system, even a new one, would typically come in at under £7,000—a significant difference in the up-front cost, which is a major barrier for homeowners. Alongside that, installation times are shorter, and homeowners avoid the need to install hot water storage tanks or replace radiators.

Industry has already indicated that it will be ready, in four years, to make all its boilers 100% hydrogen-ready. It also indicated to a previous Secretary of State that it would provide price equivalence with the products in existence then. I recognise that the Climate Change Committee has tried to move us along by suggesting that there is no role for gas in the future of heat, but as someone who spent my entire career trying to decarbonise heat, I would humbly say that, although that guidance was well intended, it might be misguided.

Even as electricity remains our primary energy vector, reliable energy generation depends on large-scale energy storage, and that means gas. A system that can produce, store and utilise clean gas is vital for electrification to be successful. Although gas is seen as cheap and dirty today, it does not have to remain so tomorrow. Its versatility means that it will be a valuable resource in the future. While forecasts are for the cost of clean gas to reduce dramatically in the future, its role will be one where its value is recognised, and cost parity with today is not a prerequisite for a future clean gas market.

Private capital has successfully been released to deliver billions of pounds of investment into our gas networks, making them safe, fit for the future, and ready for future gases such as hydrogen and methane. More capital stands poised and ready to be invested. However, our previous Government, who should be congratulated on putting the UK in a leading position for a few years in the 2010s, then created a cloud of uncertainty that has left our gas industry in limbo.

Our mission to make the UK a clean energy superpower should be a powerful beacon that burns that uncertainty away, but it must include a tangible future role for the gas networks in our envisaged energy system. Ambition must be converted into some techno-economic goals that are clear and certain. For gas, that means committing to two things: storage and transportation. The prize is for the UK to once again lead and be an innovating leader in a new global energy outlook.

It has become dazzlingly clear from my discussions with industry that storage is a key enabler. It provides a price and a sink for producers to make clean gas, and a price and a source for users to plan their transition. It could be delivered by establishing and planning a progressive build-out of a strategic national clean energy reserve, which could utilise private capital but, crucially, be publicly commissioned, operating in the national interest for resilience and stable markets.

For those markets to develop, storage must be backed up by transportation. Fortunately, that solution already exists in our world-leading gas networks and can be completed through the delivery of a national hydrogen backbone. We could make a decision on blending now, and that would unlock those markets and allow for the large-scale production of clean gas.

The key signal to unlock all that is reassurance from the Government that the gas system, having transitioned to low-carbon gas, has a future for decades to come. That single declaration—one line that says, “We can see clean gas playing a role in the energy future of our towns and cities”—would be transformational. With it, we can ensure that the industrial economy spread across our country has a sure and hopeful future of opportunity and renewal. With it, we can ensure that the UK’s energy system is resilient, robust, secure and a source of strength, not vulnerability, in our national security. With it, we can deliver a deep and rapid energy transition through agility, partnership and UK innovation. With it, we will be on a strong pathway to making the UK a clean energy superpower.

10.11 am

Joe Morris (Hexham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dame Siobhain. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) on securing this important debate.

I, too, commend the Government’s commitment to clean power and our clean energy mission. I will speak about not industry but the impact of the gas grid on rural communities, because many of my constituents do not have the luxury of being connected to the gas grid. Many of them rely on other means of heating their homes, which are subject to price fluctuations and greater disruption, and then shut them out of opportunities. Before I turn to the impact on rural communities, however, I put on record my support for reaching net zero, decarbonising our economy and decarbonising

our energy system; I look back at the relatively halcyon days when it was not politically controversial to say that, and hope at some point that we can get back to that.

It is vital that rural communities are at the heart of these discussions, and I hope that the Minister will bear them in mind when he goes back to his Department. For many communities across Northumberland, being shut out of the gas grid contributes to a wider feeling of being shut out from broader opportunities. They are unable to access the essential energy infrastructure that often facilitates the growth of small businesses and local economies and helps to attract tourism.

I read an article last week that said that people in the Coquet valley, of which I represent a small part—it is mainly represented by my hon. Friend the Member for North Northumberland (David Smith)—felt cut off and on the edge of society because they were not connected. That feeling is present not just in the Coquet valley, but across the rural extremities of Northumberland. When I hold my surgeries in those places, I get that feedback constantly. The fact that there is not just inadequate gas, but inadequate electricity and phone signal, emphasises that lack of connection. These communities are not just off the grid; they are shut out from opportunities that urban parts of our country often take for granted.

One of the major failures of the last Government was that they did not properly boost and invest in rural economies and the opportunities of people in places such as Otterburn. That has deprived rural residents of lower heating costs, efficient services and opportunities that individuals in urban regions access daily.

What can the Government do to ensure that rural communities such as those dotted around my constituency get the services they need and the energy they depend on—at the price that they deserve—to prevent that feeling of being on the edge of society? Rural communities must not be deprived of basic necessities purely because of their geographical location. We need to ensure that that feeling of being at the extremity ends with this Labour Government.

With the National Energy System Operator, we already have a highly resilient electricity system. I regularly see the community action, investment and spirit that is brought about by storm events, when communities club together to provide for one another. I know that is something continually looked at by communities and organisations working in Northumberland.

I wanted to come to this debate, not because I have any great industrial expertise—I will leave that to some of my illustrious colleagues who spoke before me—but because, in the past, MPs representing my constituency have not been the voice that rural communities need. It is important that MPs from Northumberland make sure that Ministers do not go back to their Departments without first considering the needs of communities that are not connected to the gas grid.

10.15 am

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dame Siobhain. I am pleased to speak in this important and timely debate on the future of the gas grid. I thank the hon.

Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) for securing this increasingly urgent debate and for his expertise on the matter, and I wish him many happy returns.

Gas has long been the backbone of how we heat our homes and power our economy. However, times are changing, and so must our approach to energy. The Liberal Democrats fully support a transition away from fossil fuels towards clean, home-grown renewable energy to deal with the energy trilemma that needs to be balanced in energy policy: cutting polluting emissions, protecting people, households and businesses from future price shocks, and strengthening our energy and national security through reliable home-grown clean energy supplies.

The future of our gas grid is a real challenge. It must be defined by clarity, urgency and care, addressing the challenges we have heard today with affordability, the promotion of alternatives—whether dominant or not—their costs, and the resilience and flexibility of our grid. We have heard about the importance of securing multi-vector energy systems throughout this transition, and that is key.

Gas remains the largest source of energy in the UK, accounting for more than half of our carbon emissions and providing 39% of the energy used across electricity, heating and industry. Although it is strategically important to our economy and to people's lives, that dependency is also a strategic vulnerability. Around half of the UK's gas is imported, and that reliance is our Achilles' heel. In times of geopolitical instability, we are dangerously exposed.

The illegal invasion of Ukraine by Putin and the resulting spike in global energy prices highlighted just how risky it is to depend on imported gas. The Climate Change Committee, in its seventh carbon budget, made clear that if we transition away from gas, and there were to be another spike in gas prices due to an incident like the invasion of Ukraine, then by 2040 the average household would be 15 times less sensitive to those price shocks and skyrocketing energy costs.

Not proceeding with the transition does not just undermine our national security; it hits people in their wallets. That damages our businesses and economic growth. Energy has never been so costly, and that matters particularly in a cost of living crisis. Today, 11% of households in England live in fuel poverty, including nearly 9% in my constituency of South Cambridgeshire. That means many people have to choose between eating and heating their homes every winter. That is the lived reality of our dependence on the gas grid, tied to volatile international markets. We must remember that in 2022 prices peaked at more than 20 times the 2020 average.

It is clear that ending our overreliance on gas must be a national priority if we are to strengthen energy security, unlock low-carbon alternatives and bring prices down. We need resilience and flexibility in the grid, which is currently provided by gas. The Climate Change Committee and the National Grid have confirmed that, to meet our net zero targets, the UK's natural gas use must fall by a staggering 90% by 2050, accounting for just 6% of our energy mix—and even then, only if emissions are captured through carbon capture and storage.

There is no escaping the scale of the challenge. With over 85% of UK homes still connected to the gas grid, we face having to overhaul our national infrastructure.

[Pippa Heylings]

Our gas pipeline network spans more than 284,000 km, or nearly seven times around the Earth, so simply abandoning the infrastructure is not an option. We are talking about a massive repurposing challenge. As we have already heard today, that repurposing also needs to cover green hydrogen, low-carbon hydrogen, biomethane, district heating and many other options.

Additionally, policy needs to look at demand, including for new homes and house building. The Climate Change Committee has been clear that no new homes should be connected to the gas grid after 2026, yet we have had dither and delay since 2016. Under the Conservatives, we ditched the zero-carbon homes policy and since then we have been building homes without proper energy efficiency and without the connections through solar panels to the grid that we should have had. We are also still waiting for the future homes standard and other standards to be brought forward.

Those actions were short-sighted, which is why it is fantastic that we have seen the Government take on board the private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson). It is "the sunshine Bill", mandating that there will be solar panels on every roof. That Bill will come forward with the future homes standard, which is fantastic. In addition, the future homes standard is committing to low-carbon heating. Today, we have asked whether that mandates how we get to that low-carbon heating with dominant technologies, or whether it should be left to the market to come up with innovations. I will be interested to hear from people with much more expertise than me on that. However, given the time that has already been lost, we must move forward.

Let me pick up on the comments from the hon. Member for Hexham (Joe Morris) about rural communities. While we are considering the cost of decarbonising heating through solar panels, heat pumps and induction hobs, we also have to consider the many people in rural communities who live off-grid. These households also need certainty and direction from the Government about how they can decarbonise their heating. The situation in South Cambridgeshire is similar to the situation in Hexham, with one in five communities living off-grid and relying on heating oil. They are among 4 million people and 250,000 businesses in this situation across the UK, which are often served by small, rural, family-owned firms. In addition, off-grid homes are some of the most difficult and expensive to decarbonise because of their age, rural location and construction methods.

The National Grid's "Future Energy Scenarios" report estimates that 1 million UK homes will require alternatives to electrified heating because of the high cost of local grid upgrades. Renewable liquid fuels such as hydrotreated vegetable oil offer a drop-in replacement for heating oil. These fuels have already been trialled in rural communities, and the Governments in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland have embraced them as part of their decarbonisation strategies. We now need a comprehensive UK-wide plan and I hope the Minister will confirm that the forthcoming warm homes plan and future homes standard will also acknowledge and address the specific needs of rural off-grid consumers.

However, although we are hearing about the challenges and barriers, within this transition lies opportunity. That is why the Liberal Democrats are calling for a just

transition plan to protect jobs, retain skills and support communities whose economies are still built around oil and gas. That means a national retraining programme to help workers to enter the green economy, incentives for oil and gas firms to pivot towards clean technologies, ending the red tape that frustrates climate tech start-ups, many of which are in my constituency of South Cambridgeshire, and finally—as many Members have already said—investment in hydrogen innovation, where the UK can lead with world-class research in its industrial base. We have heard today about hydrogen blending, which could make hydrogen 20% of the natural gas supply, helping to reduce the carbon intensity of gas and meeting the gas demand in the medium term while we adapt our infrastructure.

We are also looking at having a resilient and flexible energy system that could be supported by green hydrogen, with storage and flexible power. We welcome the Government's recent announcement of investment in hydrogen, but we would like to see that investment being part of a comprehensive plan to support low-carbon technology across the board. We felt that such a plan was absent from the Chancellor's most recent spending review, so, as we have already heard today, it would be good to get clarity about the role of hydrogen and the level of investment in it.

Like other Members, I have recently had a heat pump installed, and we are now completely off gas—off the grid—with an induction hob. As many have said, it is not easy, and it can be costly up front. We have to recognise that we need a 10-year emergency insulation programme, with free upgrades for low-income households and those for whom such decarbonisation of heating is not a possibility, which is what the Liberal Democrats have called for. All new homes must be built to the future homes standard, as zero carbon-ready from day one. We need investment in heat pumps and alternatives, with full cost coverage for the most vulnerable, and investment in low-carbon, green and wild hydrogen to provide greater flexibility in the grid. Once again, I thank the hon. Member for Cannock Chase for bringing forward this debate.

10.25 am

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): I am pleased to respond to this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) on moving his motion just in time, and on his birthday. He gave an excellent speech, once he got his breath back, and I thought his warning about an overloaded electricity grid was very wise.

There was a lot of agreement in the debate. The hon. Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) joined the hon. Member for Cannock Chase in pointing out the prohibitive cost of heat pumps. The hon. Member for Hexham (Joe Morris) pointed out the particular challenges for rural communities. The hon. Member for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East (Seamus Logan) rightly did his duty representing that part of the country by talking about the jobs that depend on oil and gas.

The hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell), from the land of my grandmother's birth, reminded us of the Northern Ireland experience and the importance of geography when we debate energy. That was reinforced by the hon. Member for Worcester (Tom Collins), who

rightly said that we will continue to need a national gas grid, because of the nature of the demand for gas. I thought he was right to criticise the Climate Change Committee for proposing no gas for heating homes. I think the hon. Member for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes) put it well when he said that Britain runs on gas. He noted the challenge of reconciling the policy to decarbonise with maintaining fairness for families.

We must always be honest about trade-offs when we talk about policy, which is one of the things about which I will try to warn the Minister. The Government may come to regret their failure to do so on several fronts, particularly on net zero. Sadly, that is a lesson, especially on net zero, that my party has drawn from its time in office, including the unhappy end of that time.

Many businesses will continue to use gas and do not have the option to go fully electric. Half a million businesses rely on gas, and not all of them will survive the switch to electricity. As the hon. Member for Peterborough mentioned, big industries continue to rely on gas, such as chemicals, ceramics and—we have similar constituency interests—the sugar industry, among many others. Smaller businesses are just as affected. Chip shops, curry houses and many businesses I do not frequent will also face cost increases from electrification because of higher levies on their energy bills. Unfortunately, Ministers have said little to reassure those businesses that there is a plan to help them and to remember them.

This is also putting a significant cost on ordinary families. Let us look at gas boilers. I challenged the Minister on that during Energy questions last week, but the Energy Secretary and the ministerial team have refused to rule out new taxes, charges or levies on gas bills to fund lower levies on electricity bills, which means a net tax rise for the 80% of households that rely on gas. This was not even mentioned before the general election, although hon. Members will remember the promise to cut everyone's energy bills by £300 by the end of this Parliament. Instead, energy bills have risen so far by an average of £111. While Labour sought to take the credit for the recent fall in wholesale gas prices, the policy costs for which they are responsible are rising.

Running down gas also denies how important it still is as a reliable source of power. Just this morning, a new National Gas report found an 18% increase in gas for power generation last year compared with the year before. At its peak, 65% of our power came from gas, with a half-hourly peak of 73%. This was caused partly by a major drop in wind power, which meant that we had to import more gas from countries as varied as the US, Norway, Qatar, Peru, Trinidad and other places. NESO might be planning another gas-free 30 minutes for the grid this summer, but the power of gas remains formidable and essential. People do not want to be forced to give up gas. Around 80% of the country relies on gas in some way or another. That is more than 20 million homes put at risk by any policy to force people off gas and on to less reliable and more expensive alternatives.

The Chancellor said during her statement on the spending review that

“energy security is national security.”—[*Official Report*, 11 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 979.]

We agree with that, which is why the anti-gas stance of the Energy Secretary is baffling. We continue to rely on gas—in any given year, 40% of the energy used in the

UK comes from it. It is a flexible and reliable source of power. It ensures that there is inertia in the grid, preventing blackouts of the kind that we recently saw in Spain and Portugal, where a lack of conventional power generation from sources such as gas contributed to mass power outages. New data centres are connecting to the gas grid to secure on-site power, instead of using wind or solar, and with good reason. But the Government want to reduce gas to below 5% of our electricity supply by 2030, and use it only as a back-up for unreliable renewables.

The Energy Secretary is being very ideological and basing decisions on dodgy claims about global fossil fuel markets. There is no single global gas market in the way that he has described on several occasions. Fossil fuel prices are higher in Europe than America, which is more dependent on fossil fuels than we are. The prices are higher here because of policy choices.

For example, blocking new oil and gas licences in the North sea only makes us more dependent on expensive, dirtier foreign imports, to the benefit of others. We are importing oil and gas from Norway from the very same seabed that we could exploit, while insisting that we are “too good” and “too green” to do that ourselves. British businesses and jobs could be benefiting from this industry, rather than being cut off. The policy does not even work on its own terms, because liquefied natural gas has four times the emissions of North sea oil and gas. As the hon. Member for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East mentioned, 120,000 jobs in the North sea are at risk. It does not make sense to shut down our own gas production when Norwegian oil and gas continues to be drilled from the North sea.

That is why I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Essex (Mrs Badenoch), announced that our party is committed to stopping the punishment of our domestic energy industry with damaging taxation. It is wrong for the energy profits levy to continue until 2030; we believe that it should be removed altogether, along with the ban on oil and gas exports. This change would actually increase revenue in the long run.

It is not just the North sea that we should worry about. Britain is the largest gas boiler manufacturer in Europe. Our gas grid is world-leading, but 130,000 gas engineers and 150,000 oil and gas sector jobs are now under threat. Deliberately winding down the gas industry is an extraordinary act of economic self-harm.

For all the Government's talking down of fossil fuels, our gas grid is incredibly stable and resilient. The gas grid depends on over 30 large gas power stations, and the gas comes in through interconnectors, LNG imports, and from Norway and the North sea. Our gas grid is a vital connection point for the European gas supply, especially following the Ukraine invasion.

Major public investment has already gone into the gas grid to help modernise and reduce failures and leaks. This makes up 5,000 miles of steel pipes and more than 60 jet engines to move the gas around the country. Our gas grid can also play an important role in reducing carbon emissions through, for example, expanding the use of hydrogen. In contrast, the cost of decommissioning the gas grid has been estimated at between £46 billion and £70 billion.

The Government's plans are causing major uncertainty for investors, businesses and workers when they should be standing squarely behind a critical industry that has

[Nick Timothy]

an important role to play in our economic prosperity and energy security. Ministers are allowing policy to race ahead of the technology, threatening to destabilise the grid and our economy. It is clear that the gas grid has a crucial role to play in our energy mix if we are to protect families and businesses from rising costs. I do not doubt that the Minister will say that he agrees with that, but the test will be in action and policy, not words.

10.34 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship this morning, Dame Siobhain. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) for securing today's debate, and I wish him a very happy birthday. He gave a breathless speech, which was fantastic, and I do not know what better celebration he could ask for than being in Westminster Hall this morning. I thought at one point that he was going to tell us he got the heat pump as a birthday present, which would have been a significant contribution to the cause. Nevertheless, I hope he has a brilliant day.

My hon. Friend gave a brilliant speech, and in fact we have had a number of important contributions today, highlighting not only the breadth of experience that we have in this House, which I am always hugely impressed by, but generally our ability, particularly in this part of Parliament, to move outside some of our party political boxes and engage with the wider issue. I think that is hugely helpful.

I will return to some of the specific points raised in the debate, but I want to start where my hon. Friend concluded, with his critical point around rhetoric. We need to base the future of our discussions on the gas network in not only fact but pragmatism and a rational look at how we make the best use of an extraordinarily important resource. He also said something that we so often forget in this place: there is no one silver bullet for these things. There are a number of solutions, all of which will play a part in different ways, and we should not discount any of them. Crucially, as many hon. Members have said, if we get this right, there is the potential for tens of thousands of jobs, long into the future, which is so important.

I also thank everybody else for their contributions today. It was good to hear the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy), acknowledge—I think for the first time—that there are some lessons to be learned from the past 14 years, although I suspect he has learned the wrong ones, unfortunately. Nevertheless, I will return to some of his points.

I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about the future of our gas network—a topic that has for too long been overlooked by, in all candour, successive Governments. That is partly because the gas network is incredibly efficient. It works quietly in the background of all of our lives in one way or another, so often we do not talk about it as much as we talk about the electricity system, but it is incredibly important. I agree with Members about the importance of us having a diverse and secure

energy supply; the importance of a gas network is not just to gas itself, but to our electricity system, where it currently plays a critical role.

The transition that is already underway is unstoppable, but it is also incredibly important for the future of our country and it needs to involve every community, so I welcome and agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Joe Morris) and others about the importance of all communities and households being part of it. There is huge potential in the transition to improve on where some of our communities are, so that they feel, as he rightly said, not on the edges of society but part of the innovation. We all have work to do on that, so his message is very keenly heard.

Let me discuss some of the context, and then come on to some specific points raised in the debate. This Government have set out to achieve a once-in-a-generation transition in our energy system to ensure that it is fundamentally fit for the future and resilient and tackles, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Pippa Heylings) said, the energy trilemma before us: how we bring down bills, deliver on energy security and tackle the climate crisis.

Through the spending review, we will invest £13 billion into our warm homes plan over the next five years, helping to cut household bills by up to £600 through the installation of energy efficiency measures. We have secured development funding for the Acorn and Viking CCUS projects, which I will come back to later, supporting our clean power ambition and creating jobs and growth at the same time. By harnessing clean power from green sources in the UK, we also reduce our dependence on volatile fossil fuels. Geopolitical uncertainty in the world is never far away at the moment, which underlines how important it is that we move as quickly as possible towards that place.

As I have often said, our focus in our energy system is on the electricity system. This is perhaps understandable, given the scale of the transformation necessary there, but it is good to take time today to talk about the future of the gas network. To reiterate, the Government have the future of the gas network right at the heart of our thinking for the future of our energy system.

Gas has been part of this country's energy story for centuries, from the use of town gas from the late 18th century to the discovery of natural gas in the North sea in the 1960s and the conversion programme. That was an extraordinary feat of transformation in households right across the country over the 1960s and 1970s, which I am far too young to remember. Some hon. Members will be old enough, but I am not naming any individuals.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): Don't look at me or you will find that your speech is very short.

Michael Shanks: I will look over here, Ms McDonagh.

Our North sea gas supply and our gas storage infrastructure mean that we can deliver heat and power across the country whenever it is needed. The fact that we so often do not discuss the resilience of the system underlines how resilient it is and how well it does its work. Even during exceptionally difficult moments, such as the “beast from the east” in 2018 or after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the gas system continued to meet the needs of millions of consumers. It safely and reliably provides the energy we need.

As our largest primary fuel, representing more than a third of the UK's energy consumption, natural gas is central to meeting our electricity demands, but it is also crucial that we look towards the future. The gas network itself—the system of underground pipes that transport gas the length and breadth of the country and meet the demands of millions of consumers daily—is critically important.

Looking to the future, the natural gas system is a key enabler of our net zero transition. It will allow us to phase out coal and reduce emissions faster than any other major economy. As the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire pointed out—I have the figure in miles and she had it in kilometres; that is the difference between Labour and the Liberal Democrats—there are 175,000 miles of pipework in the network associated with various infrastructure. It is an extraordinary thing, and we must remember the absolute scale of it. I pay tribute to the workers up and down the network who keep it going every single day, in really difficult circumstances at times. Some 26,000 workers are employed in the gas system, which demonstrates the size and scale of the industry.

However, it is important that we are not trapped in nostalgia about the system and that we have a clear-headed view of its future. The role of gas needs to change and has already begun to do so, so it is important that we set out how to get the change right. The Government are clear that making Britain a clean energy superpower is one of our defining missions, and that means that gas will play a smaller and smaller role in our electricity generation. That is the right thing to do. In a broader sense, net zero also requires a wide-ranging transformation of the rest of the economy. The transformation will mean a sea change in how infrastructure, industry, business and our homes work. The power sector, domestic buildings and transportation will all have to undergo significant change, and that will require not one solution but many things.

Part of the solution is the warm homes plan, which is about transforming our homes by making them cleaner and cheaper to run. We are also helping to unlock the potential of electric vehicle infrastructure right across the country. New clean heating solutions mean that fewer homes will rely on gas boilers. Our transition presents an incredible opportunity to build on the skills of the existing gas workforce as we build what comes next. That will lead to thousands of new jobs and training opportunities across the country. As we decarbonise industry, we will also see a growing role for carbon capture and low-carbon gases such as hydrogen and biomethane, which will help ensure that we meet our objective of net zero, while still providing secure, reliable and affordable energy.

One of my hon. Friends asked about the green gas support scheme. I can confirm that it will close for new applications in 2028, but we are looking at the responses to a call for evidence on its future.

It is clear that the gas network will continue to play a critical role in meeting our energy needs out to 2050 and beyond. Even when we achieve our clean power mission, as we will, gas will play an important strategic back-up role, so it will still be important to maintain that system. The Government are clear that gas use will decline overall, and that how we use gas in our system will change. We therefore have to think critically about this

nationally important asset. We must repurpose it and make sure that we do not take any options off the table. We will set out our views on the future of the gas system in much more detail very soon.

We have to acknowledge the challenges, as this will not be straightforward. Ensuring that we remain energy independent and that the gas network continues to operate as needed during the transition means that we will have to make some difficult choices, and maintaining investor confidence is absolutely key. We must maintain the current system and drive in the investment that we need for the future. We have been working with Ofgem on its RIIO-3 plans for the price control period from 2026 to 2031, to make sure that investment in industry is fair and affordable. We also recognise that, as the demand for gas declines due to homes and industry increasingly relying on electricity, there will need to be an orderly transition across our energy network. We will continue to work with Ofgem on that.

A number of contributions focused on what the future of the gas network will look like. Given the country's huge technological expertise and investment, to have such a secure and reliable network, we need to think about how we protect it while considering the different demands that will be placed on it in future—we are looking at all possible options in this space. We are aware of the need for clarity on the future of the gas grid and how these repurposing options fit within that, and we will say more on that in due course.

I will turn to two specific things that have been mentioned today. First, the potential of hydrogen is clearly quite significant both for heating and industrial demand. We are doing a serious amount of work and taking further evidence on how we repurpose our gas networks to enable that. Several Members, including my friend, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—he is ever present in this Chamber—spoke about working together across the UK on solutions. I will resist being drawn into constitutional arguments, although it is difficult to resist that temptation. The hon. Gentleman made an important point about working together on skills and jobs. Indeed, perfectly timed for his contribution, I am meeting Minister Archibald from the Northern Ireland Executive later today to talk about many of these issues and our co-operation with Northern Ireland.

On the question of blending, a mix of natural gas and hydrogen could be used in gas networks to decarbonise our gas use. The Government are actively looking at the question of blending and considering the appropriate decision points. My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes)—I think he said his constituency is the King's Cross of the hydrogen world, which is an interesting analogy—asked about consultation on hydrogen blending. I can say that we will soon be publishing a consultation on transmission blending. On the core network, we agree that many benefits can be achieved from the hydrogen economy, but there are areas on which we require further evidence, as we really want to get this right. We are moving as quickly as possible, but we will need more evidence in some areas.

The Government want to provide strategic clarity on decarbonising home heating to best support our mission. To support that, we are assessing all the latest evidence, and we will consult later this year on the role of hydrogen in home heating. We also plan to bring forward a clear

[Michael Shanks]

plan for industrial decarbonisation and a renewed industrial decarbonisation strategy, which will set out the strategic direction for our approach with industry.

The Government are enabling the development of the carbon capture, usage and storage sector to create jobs, reduce emissions and put the UK at the forefront of global CCUS. The Government are working on developing the strategic direction of CO₂ transport networks. At the spending review, the Government announced that they will be providing development funding to advance the delivery of Viking and Acorn, with a final investment decision taken later in this Parliament.

I am grateful for the typically thoughtful contribution of the hon. Member for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East (Seamus Logan), who I have met a number of times, and we have had fruitful conversations. I was pleased to visit his constituency a few months ago, when I went to St Fergus, one of our most important gas terminals, and I welcome his comments on the Acorn project. We see it as a crucial project, and the funding we committed to it in the spending review will help drive it forward. It represents our commitment after years of dither and delay from the previous Government.

We think there is a role for biomethane in decarbonising all end users in the gas grid. It is already being used in the gas network, and we expect it to play a role in reaching our net zero target. It can be used flexibly, and that flexibility is valuable as it enables us to adapt to the hard-to-predict cost curves and deployment trajectories of existing technologies. Our biomass strategy sets out our ambition through to 2050.

With all repurposing and future use options, we need to determine the extent to which they are feasible, considering a range of factors. They must also be investable, to ensure that the gas industry can attract the necessary investment needed to build sustainable, viable networks. Crucial to that is that they have to provide value for money, providing affordable solutions for consumers who might use them.

To return to the point I started with, we need to be pragmatic on all this. Where repurposing is not viable, long-term consideration will be needed on whether we should decommission unused parts of the gas network and on the appropriate timeline for that. I want to be clear that none of this is straightforward. After successive Governments have not looked at this in the round, we are now grappling with how to deliver a future gas network that takes all the options into account and does not decommission things that we may wish we still had in the future.

There are lots of questions, and the Government do not have all the answers about the future, which is why the calls for evidence are so important. It is complex and challenging and, although we are not rushing, the Government cannot continue to ignore it. We are grappling with some of these big questions and will continue to work with industry and regulators on how best to meet the challenges.

The challenge before us is formidable but, like much of the energy transition we are embarking on, it is not insurmountable. As I frequently say, the point of being

in government is to tackle the hard stuff. As with any issue that will outlive any Government, it is important to start the work now.

Our gas network will ensure that we can meet the transition challenges, providing us with the resilience and flexibility needed to deliver a fair, smooth and co-ordinated transition while protecting our energy security and independence in an affordable way. It can also be the foundation of new, innovative energy solutions to repurpose and adapt to future energy needs in a sustainable way.

Our plans announced in last week's spending review set us on the right path, allowing us to build on those foundations. We need to harness the expertise and the passion within the gas industry, which I have had the huge privilege to learn from over the past 11 months in this job. We will combine that with the Government's ability and determination to get this right as we broker a consensus on the way forward with a shared vision for the future of our incredibly important gas network.

As the Secretary of State set out at the International Energy Agency summit in London a few weeks ago, we will soon set out in much more detail our views on the future of the gas system. I look forward to continuing to work with the hon. Members present, not least because they have so many helpful suggestions about what the future will look like, and so much expertise to draw on.

Contrary to what the shadow Minister said, this is an area in which there is very little ideology. This is a practical problem that we have to solve as a country, so that the gas network is fit for the future, so that consumers benefit and so that we deliver on our energy security in the long term and have the opportunities for economic growth that the gas network can provide.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase again for securing the debate. I wish the rest of his birthday to be just as joyous as this debate, now that he has caught his breath. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions.

10.52 am

Josh Newbury: It is genuinely a pleasure to lead this debate on my birthday. Some people might sooner spend their birthday at Alton Towers or on the sofa, but an energy wonk like me would rather be here, among such knowledgeable and passionate Members, to discuss an issue of such significance to our nation's future.

I thank hon. Members for their thoughtful and well-informed contributions. I am pleased to see the amount of consensus, which is a rare thing or even a dirty word in the current political climate. Many of our constituents believe we spend our weeks shouting at each other, but this debate has been a prime example of the reasoned and respectful engagement that I think defines Parliament.

We have heard from three of our four nations and covered a huge range of angles, from affordability, jobs and industry through to resilience, flexibility and, most importantly, communities and people. I welcome the Minister's statement of confidence in the gas grid of today and tomorrow. He is right to say that we need to be pragmatic, and I welcome the clarity he has given us today. I worked in the industry for many years, so I know that is something we have not always had from previous Energy Ministers.

I look forward to continuing this debate in the months and years to come. As the Minister said, tackling the hard stuff is what we do in this place. I look forward to a bright future for our gas grid and, therefore, our whole unique energy system. Once again, I thank you, Dame Siobhain, for ably chairing the debate and hon. Members for making it such a rich discussion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the future of the gas grid.

10.54 am

Sitting suspended.

Marriage between First Cousins

11 am

Dame Siobhain McDonagh (in the Chair): I will call Richard Holden to move the motion. I will then call the Minister to respond. I remind other Members that they may make a speech only with prior permission from the Member in charge of the debate and the Minister. There will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up, as is the convention in 30-minute debates. I call Richard Holden to move the motion.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government policy on marriage between first cousins.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Siobhain. I rise to speak on a topic that many in our country assume is already settled. People assume that the marriage of first cousins is prohibited, as it was for 1,000 years in England. Yet that is not the case today. Despite deep cultural, medical and societal reasons to avoid such unions, our laws have remained unchanged since the era of Henry VIII. To many, that is a source of bewilderment and bafflement—as it was to me, until I dug deeper and realised some of the real dangers that widescale first cousin marriage can bring.

The Church banned first cousin marriage in the fifth century. By the 11th century it had prohibited marriage up to sixth cousins. That ban was reversed by a Tudor monarch with a perhaps chequered marital record and we have remained broadly silent on the issue ever since. However, the rights and freedoms of individual citizens, society and our broader understanding have moved on, and our laws must do the same.

This is not a call for a legislative knee-jerk reaction. Silence, as Matthew Syed has powerfully written in *The Times*, does not constitute neutrality. Silence is a fundamental choice with serious consequences, both for children born with preventable disorders, and even more so for men and women denied basic freedoms and for communities fragmented from wider society. I urge the House and the Minister to recognise the scale of the issue and—I hope—the moral imperative to act. My argument rests on three key tenets: freedom, social cohesion and health.

During the last Parliament I worked with campaigners to end virginity testing and hymenoplasty. In doing so I stood on the shoulders of giants: brave women from many organisations who support young women trapped in oppressive familial and extended family tribal systems. I pushed for a private Member's Bill, and then via amendments to the Health and Care Act 2022, with Baroness Sugg in the House of Lords helping as well; the Government accepted the argument by tabling their own amendments. When I picked up that campaign, via a chance encounter with an item on BBC Radio 1's "Newsbeat", there was no politician of any party leading the charge in this House. Some of the activists involved might have been a bit miffed that a new, unknown Back-Bench Tory MP was leading their cause—but they got me, and we managed to push through some of the changes that they had been fighting for so bravely and with such strength for such a long time.

[Mr Richard Holden]

What was the reason behind women being forced to undergo procedures that are at best pseudo-scientific, and at worst deeply harmful? It was unscientific concepts of virginity linked to gender-oppressive ideas of purity in an oppressive patriarchal culture. Often those were linked to forced marriages. Some of their stories will never leave me: young women who had had their education and ambitions cut short being sent to marry men they had never met—men chosen not for compatibility or affection, but to preserve family alliances, assets or bastardised notions of honour.

Such arrangements are not just about culture; they are also about control. The system is upheld by pressure and enforced through silence, and people attempt to justify it through tradition. When marriage is confined within families, the cost of refusal rises astronomically: it is not simply turning down a partner, but rejecting grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts and the entire network of family and friends—and that has a price. Choice under those circumstances is no choice at all. That is why I see the legislation that I put forward in my private Member's Bill, the Marriage (Prohibited Degrees of Relationship) Bill, and the debate we are having today as an extension of the work I did in the last Parliament.

We have heard, rightly, about patriarchal systems that rob women of autonomy, but in cousin marriage those systems are particularly resilient. Why? Because the families are not just connected, but fused—inextricably joined. The pressure is not just external, from legal systems; it is intimate and wholly inescapable, especially when it is generation after generation.

Men are trapped too; I have been told of British Pakistani men forced into such arrangements by community and familial obligations, terrified to defy expectations and cut ties with cousins whom they often consider, because of the closeness of their relationship, almost as siblings. There are even cases of gay men and women who have been forced to marry out of familial obligation. That is not hypothetical: since raising this issue, I have been contacted by scores of youth workers, healthcare professionals and ordinary members of the community who have thanked me for raising it and asked me to keep going. They need politicians to speak up, because they feel that they cannot.

Beneath the surface and behind closed doors, there is support and a real hunger for change in these communities. Sadly, what is lacking is the political courage to match that quiet majority—and it is a quiet majority in all parts of our community: polls show that support for reform is not linked to the black, white or other populations, and a YouGov poll just a few weeks ago showed that a majority of British Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities back a ban on first cousin marriage. The vain virtue signallers who said that moves in this direction would be racist must take a look at themselves; they are the ones opposing a majority of the communities that they play-act at representing.

For people in the communities I am speaking up for—most of the British Pakistani community, where this is a big issue, and to a lesser extent the Traveller community—cousin marriage is entangled with status, tradition and expectations, and speaking out can be very dangerous. As with forced marriage and female

genital mutilation, silence only enables the system. Only sunlight breaks the cycle, and that means naming the issue, debating it and legislating against it.

Some critics say a ban would infringe upon people's freedom—but what freedom are we protecting? The reality for so many is a life predetermined by bloodline and birth order. We are not protecting a freedom; we are perpetuating oppression. Whose freedom, if any, are we protecting? Purely the freedom of the oppressor to oppress and keep down—not the freedom of the individual. The state already intervenes where power dynamics distort consent. We rightly outlaw relationships between teachers and pupils or therapists and clients, because of the imbalance. The same must apply here.

Let us not forget that most cousin marriages are not one-offs. In some cases, they are multi-generational. With each generation, the chance to choose diminishes further. The net tightens and lives are lost in the gaps.

I move now beyond individual freedom to the broader issue of social cohesion. Patrick Nash, an Oxford theologian, argues that cousin marriage undermines trust in public institutions; when communities marry inward, loyalty is channelled inward to extended families and clan structures, rather than to the important shared civic values of the nation state and wider society.

At Harvard, Joseph Henrich has documented how the decline of cousin marriage helped to build western liberal democracies. When families are forced to look beyond their kin networks for marriage partners, new alliances form. Societies move beyond tribal loyalty to a broader civic trust. Studies show that, where cousin marriage continues, there is reduced integration, lower social mobility and higher incidence of corruption. Why? Because when job, marriage, dispute resolution and identity all sit within the same extended family structure, wider society fades from relevance.

If we want a society that functions on the basis of fairness, where the rule of law prevails and where people engage beyond their own, we cannot allow closed family systems to continue to flourish unchallenged. So-called community leaders—often unelected and unaccountable—who derive their authority from familial networks become gatekeepers for those people and communities. They decide who speaks, who marries whom and who gets heard. This system is self-perpetuating. These are not British values, and those who perpetuate such systems should be exposed. In many cases, those leaders are the ones resisting reform, not because the arguments for change are weak, but because their own power depends on those structures being preserved. Reform threatens their influence. That is why this issue matters so much.

We must remember that cousin marriage is not a religious obligation, but a cultural tradition, and traditions can and must change. Other nations have already exhibited powerful leadership in this area; we should look towards countries such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark for a steer. Those countries are liberal democracies with incredibly strong human rights records. They are not reactionary or anachronistic, but fundamentally progressive. Why, then, are we allowing Britain to lag behind? We hear concerns about cultural insensitivity—I have been accused of it myself—but is it not far more insensitive to ignore the pleas of those trapped within those structures? Is it not condescending to assume that communities cannot adapt or reform?

We should be empowering individuals, not entrenching power in extended family hierarchies. The state's job is not to ratify patriarchal bargains, but to protect liberty, health and the chance of every citizen to live a full and independent life. When cousin marriage is prevalent, society and integration suffer, and shared spaces become fewer; school catchments, neighbourhoods and even workplaces can fracture along the lines of extended kin. That is not diversity at its best, but division at its worst. It is not about faith or race. It is about what sort of country we want to live in: one ruled by fear masquerading as family loyalty, or one where each citizen stands equal, with rights and responsibilities to each other deeper than those of family and clan. Those fundamentals are the foundation of a modern nation state and ones I believe this Parliament, this Government and this House should uphold.

Finally, I come to science and the health issue, because the best understood point against cousin marriage, though it is not core to my argument, is health. The Born in Bradford study, one of the UK's most comprehensive birth cohort analyses, has followed 11,000 children.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue forward. It is a difficult subject, and one that can be hard to listen to and respond to in a balanced way. I thank him for doing that well. Does he not agree that the science showing that the prevalence of birth defects doubling in cases of cousin marriage is reason enough to consider drastic legal action? While education is an enviable end-goal pathway, the stats show that it is not effective enough at present. In the interim, for the sake of children and communities, does he agree that action should be taken?

Mr Holden: The hon. Member contributes so often to our debates in such a thoughtful way. He raises an important point about health, which I will develop. The health issues are of fundamental importance but, as I have said in my speech, there are broader societal concerns that mean this issue should be higher up the Government's agenda more generally as well.

For unrelated parents, the Born in Bradford study found that around one in 40 children are born with serious birth defects. Among first cousins, that rises to roughly one in 15, even when controlling for poverty, education and maternal age. That is more than double the risk. It cannot be stressed enough that this is not an isolated issue. In some communities, cousin marriage remains par for the course—the typical, not the atypical. In parts of Bradford, for instance, over half of all mothers of Pakistani heritage are married to first or second cousins.

That is hardly new information; as far back as the 19th century, the *British Medical Journal* documented inherited risks from unions between first cousins. Charles Darwin himself was married to his first cousin, and he suspected a link between his marriage and the poor health of his children, three of whom died young and five of whom suffered from chronic illnesses or disability.

The genetic risks run from the well-known Tay-Sachs, thalassaemia and cystic fibrosis to the under-recognised microcephaly, heart defects and intellectual disabilities. Those disorders are often lifelong, and the toll is felt

not just by families, but by wider society—by the NHS, by our special educational needs system and across communities.

Alison Shaw, professor of social anthropology at Oxford, has written extensively on cousin marriage in British-Pakistani communities. Drawing on public health data, she highlights that children born to first cousins face roughly double the risk of serious genetic disorders compared with those of unrelated parents. Some have suggested that genetic testing could solve the problem but, while certain conditions can be screened for, many cannot. More importantly, testing does nothing to address the broader issues I have already spoken of around coercion and lack of real choice.

Moreover, as UK Biobank studies demonstrate, multi-generational first cousin marriages exponentially compound risk. The DNA profiles in such families begin almost to mirror those of siblings, or certainly uncle-niece relationships, which often carry much higher risks of severe birth defects, when first cousin marriage occurs generation after generation. In broader culture, people often think of the Habsburgs as a reference point, but this issue is more than mere historical curiosity; it is sadly representative of a contemporary crisis that continues to affect families today.

Behind every statistic lie families, clinicians and patients struggling to manage lifelong consequences. What makes this more painful is that so many of these conditions are entirely preventable. When the science is clear, it beggars belief that we still choose not to do anything. We must stop pretending that this is a marginal issue. The data is clear: it is not anecdotal, but systematic. The status quo is not neutral; it is a form of abandonment, and sustaining it is indefensible.

If we were to design a system that throttled personal freedom, threw in major health issues and undermined national cohesion, we could hardly do better than the widespread practice of first cousin marriage. We ban incest for good reasons. We recognise the power imbalances inherent to sexual relationships between teachers and pupils, doctors and patients, uncles and aunts and their nieces and nephews, and parents and their children. We legislate to protect the vulnerable, so why are we silent here? Sadly, I fear that it is because we fear being called intolerant and it is sometimes easier not to look. The truth is that inaction is not neutrality; it is complicity. We must do better.

We need only to look at what has happened in recent days with the release of the report on grooming gangs. I think back to the Labour MPs who raised that issue at a much earlier stage, such as Ann Cryer, who spoke passionately about it almost two decades ago. There is a lot to learn from people who have gone before us.

My Bill currently sits before the House. I thank the Members who have already put their names to it, including the hon. Member for Liverpool Walton (Dan Carden), my right hon. Friends the Members for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho) and for Newark (Robert Jenrick), the hon. Member for North Northumberland (David Smith), my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston (Neil O'Brien), the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), my hon. Friends the Members for Fylde (Mr Snowden), for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), for West Suffolk

[Mr Holden]

(Nick Timothy) and for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott).

I urge the Government to take this matter seriously and to listen to the survivors, to professionals and to the silent majorities in the affected communities. We must stop treating such issues as a taboo. If the so-called community leaders had got their way, we would have kept marriage under 16 and we would not have banned hymenoplasty and virginity testing or people being taken abroad for forced marriage. This should not be a taboo issue; it is a public health issue. It is about liberty and integration.

The aim is not to condemn, but to liberate, in order to ensure that our country is one where freedom does not end at the edge of tradition, where cohesion is built on our common citizenship, not inherited constraint, and where children are not born into suffering that we have the power to prevent. We have a chance to take a lead and make a statement that in 21st century Britain, freedom, health and integration matter. I hope the Minister will hear that call.

11.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Davies-Jones): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dame Siobhain. I thank the right hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Holden) for securing this important debate and commend him for all his brilliant work to support women, in the previous Parliament and going forward. I know that he feels strongly about this issue and, as he said, has introduced a private Member's Bill on the subject. It goes without saying that it is a sensitive and complex issue, which requires nuance and respect. I thank him for the way he presented his arguments today.

It is important first to understand the current law around marriage. In England and Wales, marriage law is governed primarily by the Marriage Act 1949, which outlines the conditions under which a marriage is considered void, meaning not legally valid. That includes situations where one party is under 18 or where one party is serving a whole-life order in prison. Under the Act, marriages between individuals who are considered too closely related are also considered void. Those relationships fall within so-called prohibited degrees of relationship, which include close blood relations, such as siblings, and certain step relations, such as someone marrying the child of a former spouse.

As we all know, the prohibited degrees of relationship in the 1949 Act do not include first cousins. To understand why that exception exists, it is helpful to consider the context. As the right hon. Member mentioned when he introduced his Bill and in his speech today, marriage between first cousins has been permitted since Henry VIII changed the law in order to marry Anne Boleyn's cousin, Catherine Howard.

The list of relationships that are legally too close for marriage—prohibited degrees—has been around for centuries. It was first officially written into law in the Marriage Act 1835. It was updated by various laws passed between 1907 and 1931, and was eventually brought together into the 1949 Act. The law has continued

to evolve since then; for example, the Children Act 1975 added a prohibition on marriages between adoptive parents and their adopted children.

There have been studies that seem to reinforce our anecdotal understanding that individuals from communities are increasingly moving away from traditional practices and opting for relationships outside their extended families. This shift reflects a broader trend of integration into wider society, alongside awareness of certain health and societal implications that are associated, as the right hon. Member mentioned, with cousin marriage.

Let me address the right hon. Member's concerns about those health risks, and specifically the risk of congenital disease in children. There is a continued debate about the genetic risks involved in first cousin marriages. As my noble Friend Baroness Merron highlighted in the other place earlier this year, the NHS offers support for families who may be at higher risk of genetic abnormalities. The Government also understand the importance of having better data in this area, which is why the National Congenital Anomaly and Rare Disease Registration Service collects and analyses data to support doctors, charities and policymakers to improve treatments and care in England. NHS England has also recently published guidance to improve recording of national data on closely related couples.

I listened carefully to the right hon. Member's argument that banning first cousin marriage could promote community integration. We recognise that the practice is permitted in some faith communities, while it is not permitted in others. As I have said, this is a complex and sensitive area of law, and I am happy to continue to engage with him on it as the Government consider the issue more broadly.

The right hon. Member also suggested that banning first cousin marriage could help to reduce forced marriages. Let me be absolutely clear: forced marriage is a serious human rights violation. It is illegal and carries a maximum prison sentence of up to seven years. It is a complex form of honour or culture-based abuse, and our response must be comprehensive, with a focus on preventing such crimes, on supporting and protecting survivors and those at risk, and on bringing perpetrators to justice.

Tackling forced marriage is a key part of the Government's mission to halve violence against women and girls within a decade. The forced marriage unit, which is a joint effort between the Home Office and the Foreign Office, works tirelessly to combat forced marriage, both at home and abroad. The unit provides a vital range of materials, including free e-learning. Last year alone, over 5,800 professionals, such as registrars, completed that training. A new forced marriage resource pack has also been launched to help raise awareness of forced marriage among professionals.

I recognise that there is a lot of interest across the House in bringing forward a number of changes to weddings law more generally. I know that many Members are keen to see changes brought forward quickly, but it is important that any such changes are made in the round. Just last week, during a debate on humanist marriage, I explained to a packed Westminster Hall that it is not possible for the Government simply to ignore the Law Commission's 2022 report. We cannot ignore the fact that that report identified a number of complex and significant issues within the current legal framework.

Mr Holden: May I take the Minister back to a point she made about forced marriage? I understand her commitment, and that of the Government, on this issue, but surely she must recognise that when we are looking at a rate of first cousin marriages of between one in 200 and one in 500 in normal society, but a rate of one in two in certain communities, real questions must be asked. How can anybody in those communities really speak out about that issue and the concerns around forced marriage? It is so clear that the family ties are so strong, generation after generation, that they make it almost impossible for people to come forward.

Alex Davies-Jones: I totally agree with the right hon. Member. He makes a very powerful point, which speaks to why we need to look at this issue very carefully. With certain groups engaging in this practice, we cannot just have a knee-jerk reaction; he mentioned that in his speech. Others are calling for me to have a knee-jerk reaction on humanist weddings, for example, and to just quickly lay a statutory instrument to make that change possible. I am not about creating piecemeal legislation in an area that is very complex.

I want to reassure the right hon. Member that the Government are not ignoring this issue. We are considering it deeply and in the round, but it is responsible of us to consider it carefully and with the appropriate communities, which he mentioned, so that we get a full picture of the situation.

That brings me to the central proposal in this debate, which is to ban first cousin marriage. It is worth noting that during the past 14 years, when the prevalence of first cousin marriage was higher than it is now, the previous Government, in which the right hon. Member was a Minister, took no steps to introduce a ban. As I have said, first cousin marriage is complex and sensitive, and this Government are considering it with the seriousness that it rightly deserves.

The right hon. Member will also be aware that in 2022, when the Law Commission published its comprehensive review of weddings law, the previous Government had ample opportunity to raise the issue of first cousin marriage in response to that report, but they chose not to respond at all. In the report, the Law Commission set out a number of issues with marriage law, including inconsistency and unfairness across different groups and faith communities. We are considering the report and the wider issues of weddings law, including first cousin marriage, and I want to put that on record today.

My officials are working hard on weddings law reform, as am I, and an update from the Government on our position will come very soon. I am happy to continue to engage with the right hon. Member and any other Members or those outside this place who want to discuss this matter further as we prepare our plan for weddings reform.

Question put and agreed to.

11.25 am

Sitting suspended.

Businesses in Rural Areas

[MATT WESTERN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Matt Western (in the Chair): I am pleased to see so many Members here. It is a warm afternoon, so if you wish to remove your jackets, you may do so. I do not necessarily expect a hot debate on this subject; however, a great many of you are expecting to speak, so we will start with a time limit of two minutes—and I am already anticipating that it could be reduced—and you may wish to prepare your speeches accordingly. I remind you all to speak through the Chair.

2.31 pm

Steff Aquarone (North Norfolk) (LD): I beg to move,
That this House has considered Government support for businesses in rural areas.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western, and I am delighted to secure this important debate. We need growth. It is a key part of the Government's agenda and it is a fact agreed across the House: our economy has to get going again. I want to make the simple but firm case that the Government can secure that much-needed growth if they give our rural economy the support it needs.

For hundreds of years, our country was driven primarily by the rural economy. North Norfolk was a vital trading hub, with the Glaven valley becoming highly prosperous as a key component of the wool trade, importing shipments from Europe and benefiting from our ease of access to the Netherlands by sea. While the Glaven ports are no longer economic powerhouses, the rural economy continues to play a major role. Nowadays, about a quarter of businesses are based in rural areas, and they contribute a whopping £240 billion to the economy per year. However, we are acutely affected by the specific challenges that rural economies face.

When people in North Norfolk think about economic growth and success, they do not need to dive head first into the spreadsheets of the *Financial Times* to decide about business confidence; they take a look at what is happening in their communities. Their economic indicators are not hedge fund billions, but on the high street. They take things such as the expansion of Coffeesmiths in North Walsham as a sign that more people are visiting our rural market towns, and they see from the opening of new businesses in Stalham that the Norfolk broads and their communities retain their unique appeal.

However, people in North Norfolk also see the closure of our local bank branches and think about how small businesses and sole traders will struggle with their business banking. They see our inadequate public transport system and wonder how our businesses can recruit or young people can train outside the immediate area.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): The hon. Member is doing a great job in advocating for rural businesses. I was speaking the other day to the Suffolk chamber of commerce, which highlighted just how critical rural bus services are for people being able to get to work, training and other activities, and therefore how critical they are for our rural economy. Does he agree that we need better funding for rural bus services not only to support the economy, but to tackle social isolation?

Steff Aquarone: I agree entirely—if only there was a buses Bill before the House. We are also going to get the Transport Committee's report on buses connecting rural communities, and I would be interested in his thoughts on that in due course.

Meanwhile, rural residents see the Chancellor and the Business Secretary courting the banks and hedge funds, or flying overseas to seek investment. They know that that is important, but they would like to see similar care and engagement for the businesses that matter to them. The Chancellor is keen to get the ear of BlackRock's Larry Fink, but what about the insights of Larry's Pizzeria in Hoveton? Meg and Jamie, the hard-working owners, recently showed me how perilous the situation is for rural businesses like theirs. They have excellent reviews, a busy restaurant and a prime broads location, but the cash still just does not add up. The ever-growing cost of supplies, the broken business rates system and high energy costs mean that it has rarely been tougher for a rural business like theirs.

Business owners, employees, trainees and jobseekers have all shared their insights about how these rural economic challenges are impacting them. Chief among them is attracting, training and retaining the workforce. Although we in North Norfolk are proud to have the oldest population in the country, we are blessed with many eager and talented young people who are keen to cut their teeth in a range of sectors. However, the sad reality is that young people in rural areas are missing out on opportunities and seeing their career paths limited by the difficulty of accessing training, apprenticeships and early career development, which are simply too far away and take too long to reach to be feasible.

A large part of that is down to our public transport struggles. During the debate on the Bus Services (No. 2) Bill, I spoke about a young woman from my constituency who is eager to get an apprenticeship working in childcare, but buses will not get her to the right part of Norwich in time for the 8 am start.

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): High streets in market towns such as Melksham, Devizes and Bradford-on-Avon in my constituency suffer from a lack of footfall, which is exacerbated by poor public transport connections. Does my hon. Friend agree that improving bus and train services, as well as providing safe cycle lanes, is crucial for business development?

Steff Aquarone: I wholeheartedly agree. It is not just the reduction in social isolation and the improved access to healthcare, but the access to training and development, and the ability of customers to get to places to spend their money in the local economy, that make the case for improvement in public transport such a compelling one.

As I was saying, a large part of this situation is down to our transport struggles. The would-be apprentice in childcare I mentioned cannot get to the right place in Norwich at the right time. Training providers themselves struggle to recruit and retain the necessary staff and professionals to deliver consistent and wide-ranging vocational training offers.

I want to highlight the work of one of my constituents in trying to tackle these training and employment challenges head-on. Mitzi from Mundesley has set up a business that employs young local people to turn empty second homes into affordable rental properties. She currently

has three such young people—Jake, Jeremy and Sandor—and they are getting practical skills and training in the construction industry while helping to deliver much-needed affordable homes for people just like them.

Community-centred entrepreneurs like Mitzi are not a rarity in rural areas. People start the businesses that their communities want and need, and they provide just as much, if not more, than they receive. However, rural entrepreneurs such as Mitzi, and business owners and managers across rural areas, also struggle with a lack of networks and experience, which are more easily clustered in urban settings. In the square mile of the City of London, there are 22,000 businesses; in the 360 square miles of North Norfolk, there are 5,000. There is a lack of easy networking, shared expertise and experience, and paths to mentorship and training, which are far more viable in an urban business setting, and yet we have no less ability to develop cutting-edge innovation, global leadership and breakaway sector success.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): I was very lucky last year, on the day after the general election was called, to celebrate my birthday at Albourne Estate, which is a vineyard that produces exceptional English wine. As those of us in areas such as Sussex look towards devolution, does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that businesses like Albourne are given support through the incoming mayors, and that those mayors have the powers in areas such as transport, training and skills to deal with the issues that he is outlining?

Steff Aquarone: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention, and I am grateful to that business in her constituency for providing such a great product, which I have sampled. It is mostly breweries in North Norfolk, so I think I will be safe.

I totally agree with my hon. Friend: devolution is a great opportunity. Whatever people feel about devolution, the opportunity that it provides, both in transport and for economic growth leadership, is clear and we must embrace it. Devolution is happening, including in Norfolk and Suffolk, and she has outlined one of the things in favour of it.

Clean Tech East, which is in a business park that straddles my constituency and that of the hon. Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild), is one example of sector-led success, but it is also a great example of the support that is needed from Government, which is slightly different. In particular, we need Government to empower local leaders to take action.

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): It is good news that the rural prosperity fund has been extended for another year, but it has been reduced to £33 million this year. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need a firm, long-term commitment to solving the challenges of rural infrastructure provision?

Steff Aquarone: I am relieved that my hon. Friend asked that question, because much as funding is welcome in all forms—I know that many of my constituency businesses and their supporters have applied for funds, received them and been part of schemes—we need long-term settlements, long-term funding and local accountability. We cannot just be queuing up to make our pitches to Whitehall; we must have things decided and delivered on the ground.

The support that is needed in rural areas is different. Rural economic development can be, and must be, more exciting, inventive and far-reaching than just building and leasing business parks. Even where they are useful, local authorities and local leaders have to get to the root causes of rural economic struggles and support businesses to address them.

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): In Winchester we have the fantastic Sparsholt agricultural college, which engages with local businesses and stakeholders to ensure that it trains students in the skills that the local economy will need. A good example is its vineyard management course, which takes advantage of the amazing new vineyards popping up on our amazing chalk soil. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need Government support to ensure that there are accessible courses to give students of all backgrounds the skills to drive our rural economy?

Steff Aquarone: I totally agree. We are developing a bit of a wine theme here, but let me return to a subject that Members might have heard Liberal Democrats talk about a lot, which is care. We are proud to have the oldest demographic in the country in North Norfolk. We should not be afraid of the fact that we have a care industry, which we should celebrate and encourage, and in which we should create career paths and provide training opportunities. Workforce development is key to tackling rural economic development.

I am delighted that some innovative, locally led programmes have been delivered by Lib Dem-led North Norfolk district council. Business owners have told me of the positive experiences they have had with the support and training that is available, and many more will benefit from the recently launched Invest North Norfolk hub. Local leaders, however, need to break the mould and provide innovative, far-reaching support and strategy to supercharge every rural economy. The rural economy is far from immune to the general business challenges that many face across the country; in fact, many of those struggles are only made greater by the nature of rural areas. Rural businesses struggle more with access to funding for investment and seed capital, and they struggle more to meet the cost of decarbonisation.

At the same time, in North Norfolk we have seen large community benefit funds from energy giants that host renewable infrastructure in our area, but the restrictions on those funds are incredibly onerous and they eventually run short of projects to fund. There are only so many bus stops in North Norfolk that they can attempt to gold plate. If access to the funds were liberalised, allowing businesses to secure the important support that they need to grow, adapt and improve, they could have a greater and wider-reaching economic impact, and they could support wider aims to secure environmental benefits and benefits for the communities that their infrastructure affects.

Mr Angus MacDonald (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD): I wonder whether I can make the case for real support from the Government for community benefit from renewable energy. It is being proposed at a fairly modest level by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, but it is one of the biggest opportunities for rural Britain to transform its economy.

Steff Aquarone: We have started the list, so let me reinforce and add my support to that ask. I hope it is something the Minister might be able to discuss with colleagues in DESNZ, to see whether some joined-up thinking might happen.

I have spoken much about challenges and struggles, but I also want to talk about the huge opportunities that our rural businesses could seize on with the right support from the Government. The unique character of our rural areas sets them up perfectly to benefit from some of the most exciting advances in science and research. Norwich research park, which is not in my constituency but is not far away, hosts many of the country's world-leading research institutes in the field of agriscience, and they are making incredible scientific progress that could make our food and farming healthier, more efficient and more sustainable. Having such research excellence almost on our doorstep is incredibly exciting, and its location within touching distance of many of our farming and agricultural businesses provides opportunities for easy roll-out of a new generation of science. Our farmers could benefit from world-leading research, and our researchers are already benefiting from our world-leading farmers.

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): Is the hon. Gentleman concerned that the trade agreement signed with the EU will stymie gene editing and the important research that the United Kingdom is doing in that field? In fact, the treaty will prevent us from rolling out gene-edited crops in the United Kingdom.

Steff Aquarone: I am a cautious supporter of the latest developments in food science. I have met the researchers who are leading on the development of that scientific frontier and the safeguards as well. I am concerned about some of the detail. I accept that there is a difficult trade-off with the other demands that farmers make of me, to ensure standardisation for import-export and harmonisation with the European market that they can sell into. However, I welcome the hon. Member's intervention; it is an important point, well made.

It is not just the deployment of research that can benefit our rural areas; these businesses add an exciting new link to our supply chain. With better connectivity and support for these new, progressive, science-led businesses to source locally, our rural businesses can see a huge boost from encouraging progress in our cutting-edge science and tech sectors.

However, we must not forget the middle of the chain. Still, too much of what is grown and reared in North Norfolk is shipped elsewhere for value adding and processing. With greater support for local leadership, we could create more resilient local supply chains from R&D all the way through to the finished product. That could vastly reduce food miles and improve quality standards and innovation. Additionally, many researchers, scientists and more might choose to come and live in North Norfolk if we had the necessary public transport links to make us a commutable destination. Instead, they are contributing to the overheating of the housing market in our main city.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an impassioned speech, as is his norm. While tourism is vital for our rural economies, he touched on accommodation, and many businesses in

[Alison Hume]

my constituency of Scarborough and Whitby are finding it harder and harder to employ enough staff because of the increase in short-term holiday lets, which is forcing local people to move out. Does he agree that the Government must urgently bring forward registration of short-term holiday lets to avoid our rural areas being overwhelmed, so that employees have somewhere to live and businesses enough people to employ?

Steff Aquarone: On balance, I agree—partly to manage the local housing supply and encourage the local tourism economy, but also for reasons of public safety and improved standards. The people I speak to and who approach me are usually the ones whose standards I have no worries about, but there are many out there who probably would benefit from registration. That is the right, balanced approach, so I support what the hon. Lady says.

Going back to buses, with the right public transport infrastructure constituents of mine could commute to the many thousands of jobs emerging in what is fast becoming the global centre of excellence for agritech. Likewise, those bringing their expertise to Norfolk could more fully enjoy the environmental and lifestyle benefits of our county and my constituency, while bringing a new and expanding clientele to our local businesses.

I look forward to hearing from many others about the rural businesses in their areas. I am grateful for the interventions so far and I expect that we will hear of many shared challenges and frustrations, but I am also excited about the opportunities just waiting for the support they need to kick-start them. The rural economy is a sleeping giant waiting to be awoken. Let us do for rural and coastal communities what we did as a country for industrialised towns and cities in the second half of the last century. We just need the Government to grasp the reins and tackle the challenges that we face.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): I believe there was a rural White Paper in 1995, followed by a similar one in 2000, but then a 15-year gap until the productivity plan and another eight-year gap until the “Unleashing rural opportunity” paper of 2023, which was 28 pages in total. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need a clear, defined rural strategy that ties all those elements together to release the potential of rural Britain?

Steff Aquarone: I agree, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the perfect platform to remind the House of my support for a coastal communities Minister—but that is outside the scope of this particular debate. This issue requires not only strategic vision and leadership from the top, but empowerment and resources on the ground; if another strategy will help that, I support it. The number of papers the hon. Gentleman referred to reminds us all of the cross-party ambition here—we just have to get on and do it, and this feels like a good time to grasp that nettle. We already contribute hundreds of billions to the economy, but there are billions more just waiting to be unlocked all over our country. With real support, vision and strategy, we can transform the rural economy into the powerhouse it has been before and should be in the future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Matt Western (in the Chair): It is good to see so many Members bobbing; I remind Members that they should bob throughout if they wish to be called in the debate. I am going to set a two-minute time limit, but we may have to reduce that at some point, given the amount of interventions that have been taken—I am not criticising that but, when speaking, please bear in mind that should you take an intervention you will prevent others from speaking later.

2.49 pm

Tim Roca (Macclesfield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I commend the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) for securing this important debate.

Rural businesses are a core part of the economy in places such as Macclesfield, which—as you will know, Mr Western—is a beautiful part of the world, on the western edge of the Peak district. Field, farm and forest bring, in equal measure, community and economic activity. Businesses are vital in rural areas, be they the local pub, the farms that feed us or the businesses that support the tourism industry—a critical part of the economy in my area.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): At the end of the high season for tourists, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should reduce tourism VAT to lower prices and allow businesses to increase investment, particularly in coastal and rural communities such as those in my constituency? That would boost growth in tourist economies. There is such a system in Italy, France and Spain, and it brings much more money in.

Tim Roca: I agree that we should be open-minded about such measures, just as I was open-minded about taking interventions—although that may change.

On that point, I want to celebrate the value of the visitor economy, which has been mentioned. It has risen to more than £1 billion in Cheshire East, which means that 10,000 jobs depend on that sector in my area. Many hon. Members have spoken, and no doubt will speak, eloquently about the challenges facing rural businesses, and I will talk briefly about a couple of those challenges too.

First, Macclesfield residents have great difficulty finding transport, so they are reliant on a car to get around. If they want to go to a local pub such as the Rose and Crown in Winkle or the Swan Inn in Kettleshulme, and they do not have a car, they must depend on bus routes that are unreliable, infrequent or simply not there. I welcome the more than £5.5 million in extra funding from the Government for Cheshire East council to improve local bus services, and I hope that we continue with efforts to improve rural transport connectivity and the road network—for those hon. Members were present for my Westminster Hall debate on roadworks in Cheshire, the B4570 remains closed from Macclesfield through Rainow.

Secondly, digital connectivity is incredibly important. In many parts of my constituency, phone signal is impossible to come by. I looked at Ofcom’s network coverage map prior to this debate, and there is limited data and not much voice access over huge chunks of my constituency. That strongly affects businesses, because we all know that internet access is a critical part of the rural economy. I welcome the schemes that are supporting further roll-outs, but more needs to be done.

Thirdly, I am sure that other hon. Members will talk powerfully about the impact of energy costs on rural businesses, and I am keen to hear more about what the Government are doing to ensure that those costs are reduced. The Country Land and Business Association powerfully said in 2024 that the rural economy was 14% less productive than the national average. If we close that gap, £40 billion extra could be added to England's gross value added.

Our rural economy is critical, as is investment in it. There is a great opportunity for us, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister about the good work that the Government are doing to support that.

2.52 pm

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. As we know, rural businesses are the backbone of our communities, but they are being asked to compete with one hand tied behind their back. Across South Devon, local entrepreneurs—farmers, shopkeepers, tradespeople, producers and publicans—are working tirelessly to keep their communities vibrant, providing jobs, supporting local supply chains and bringing people together, but the odds are stacked against them.

One of the most urgent and unacceptable barriers that rural businesses face is poor broadband and mobile phone coverage. In some parts of my constituency, people cannot send an email without it crashing halfway, and taking card payments is a gamble. How can a small rural business compete in a digital economy if it cannot get online? Poor coverage is not just an inconvenience; it is a direct threat to livelihoods.

I will also address the way in which the Government are implementing the extended producer responsibility scheme, which is hitting local hospitality businesses hard. I welcome the Government's efforts to make manufacturing more sustainable, but that must not come at the cost of adding further financial uncertainty for small businesses that are already under pressure.

The New Inn, a historical pub in the small village of Moreleigh in my constituency, has been informed by the brewery that supplies it that prices will increase by 7p per bottle of beer and cider and up to 21p per bottle of wine. The brewery will not deal with the bottles afterwards, however, so the pub also has to pay for the disposal of the glassware. The proprietor said:

"in effect we are paying twice...The hospitality trade is being unfairly targeted by this government. Trading is becoming increasingly difficult. After our business just surviving Covid—we are still paying the bounce back loan—then being hit with the Employer's NI hike and now this, I am beginning to wonder if after 14 years it's really worth it any more."

These pubs are not major polluters; they are local employers and community hubs. They are vital to the social and economic life of our villages and towns. More than just pubs, they are third spaces and social hubs that are vital to community life. Yet under this scheme they are treated the same as massive supermarket chains. That is unfair, out of touch and economically harmful.

2.54 pm

Elaine Stewart (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. It has taken until 2025, but Barr, a rural south Ayrshire village, is finally able to enjoy a mobile phone signal.

I was pleased for the community; I had my photograph taken with residents, and the local papers covered the story. It should have been a non-event—this is 2025, after all—but rural communities are too often left behind when it comes to digital connectivity, which is why it was an important moment for Barr. That is the first of three points that I want to make about businesses in rural communities such as Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock.

My second point is that businesses employ local people, and people buy houses and spend their money in the local community. Sometimes the issue is finding local talent, and that is made more difficult by a skills mismatch. Take green energy: many rural communities are hosting new wind farm projects, but vacancies for local engineers and maintenance staff for wind farms are not always easy to find. I am sure that that is also common in many other areas. We have talent in Ayrshire, but we do not have the right skills. We need to train our young people with the right skillsets for local jobs for the future. I want growth deals, such as the Ayrshire growth deal, to invest in skills for the future, and I made that case to the Scotland Office yesterday.

My final point is about broader infrastructure such as transport. Poor road connectivity and limited public transport options hinder people's access to work. The A77 in Ayrshire is in desperate need of an upgrade. It is plagued by congestion and shocking road surfaces, which make travel difficult for residents and businesses alike. Last week, the Government announced £15.6 billion for transport in the spending review. The spending review shows that the Government are backing the devolved Administrations. Those funds should be used directly to ensure that Scotland's transport network is efficient and accessible. I have again written to the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop, about the state of the A77.

I want to finish on a broader point—

Matt Western (in the Chair): Order. I am afraid you are out of time.

2.57 pm

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Western.

The family farm tax was a hammer blow to our agricultural businesses. We understand that the Government seek to raise money, but there is an alternative on the table: the so-called clawback proposal. I hope that the Minister will update us on that and, if the Government do not think that the clawback proposal would work and raise potentially even more money than the current policy, I hope that he can explain that.

More broadly, the Government have said that they will increase spending on environmental land management schemes, but they are cutting back in other areas. The overall budget for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is coming down in real terms. What will that mean for our agricultural businesses?

Beyond specifically rural businesses such as farms, rural constituencies have all manner of other businesses that just happen to be in rural areas. As colleagues have said, those businesses face additional challenges, first among which is connectivity. I hope that the Government will do more on the shared rural network; it is going quite well in Scotland and Wales, but we need more of it in England.

[*Damian Hinds*]

On the transition to VoIP—voice over internet protocol—we need to ensure that businesses have proper power back-up systems in place for power cuts. We need a rapid expansion of banking hubs, because the loss of banking infrastructure is felt particularly in rural areas, where banks are more spread out, and we need full utilisation of the national post office network.

As well as dealing with problems, we must seize opportunities. A couple of colleagues have already mentioned the wine sector, which is a great growth opportunity for rural areas. Much more could also be done on tourism, both inbound and domestic, as well as agritourism. We need to ensure that young people growing up in our constituencies have the same opportunities as others, and that means a particular focus on T-level industrial placements for children from rural areas, as well as ensuring that they can get to work; I would love to see a national version of the wheels to work programme, renting scooters to young people.

2.59 pm

Terry Jermy (South West Norfolk) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. I thank my Norfolk colleague, the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone), for securing the debate.

One of the real pleasures of being a Member of Parliament is visiting businesses across the constituency. That is something I aim to do regularly in South West Norfolk. I have two questions when I visit: what are your challenges, and what are your opportunities? The responses are nearly always the same: skills and connectivity.

The Heygates flour mill in Downham Market is nearly 200 years old. When I visited, the owners told me that they have to bring over engineers from Turkey, which is a big flour-producing country, to service the machines. They cannot recruit engineers locally, so they bring them in from Turkey at great expense.

On healthcare, 85 million drip bags are produced every year in Thetford in my constituency. Those businesses tell me that they are moving away from having people on production lines and towards automation, so they need trained, skilled individuals to help with technology. They struggle to recruit locally for that critical part of our healthcare system, located in a rural community.

The Wissington sugar beet factory near Downham Market is the largest sugar beet factory in Europe. The owners tell me that they have vibration sensors on the machinery, linked with artificial intelligence, so they can proactively plan maintenance to reduce the number of breakdowns, but they struggle to recruit people with the right skills.

Those are the issues that come up time and again. Hon. Members have already mentioned connectivity, and I would agree that issues with connectivity in the broadest possible sense—mobile phone signals, broadband, trains, buses and road infrastructure—really hold us back in my part of the world. I therefore ask the Minister to comment on skills and connectivity.

3.1 pm

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) for securing this important debate and for his excellent speech.

Small rural businesses are the heartbeat of the economy in Glastonbury and Somerton, but many are in crisis. The Government's increase in employer's national insurance contributions is an aggressive measure that disproportionately burdens the rural economy. Jacqueline, the owner of two businesses in my constituency, has gone from being in profit to laying off four members of staff. The Liberal Democrats have opposed the rise at every turn, knowing the devastating impact that it will have on rural businesses.

The Chancellor's choice to introduce permanently lower multipliers for retail, hospitality and leisure properties from 2026 will punish significant rural employers at a time when the Government should be supporting them. The Kings Arms in Charlton Horethorne is a thriving rural pub, but the owners contacted me recently to say that the changes to business rates could cause its closure. Overt Locke, a Somerton hardware store, is also experiencing economic collapse. Indeed, it did close—the previous owners had to sell up—but luckily the new owners, Rob and Louise, have resurrected the business; however, it will be profitable only if business rates relief is sustained at 75%.

The Liberal Democrats would scrap the broken business rates system and replace it with a commercial landowner levy that taxes land value, not productive investment. When rural businesses fail, we lose not just livelihoods but the social and economic fabric of our countryside.

3.2 pm

Maya Ellis (Ribble Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I thank the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) for securing this brilliant debate.

My constituency is a fantastic mix of urban pockets and vast rural areas, with some incredible businesses, including Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses, James' Places hotels and Massey Feeds. I have just come from the Countryside Alliance awards in the House of Lords, and the hottest restaurant in the north-west, Eight at Gazegill, has just won the rural enterprise award.

Hon. Members have raised really important issues, including affordable housing, transport and congested country roads, but I want to focus on a particular point that I am concerned about following the spending review last week. My rural constituency in the county of Lancashire and many other areas across the UK are about to lose the last pockets of business support funding.

The areas that remain without a mayoral devolution deal are predominantly rural shire counties, and in the spending review it was confirmed that the shared prosperity fund will end in 2026. It was obviously meant to be a bridging fund to replace the millions of pounds of regional development funding that areas such as Lancashire used to receive from the EU, and it predominantly funded business growth hubs and other business support.

As of next year, all local growth and business support funding will be channelled into mayoral areas. I would be grateful if the Minister could assure us that further plans will be made to continue supporting innovative and high-growth businesses across our non-mayoral areas; otherwise, we are set to miss out on huge opportunities for innovation in the often more community-driven and community-embedded businesses that we value and want to encourage.

I am conscious of time, so I will end by saying that I look forward to the Government building out our strategies to understand rural economies more. I support the calls for a proper strategy. We need to grip the rural opportunity in this country, and that starts with the rural businesses that keep those areas thriving.

3.4 pm

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Western. In eastern and mid Devon, we have many ordinary medium-sized and small businesses, but they are facing extraordinary barriers, including being held back by a lack of reliable broadband in rural areas. I appreciate that that is not in the Minister's brief, but I urge him to lobby and talk to his colleagues in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology to try to get some movement on the issue.

Under the recent spending review, the 99% target for national coverage moved from 2030 to 2032, which was deeply disappointing. According to Ofcom's "Connected Nations" update in January, only 56% of premises in mid Devon have access to full-fibre broadband, which is way below the national average.

Daniel Lennox lives in Sidbury with his family. He works remotely and he runs a home-based business called Stagely, a digital platform that helps people to discover regional theatre productions. The business sets out to showcase local productions, and it is backed by Innovate UK. It is exactly the kind of enterprise that we want to be encouraging. It is creative, based in the community and part of the future digital economy. However, it cannot run properly, given the lack of a decent internet connection to Daniel's property, which has been left with a part-copper line that is unreliable, slow and not sufficient for a digital business.

Daniel's case is far from unique, and while I welcome the Government's £5 billion investment in Project Gigabit, the delivery is falling behind. We must ensure that rural businesses such as Daniel's on the edge of villages succeed, and that they do not fail because of unreliable or unavailable broadband.

3.6 pm

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter (Suffolk Coastal) (Lab): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. I start by thanking the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) for bringing forward this important debate.

I would like to celebrate the success of Orford General Store, which, just 45 minutes ago in the House of Lords, was highly commended in the Countryside Alliance's national award category of best village shop. Susan and her team have built an incredible business that supports the local and regional supply chain. It procures from more than 50 local businesses, acts as an important champion of local and regional food producers, and

supports the local community. It is, of course, just one example of the many local businesses across Suffolk Coastal that demonstrates the best of our rural businesses.

In Suffolk Coastal, we have 4,210 businesses, of which 4,135 are small or micro businesses. It is those small businesses that make up the lifeblood of business in rural areas. Micro, small and medium-sized businesses truly drive the regional and local economy. They do more than just invest directly and indirectly; their local money employs local people, uses local contractors, sells local produce and celebrates the best of our local offering. They provide local services to our community.

In fact, those businesses are more than just the lifeblood; they are the bones that hold us together and the very organs that make rural life possible. More needs to be done to ensure that we truly understand the challenges that they face.

I am conscious of time, but I am going to provide a shopping list of some of the issues that we would like to be addressed. Digital connectivity has been talked about a lot. We also need investment in our B roads; we have no motorways in the entirety of Suffolk, and B roads are the lifeblood of our areas. Transport, housing, planning restrictions and a cashless society are also challenges for rural businesses. I support the hon. Member in calling on the Government for a rural strategy.

3.8 pm

Victoria Collins (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) on securing this excellent debate. In preparation, I surveyed local businesses to hear from them directly. What came through loud and clear is that rural businesses face the same mounting pressures as many others. As one business in Tring said:

"The cost of business is the highest it has ever been."

Another told me:

"Currently, there is no incentive for small businesses to employ staff or even start up."

I grew up helping my mum on the shop floor in a rural market town, so that breaks my heart. Such businesses are the backbone of our community.

Practically all the businesses who responded cited the combined impact of Government Budget measures, from the employment costs faced by Claire in Wheathampstead, who runs 2by2 Holidays, to Tring Martial Arts Academy and DJ's Play Zone, which are reducing operating hours and workforce, and shelving expansion plans. How does that support the growth of our economy?

Accountants are often the canary in the coal mine when it comes to business health. AngloDutch accountants in Tring confirms that numerous clients, especially in hospitality, are struggling with employer's national insurance increases alongside rising business rates. There are also the rising costs of day-to-day operations, from energy bills to products, as highlighted by Savage's and Tabure in Berkhamsted. The cost of living has an impact on customers too. Chantal from Wheathampstead tells me that people simply are not buying like they used to, a concern also raised by businesses such as iQuilt.

As has been mentioned, our rural businesses face additional structural burdens. Connecting people to businesses in person or online is hindered by terrible

[Victoria Collins]

internet and inadequate transport services. Flamstead, Markyate, Gaddesden and parts of Wheathampstead are in the worst 10% for connectivity nationwide. What is more, under the Conservatives, Hertfordshire saw the biggest cut—56.5%—in vehicle mileage on bus services from 2016 to 2021. I call on the Minister to take action for our rural businesses.

Matt Western (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members to keep an eye on the clock. The time limit is two minutes.

3.11 pm

Dave Robertson (Lichfield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Western. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) on securing the debate.

In Lichfield, Burntwood and the villages in my part of rural Staffordshire, we have an amazing number of great local businesses—far too many to name in only one minute and 45 seconds. Many businesses are held back by poor connectivity, both broadband and 5G. Although the Government's investment of £5 billion at the spending review is welcome, we need to crowd in private sector investment to drive the much faster roll-out of broadband and 5G.

There is a potential lever for us to pull on broadband. BT Openreach owns the infrastructure that broadband providers rent—the poles and holes, as it is referred to in the industry. The rental of that infrastructure is charged by the metre, not by address or business, which means that access to it is 20 times more expensive in rural areas. Although I welcome Ofcom's ongoing review of that charging structure, I hope that the outcome will reduce costs for rural businesses and level the playing field between what is urban and what is not.

There is also work to do on 5G, because the current roll-out is the slowest in the G7. The simple fact is that we need more masts; 5G works better because it is higher frequency and shorter range. Unfortunately, the tower companies that own the masts are driving down rentals for landowners and litigating against them using legislation introduced by the previous Government. Our Government should look at how the market structure operates, and how legislative change could allow a competitive market to bring forward new masts to provide the physical infrastructure to allow that connectivity to happen.

3.13 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. I want to make two brief points that have been raised with me in the highlands. First, the gov.uk One website is proving difficult, with customer services support problems. I do not expect the Minister to reply but I would be grateful if that could be passed on to civil servants.

Secondly, on 1 November 1965, the then Labour Government had the wisdom to put in place the Highlands and Islands development board. That was a red letter day because it helped to halt depopulation of the highlands, boosted little businesses and got them off the ground.

It was a great body, and many of us in the highlands had cause to be grateful for its work over the years. Today, it exists as Highlands and Islands Enterprise which, I am bound to say, is not what its ancestor once was, notwithstanding its best efforts. The budgets are lower and it is less able to target resources.

Hon. Members know that I have a cordial relationship with the Scottish National party. We have worked together over the years in a friendly and amicable way, and I am saddened that its representatives are not here today to listen to my words. I wish they were, because perhaps they could take the message back to their masters in Edinburgh to say, "Please, look at this problem. It is too bad that this excellent organisation is withering on the vine."

The Minister would be within his rights to say, "That's devolved, mate." But there is something called the Scottish election coming up next year, so I am speaking through the ether, as it were, to the structure of the Scottish Parliament in a year's time: "Please remember my words, look at Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and think about building it back to what it once was."

3.14 pm

Sarah Bool (South Northamptonshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. South Northamptonshire is 92% agricultural, forest or semi-natural, so it really is a quintessential rural constituency. It is home to 5,300 businesses, of which 5,200 are small or medium sized. Reports say that almost a quarter of British businesses are in rural constituencies, but they often feel that their voice is not heard. That will certainly not be the case on my watch. I run a series of business breakfasts where I listen to the concerns that they raise, and they all say that they need support to be able to grow. That is across all sectors, from Yummy Grains, just outside of Towcester, which sells granola and free range eggs, all the way up to BPY Plastics in Brackley.

The Government talk about growth, but the policies such as the hikes in employers' national insurance disproportionately affect small and medium-sized enterprises. Whittlebury Hall, for example, is a huge employer in my constituency and the hike hit it with a bill of nearly £1 million bill overnight. That makes offering new jobs totally unsustainable. The hairdressers and beauty salons in my constituency are scared that they will not be able to continue to offer apprenticeships. Indeed, it is said that by 2027 there will be no new apprenticeship starts.

The 95 pubs in my constituency, such as the White Hart in Hackleton, supply local jobs for local people, but this Government's policies are really hurting them. As for my farmers—my poor farmers—please do not get me started on them. They do absolutely all that they can. They work relentlessly, but this Government are not giving them the ability to plan correctly. Changes to agricultural property relief, business property relief, the sustainable farming incentive and capital grants, as well as the double-cab pick-up tax and the fertiliser tax all make things unsustainable. They are the backbone of our society. Establishing and running a business is a risk, and we need to give our entrepreneurs some security and some hope for the future. I ask the Government to go back to the drawing board to help back British rural business.

3.17 pm

Mr Angus MacDonald (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD): I want to make the case for a review of the VAT system. VAT starts at £90,000 and above, and I think that that level should be increased to £250,000. The UK has 3.1 million sole traders. Many of them do not want to grow above £90,000 because they do not think they are in the business of administration, and quite a lot do cash business in March just to get past that. If we lift the limit to £250,000, many of them would employ an apprentice or two. Some might become quite major. We would enable a junior level of people who were not particularly good at school to join the trades sector, in plumbing, for example. This is a fantastic opportunity if we want to take the foot off the neck of micro-businesses and would allow us to grow a worthwhile SME sector.

3.18 pm

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. Since the election last year, our rural businesses have been let down by the Labour Government. Their family farm tax has had a grave impact on the rural economy. Constituents talk to me of the enormous worry that that proposal is causing them. It threatens their family businesses with a huge tax bill when the owner of the farm dies. It is causing investment in rural areas to fall as families wonder how they can pay the tax; many will be forced to sell productive land or assets just to pay it. That not only is deeply wrong, but puts our food security at risk. If we combine it with the Chancellor's jobs tax, the Government seem to be designing a system to cause as much damage as possible to family-run businesses in rural areas.

New taxes are not the only issue causing harm to businesses. Look at the disastrous scrapping of the sustainable farming incentive scheme earlier this year. The SFI was one of the main sources of Government support available to farmers, but it was closed to new applications with no warning whatsoever in a move the National Farmers Union described as "crushing".

Digital infrastructure is critical to supporting the rural economy. Across Somerset, the Government have scaled back plans to install gigabit-capable broadband. In my constituency of Bridgwater, average speeds are already far below the national average, and now 1,450 properties have been descope and are not included in the new deal. In the spending review, the target for Project Gigabit has been pushed back from 2030 to 2032. Minister, how can we close the productivity gap between urban and rural areas when digital infrastructure is not a priority for the Government?

3.20 pm

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) on the welcome focus on our vital rural businesses. When we talk about rural business, we are talking about the lifeblood of our countryside. In Taunton and Wellington, and across Somerset, businesses are not just economic units but the backbone of our communities. Family farms are not taxation units for inheritance purposes; they put food on our tables. The Government should think hard about their family farm tax, and should do so urgently.

Rural entrepreneurs face rising costs across the board, unreliable infrastructure and a postcode lottery in support. Constituents in villages such as West Hatch, Staple Fitzpaine and West Buckland, as well as those around Wellington, simply cannot get reliable broadband or mobile signals. Transport is another key concern, which is why the Liberal Democrats proposed an amendment to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill that would have provided compensation for rural firms, such as Apple Campers, Western Recovery Services and TLC, that are losing business due to the closure of junction 26 on the M5 for three whole months under National Highways requirements.

Public transport is also essential. It is about connecting the parts of our UK economy to make a stronger whole. Banking and postal access are also vital to our rural businesses. Although I welcome the introduction of the banking hub model in Wellington, as I know the Minister does, it is somewhat bizarre for residents to see, in a town that has no post office, a building with the Post Office logo above the door and window that is not a post office and does not provide post office services. That craziness is straight out of "Yes, Minister" and needs to change urgently.

Rural businesses do not ask for special favours. All they ask for is fairness and for a level playing field for infrastructure, support and services.

Matt Western (in the Chair): I call Llinos Medi.

3.22 pm

Llinos Medi (Ynys Môn) (PC): Diolch, Cadeirydd—it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. SMEs employ nearly 750,000 people in Wales, with a combined annual turnover of over £50 billion. There are more rural businesses in Wales, at 46.2%, than in the UK as a whole, at 31.9%. Supporting rural businesses is therefore especially important for the Welsh economy.

The spending review announced an increase in R&D funding to benefit businesses. However, Wales makes up 5% of the UK population and yet received just 2% of the R&D spend. We need a fair R&D funding policy to ensure that Wales's proportion reflects its population share. The Federation of Small Businesses in Wales is calling on the UK Government to set a target that half of all direct Government business enterprise expenditure on R&D funding should be directed to SMEs.

The spending review also announced billions of pounds for improving transport connectivity in English regions, such as Manchester. However, there was nothing for rural Wales. Poor transport links in rural areas are a drain on businesses' time, and it limits their ability to grow. Ynys Môn also has some of the worst digital connectivity in the UK, with 35% of the constituency receiving gigabit broadband, compared with 78% of the UK on average. Business needs both physical and digital infrastructure to flourish.

There are changes that the Government could make now to support specific industries. An example is food and drink. I declare that I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on hospitality, events, major food and drink businesses in Wales. In Scotland, the Scottish Government have introduced a guest beer agreement as part of the Scottish pubs code. This could benefit Bragdy Mona and Bragdy Cybi breweries in my constituency. The pub code is currently under review,

[*Llinos Medi*]

so I ask the Minister whether the Government will look at the merits of including a guest beer agreement in the pubs code, as has been done in Scotland.

The Government must use their industrial strategy to prioritise rural businesses, which are the backbone of our rural communities.

3.24 pm

Adam Dance (Yeovil) (LD): There are over 3,400 fantastic businesses in Yeovil that provide amazing services for our communities, from big employers such as Screwfix and Leonardo to local businesses such as Ben Russell's hairdressers or the Somerset Cheesecakeery in Ilminster. Thanks to terrible Government Budgets, unfair trade deals and soaring energy prices, many businesses in Yeovil do not feel supported by central Government. This Government can change that.

I am sorry if this sounds like a list of local demands but, well, it basically is. The Government changes to national insurance are an unfair jobs tax. Let us get rid of that, and instead, reverse Conservative tax cuts for big banks, increase the digital services tax to 6% on social media giants and raise the remote gambling duty for online gambling companies.

Next is our family farms. Farmers deserve some actual support, because in Yeovil they have lost trust in this Government. To start, the family farm tax has to go, or at least be delayed until April '27 as the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee suggests. We also need to strengthen the grocery code so it has some actual teeth to support farmers.

Finally, our high street businesses need banking hubs. I was happy to have secured a banking hub for Crewkerne, but, despite having the same needs, Chard and Ilminster were denied one because they had cash machines. They are not alone. Will the Government expand the criteria for approving banking hubs and commit to rolling out a few more than 350 banking hubs?

I could go on about funding for vital bus services, such as the No. 11 bus in Yeovil, and the need for better broadband, greater investment in apprenticeships, greater defence spending to support jobs in Yeovil and so on, but time is short, so I will just say that I hope the Government take on board my asks and those from hon. Members today, because then we might finally start to get a Government who help rural businesses thrive rather than getting in the way.

Matt Western (in the Chair): Last, but certainly not least, I call Jim Shannon.

3.26 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The book is very clear, Mr Western:

"the last shall be first, the first shall be last".

Today I am the last; the next day I will be the first. I thank the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) for setting the scene so well. I want to give a Northern Ireland perspective—I know that is not the Minister's responsibility, but I always sew it into debates, and I have one question for him at the end.

As the MP for Strangford, a wonderful mixed rural and urban area, I have the ability to see success in both areas, which I am thankful for. Although there is no doubt that business is more difficult to carry out logistically in rural areas, I believe there is greater potential—it is massive. Rural businesses in Northern Ireland are a vital part of the economy, with 58% of all businesses located in rural areas, although they only account for a smaller percentage of the total employment—21%—and a turnover of 25%. However, they are still critical for the area. The businesses are heavily concentrated in sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishing and construction.

Support for rural business is available through various initiatives, such as the rural business investment scheme and the rural business development grant scheme. They are administered by the local Ards and North Down council, but the money comes from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework. I commend my honourable friend and colleague Councillor Alderman Robert Adair.

The development grants are between £500 and almost £5,000, and are available to micro-enterprises based in rural areas to support sustainability and growth. Over the last short time, £100,000 has been allocated to 32 rural businesses in my area. The scheme is oversubscribed. It was an annual scheme, but there is a question mark over what will happen in the future. I highlight that to the Minister—it is not his responsibility, but he is an hon. Gentleman, a good Minister and he does good for us all. Will he engage with the relevant Minister at the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that we continue to have the business growth that is available in my constituency of Strangford and across all of Ards and North Down?

3.28 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) for securing this debate and his excellent opening speech, which touched on Liberal Democrat enthusiasms such as buses and microbreweries, but also his characteristic interest and enthusiasm for the opportunities created by science and tech in rural areas as much as across the rest of the country. Small businesses have had a tough time for years. I thank my hon. Friend for his eloquent speech, particularly outlining the challenges that businesses in his constituency face and touching on the broader challenges facing rural businesses in all corners of the country.

When I speak to businesses, their owners repeatedly tell me that their bills are too high, and that causes them to question their future, as they see their neighbouring shops and businesses close down. As we have seen, soaring energy costs over the past few years and costs related to transport, energy and supply chains can disadvantage rural businesses, and many of the Government relief schemes that exist do not sufficiently account for unique rural pressures.

Nowhere is that clearer than in the changes to national insurance contributions announced by this Government. The changes are an unfair jobs tax that will hit small businesses, social care providers and GPs. The NICs changes present an additional challenge to businesses

already struggling with rising energy prices, interest rates and input costs. These businesses were hammered by the previous Conservative Government, who broke their promise to reform business rates, and instead trapped businesses under mountains of red tape, stopping them trading internationally. Making things even harder for small businesses and their workers will not grow the economy. Raising the employment allowance will shield only the very smallest employers, but thousands of small businesses will be seriously affected.

A significant amount of the income of many businesses goes straight out the door via our outdated businesses rates system. Business rates are harmful for the economy, because they directly tax capital investment in structures and equipment, rather than taxing profits or the fixed stock of land. I am sure the Government would agree with that assessment, given their pre-election promise to overhaul our business rates system. Nearly a year into this Government's time in power, however, and this commitment seems to have been forgotten. Meanwhile, businesses across the UK are continuing to struggle with a system that is unfit for a modern economy. The Liberal Democrats are committed to replacing business rates in England with a commercial landowner levy based solely on the land value of commercial sites, rather than their entire capital value, thereby stimulating investment and shifting the burden of taxation from tenants to landowners. I urge the Government to consider this change.

The decline of high street services in rural areas has been an ongoing issue in the UK, with banks, post offices and other essential services disappearing at an increasing rate. This has significant consequences for residents, particularly older people, those without digital access and small businesses—not least the confusion it appears to be causing in Wellington. In the past three years, nearly 2,000 banks have closed across the UK, including hundreds of rural branches, due to declining in-person transactions and the rise of online banking. Many villages and small towns now lack a single bank, forcing residents to travel long distances for financial services.

The challenges are often compounded by limited broadband or access to the internet, leading to swathes of people in rural communities being excluded from online services and digital banking. The Liberal Democrats are concerned about the inequality of provision as the 5G network is rolled out, and we believe it is wrong that people should be disadvantaged simply because of where they live. I urge the Government to prioritise major investment in broadband for underserved communities. Alternative solutions such as banking hubs are being developed, but there are not enough of them, and the Government should be facilitating more to ensure that people across the country can access vital services when they need them, and prevent the digital exclusion of people in rural areas.

As high street services close, rural public transport has also been cut, making it even harder for residents to reach alternative services.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Does my hon. Friend recognise that rural communities always seem to carry the burden of losing out on everything? They have the businesses struggling to get people through the door, they lose their public transport and they lose their

health provision. I am seeing that in my constituency, where a rural village is losing its GP surgery, but there is no bus to take people to the proposed GP surgery in the nearby town. We need to support our rural businesses because they are the backbone of these rural communities, and they are keeping these rural communities alive.

Sarah Olney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is always the danger that we get into a vicious circle of declining transport provision leading to declining demand for services, which then lose viability and are withdrawn. The point about investment in public transport that my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk made so eloquently at the start of this debate would go a long way to managing some of those issues.

Bus route reductions leave some villages with little to no public transport, which worsens isolation. Bus services are the backbone of economic activity in communities across our country, but they are particularly crucial in rural areas, where accessible local amenities and services are greater distances apart.

Caroline Voaden: In fact, in the spending review, the whole of rural England was given a seventh of the money for transport plans that was given to urban areas. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is not sufficient to sustain and improve the rural bus transport network as much as we need?

Sarah Olney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The way that some of the infrastructure and transport investment moneys have been distributed in the recent spending review has raised some eyebrows. Investing in rural bus services would certainly boost our struggling town centres and high streets, which would lead to economic growth.

The increase in the fare cap to £3 is a bus tax that will hit working people, rural communities and people on low incomes the most. Although the Government have made their red lines on taxation clear, a 50% increase to the bus cap is just taxation by other means. The Government have been left to make difficult choices, but they cannot allow the burden of fixing the Conservatives' mess to fall on working people and small businesses. Neither Labour nor the Conservatives before seems to understand that for rural communities, having a reliable bus service is critical to enable daily tasks and commutes to be completed. I was also reflecting on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk about the impact of a lack of suitable transport infrastructure on training and the workforce.

Last week, the Liberal Democrats welcomed many of the Government's public infrastructure and public transport investment announcements. However, we are concerned by the lack of provision allocated to rural bus services. Many communities without combined authority mayors—from Cumbria to Cornwall, and Norfolk to Newton Abbot—seem to have been left without new support for their transport networks. The Liberal Democrats continue to call on the Government to make sure that these areas see the investment that they so desperately need.

As the Government start implementing the new public infrastructure announcements, they must put the construction sector on a sustainable footing by introducing, in tandem, an industrial strategy to actually implement the projects. The general secretary of the Prospect trade

[Sarah Olney]

union warned that the UK lacks the skilled workers required for new defence and nuclear infrastructure projects. Similarly, Make UK and the Federation of Small Businesses have highlighted a shortage of skilled workers as a critical stumbling block for growth. Workforce shortages often disproportionately affect rural areas, with limited local training opportunities and housing affordability issues exacerbating the problem, making it harder for businesses to expand.

As we await the much-anticipated industrial strategy, I ask the Minister to ensure that it will include a strategic framework to effectively address the needs of businesses in rural areas, by collaborating with local, regional and devolved authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to establish how the strategy will support and facilitate industrial regeneration and innovation across all UK nations and regions. My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I look forward to scrutinising the details of the proposals as they are brought forward.

Businesses and rural areas of the UK face a distinct set of challenges compared with their urban counterparts. Although Government support exists through various grants, loans and initiatives, several issues, including infrastructure challenges, the phasing out of EU funding and higher costs related to transport, energy and supply chains, can disadvantage rural businesses more severely. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk for securing this debate, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister about the steps the Government are taking to ensure that businesses in rural areas receive the additional support they so desperately need.

3.37 pm

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone). We have had many great contributions from across the Chamber. Given the number, I will not seek to name all the Members who spoke; I will just pick three at random who I thought were particularly good: my hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Sarah Bool), my right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Sir Ashley Fox).

It is a privilege to speak on a subject that is close to the hearts and livelihoods of so many of my own constituents in my rural constituency of Mid Buckinghamshire. I pay tribute to the immense contribution that rural businesses make to the United Kingdom. Whether they be in farming, tourism, food production, forestry, hospitality or manufacturing, or our rural innovators, these enterprises are not simply economic units; they are custodians of heritage, engines of local employment and lifelines for communities that could otherwise be left behind.

Some of the challenges have been picked up through the course of the debate. We will start with communications. It was a Conservative Government who introduced the shared rural network in 2020, which was a £1 billion joint programme, at that point, with mobile operators to attempt to eliminate the so-called notspots in rural coverage. Many of those spots were found in my constituency and some still are, such as the village of

Cuddington. The initiative is transforming how farmers, tourism operators and remote workers do business, but it is clear from the debate, and indeed my own experience, that there is still some way to go. As others have said, if we cannot solve the communications challenges in the digital age, that will hold everyone back.

A thriving rural economy also depends on a fair tax system, which is why successive Conservative Chancellors took steps to freeze fuel duty—a vital measure for those who live miles from the nearest market, school or supplier. It is why we increased the VAT threshold for small businesses and championed business rates relief for village shops and pubs, demonstrating their community value as well as their commercial one. We also froze alcohol duty, offering a crucial boost to rural pubs, breweries, cider producers and vineyards, which are often vital employers and social hubs in rural areas. These measures reflect a Conservative belief in letting enterprise breathe, rather than smothering it under tax and bureaucracy.

We also need to combat rural crime far more harshly—another area in which I speak with some experience from this place. What began as my private Member's Bill grew into the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023. Once the Government finally introduce the secondary legislation required for it, it will protect farming businesses from agricultural machinery thefts.

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Con): On that point, I recollect a visit I made in 2023 to one of the fantastic farms in my hon. Friend's constituency. I pay tribute to his doughty and indefatigable campaigning to create that new offence, which protects farmers from rural theft and is an important change to the law.

Does my hon. Friend agree that illegal encampments are also blighting our rural communities? In Denmead and parts of Southwick and Fareham, we have had real challenges with illegal encampments. The last Conservative Administration introduced more police powers to move on some of the groups that cause a nuisance, destruction and intimidation, and sometimes engage in illegal activity. Of course, we respect the rights of minorities, but does he agree that a lot more awareness needs to be raised among the police and communities so that we can combat the scourge of illegal encampments more successfully?

Greg Smith: I remember my right hon. Friend visiting the farm. It was in my constituency at the time, but the boundary changes actually took it away from me. Preventing the theft of machinery from not just farms but all rural businesses, which suffer so badly when equipment theft takes place, is a critical measure that we have to get right.

I take the important point that my right hon. Friend makes around illegal encampments. Any illegal development needs to be clamped down on in whatever form it takes. I pay tribute to Thames Valley police's rural crime taskforce for some of its work on that. It would be good if the Minister could work with Home Office colleagues to extend that work across the whole country, and push the Minister for Policing, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North and Cottingham (Dame Diana Johnson), to introduce the statutory instruments that would bring the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act into full force.

Let us turn to the direction of travel on rural business under this Government, which gives me real concern. First, as others have mentioned, the increase in national insurance contributions and changes to the NICs thresholds place a disproportionate burden on rural employers, many of whom already operate on the tightest of margins. For a rural farm employing five seasonal workers, or a family-run dairy business with a handful of long-serving staff, these extra costs are not abstract; they are the difference between hiring and firing.

The sharp rise in the national living wage is hitting rural sectors, with seasonal and low-margin employment—especially farming, food processing and rural tourism—hit particularly hard. These sectors do not have the luxury of passing on costs to consumers in the same way that some of the big urban retail or tech companies do. They face fixed contracts and price pressures from supermarkets, and this change risks hollowing out jobs that were previously viable.

Compounding that is the change to business property relief, which will strip tax protections from many family-run rural enterprises such as holiday accommodation and equestrian centres, undermining succession planning and deterring future investment in those rural businesses. Labour has targeted the very dynamism that it claims to support.

Labour's Planning and Infrastructure Bill poses a serious threat to rural enterprise. By relaxing environmental safeguards and expanding compulsory purchase powers—removing hope value protections from prime farmland—the Bill risks allowing developers and central authorities to override local rural businesses and agricultural land. The removal of green belt-like protections from the mythical grey belt areas also paves the way for large-scale development in what were previously safe rural areas. Rural entrepreneurs now face heightened uncertainty over their long-term investments and succession plans. Farmers, holiday let providers and small rural manufacturers alike may wake up to find their economic foundations undermined by top-down planning interventions.

The Employment Rights Bill threatens significant administrative, legal and recruitment costs for rural businesses, which are estimated at up to £5 billion across the economy and are disproportionately heavier for small rural businesses, jeopardising their ability to hire flexibly or offer seasonal work.

But perhaps the most damaging of all is Labour's recent change to agricultural property relief: the family farm tax. This is not simply a tweak to inheritance policy; it is a direct assault on the ability of farming families to pass on their land and their livelihoods from one generation to the next. An estimated 40,000 farming jobs will be lost under Labour's plans to force all farmers to stop farming on up to 20% of their land.

The Government's estimate of 27% of farms being impacted is based on outdated APR claims data from 2021-22 that does not reflect rising land values or the full economic picture of commercial family farms. Nearly 40% of farms rely on a combination of APR and BPR to mitigate inheritance tax liabilities. The £1 million threshold applies to both combined, making it far more restrictive than the Government's modelling suggests. In my constituency, this is already causing disinvestment. I have spoken with farmers who are now deferring

expansion, shelving plans for tourism ventures and, in some cases, considering breaking up long-held estates that have supported jobs and communities for generations.

Farm shops have, after years of successful trading, made the difficult decision to close. On rural high streets, costs have risen 15%. At Rumsey's Handmade Chocolates in Wendover in my constituency, this is already leading to job losses and reduced hours for the staff they have been able to retain. The Pink and Lily pub in Lacey Green shut in February, just seven years after it first opened.

Rural Britain does not ask for favours, but it does demand fairness. It wants policies that reflect the unique challenges of doing business across distances, in smaller labour markets and with greater exposure to the weather, the global economy and regulatory interference. That is why the Opposition will continue to champion low tax, light-touch regulation and a level playing field for rural enterprise. The future of the rural economy cannot be sustained on sentiment alone; it must be underpinned by policy that understands the realities of rural life. On that test, thus far, Labour is failing.

Matt Western (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, I gently remind him to allow a couple of minutes for the mover of the motion at the end.

3.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Gareth Thomas): It is genuinely a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western—thank you for your reminder of the etiquette at the end of the debate—and to respond to what has been an extremely important debate on supporting the many remarkable rural businesses across the country. In the usual way, I take this opportunity to thank the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) for securing this debate, and for what I understand is a long-standing interest in this vital issue for our rural community.

If there were any doubt about the importance of the rural economy, the sheer numbers of hon. Members who have contributed to this debate have surely put that to bed. I say gently to the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith), that I heard some impressive speeches from Members on this side of the House, but I none the less recognise the significance of the contributions from those on the other side. Such was the range, I fear that I will not be able to do justice to all the different points that were made. I recognise that one or two contributions were as much about getting me to deliver messages to other parts of Government as they were about my own Department.

Rural businesses are without doubt the lifeblood of our countryside. More than half a million businesses are registered in rural areas, contributing over £315 billion a year to the economy in England alone. The diversity of the rural economy is striking: 86% of rural businesses span sectors beyond just agriculture, forestry and fishing. The Government fully recognise the immense potential for growth in our rural areas. That is why we are committed to creating the right conditions to allow rural enterprises of all kinds to thrive and succeed.

First, we are taking steps to improve rural infrastructure—the keys to unlocking that growth potential. The hon. Member for North Norfolk waxed lyrical about the significance of rural bus services, which I absolutely accept.

[*Gareth Thomas*]

He will be only too aware of the significance of the decisions, to which I think he alluded, that the Bus Services (No. 2) Bill will bring into force. It will put decision making about what bus routes should be provided into the hands of local leaders across England, including in rural areas. That will allow local communities to determine for themselves how best to design their bus services, so that they genuinely have control over routes and schedules, helping both local communities and—crucially, in the context of this debate—rural businesses.

Joe Morris (Hexham) (Lab): On transport, it is not just buses but road infrastructure that is important for our communities and businesses, whether that is the Lord Crewe Arms in Blanchland, in the south of my constituency, or Falconry Days in Simonburn, in the north. Filling potholes is important to ensure that we can get to appointments and to businesses, but the lack of advertisements from councils on when they are conducting roadworks impacts tourism businesses. Does the Minister agree that Northumberland county council could do a far better job of communicating with small businesses about when it is repairing roads, so that tourism bookings do not drop off?

Gareth Thomas: I am disappointed to hear that my hon. Friend's local county council is not liaising about roadworks more effectively with small businesses in the rural areas that he represents, and I hope that it will hear his intervention and take action. He is right that we need to ensure that we are investing not just in buses—I will come back to that point—but more generally in the roads that serve rural and urban areas. We have committed more than £2.3 billion for local transport links in smaller towns and villages, which I hope will make a real difference in all the communities where hon. Members have expressed concerns about the quality of bus services.

A key theme that has surfaced in this debate—certainly a lot of Government Members were keen to stress it—is digital connectivity. I hope that the fact that the Government are investing over £1.9 billion in broadband and 4G connectivity will help to give confidence across rural and urban communities that the crucial issue of digital connectivity is being taken forward in a way that supports residents and small businesses. Good digital and transport connections are essential for rural businesses to access markets, suppliers and talent.

As well as taking steps to improve rural infrastructure, we are backing rural entrepreneurs and businesses with finance and advice. The British Business Bank has supported more than 200,000 businesses, in every constituency of the UK, to grow over the past decade. Its regional funds provide vital debt and equity finance to firms outside London and the south-east.

Meanwhile, our nationwide network of growth hubs offers free, impartial guidance to rural enterprises on everything from start-up to scale-up. I hope that the business growth service, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business and Trade has announced, and which we will say more about shortly, will also help to make a significant difference to rural businesses in terms of the quality of advice that they can access.

Mr Angus MacDonald: Will the Minister acknowledge the disparity in energy price between rural areas and urban areas? Businesses in urban areas can access mains gas and pay 6p per kilowatt for their energy, whereas businesses in rural areas pay 24p per kilowatt for their energy. What a disadvantage that is for rural areas.

Gareth Thomas: The hon. Gentleman underlines the need for significant investment in green energy. Other hon. Members referred to the need to support renewable energy, particularly community renewable energy schemes, as part of the solution to issues around rural prosperity and to tackle the energy challenges that we are all familiar with.

We are investing directly in rural areas through schemes such as the rural England prosperity fund, which is worth £33 million this year. That funding will provide capital grants for new business facilities for product development and community infrastructure improvements that benefit local economies.

We are committed to sustaining vital services and amenities in rural areas. Our £2.7 billion a year for sustainable farming ensures continued investment in environmental land management and nature recovery, underpinning the agriculture sector. We are also working to enhance access to banking, particularly in rural areas, including through the roll-out of banking hubs across the UK by the end of this Parliament.

Rural businesses can also look forward to benefiting from measures such as reforms to the apprenticeship levy, helping them to invest in skills—a key concern that was raised in this debate. I know that rural businesses, as well as businesses in urban areas, are really concerned about that.

We also heard a couple of contributions from hon. Members about the significance of post offices in their communities. Again, I recognise the critical role that post offices play in rural communities, and indeed, the potential for the Post Office to do more. As some hon. Members will know, we are bringing forward a Green Paper on the future of the Post Office shortly, which I hope will give further confidence about the potential for the Post Office to do more in rural areas, as well as more generally.

Jamie Stone: Will the Minister give way?

Gareth Thomas: I will for the last time.

Jamie Stone: The Minister may or may not know, although I thank him for it, that a banking hub will shortly open in Wick, in the extreme far north of the United Kingdom. I would be grateful if he could ask his civil servants to come up and take a look at it once it is up and running, because there might be something to learn from it as to how other very remote parts of the UK can be serviced.

Gareth Thomas: I thought the hon. Gentleman was going to invite me to come to Wick, but I will certainly pass on the invitation to my officials. We are keen to learn from the experience of the banking hubs that have worked, that are up and running, and that are now seen as being effective. There is more that the Post Office can do to provide more of the services that banking hubs provide, and we are keen to work with the financial services industry to make sure that that happens.

Hon. Members asked a series of questions about tax and I suspect that we will come back to those issues in a number of forms. I just say gently to the Opposition spokesperson that we inherited a very difficult financial situation—a £22 billion black hole. If we are to provide, as we rightly should, the schools, teachers, hospitals and police forces in rural communities, difficult decisions had to be made about the finances going forward.

Lastly, we also want to make sure that we are opening up new markets for businesses in rural communities to access, which is why the trade deals that we have agreed with the United States, India and—crucially, too—the European Union are so significant. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the importance of rural businesses to growth across the UK. We know that there is more to do in this space and we are determined to do it.

3.59 pm

Steff Aquarone: I just reflect on the fact that this debate, far from being a game of constituency bingo, has seen hon. Members from across the House bring forward genuinely new issues and new ideas, for which I am deeply grateful.

I will end on a reminder of the importance of skills and the trade strategy. Just this morning, we were talking in the Transport Committee about the impact of boom and bust on rail infrastructure. We must get the offering right for our young people so that they can better enter training in rural areas.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Government support for businesses in rural areas.

Asbestos Removal: Non-domestic Buildings

4 pm

Matt Western (in the Chair): I will call Emma Lewell to move the motion and then call the Minister to respond. I remind other Members that they may make a speech only with prior permission from the Member in charge of the debate and the Minister. As is the convention for a 30-minute debate, there will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up.

4.1 pm

Emma Lewell (South Shields) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the removal of asbestos from non-domestic buildings.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Western. Asbestos was banned in the UK in 1999, yet we still have one of the highest levels of deaths from mesothelioma caused by exposure to asbestos in the world. Asbestos continues to be the leading cause of work-related deaths in the UK, with the latest figures showing it causes the death of over 5,000 people per year.

This year new data has come to light showing that in my constituency people are dying from asbestos at a higher rate than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. In the north-east, with our legacy of heavy industry, we are sadly no strangers to the harms from asbestos. My generation has grown up surrounded by families whose dads, granddads, uncles and loved ones have suffered horrendous deaths from exposure to asbestos. We now know that even some of their wives have died from inhaling the fibres that were left on their overalls after work.

My own dad was a welder in the shipyards. He once told me about a day in the 1990s when he was told to go and work below deck. When he got there, he could see asbestos floating among and around all the lads he was supposed to join working that day. I remember when I was a little girl and the council came to do some work on our house. My mam asked me to keep out of the way because asbestos was found in our walls.

Just today I spoke to a constituent who worked in a local comprehensive science lab in one of our schools in the 1980s. He told me that after the fume-cupboard mats were changed in six of the schools' labs, asbestos was disturbed. Upon re-entering the room, he saw thick layers of it on top of the cupboards. He and his colleagues refused to go and work in there, but the school sent all the pupils back into the classrooms regardless.

This is not our history. It is our present, too, because increasing numbers of teachers, school workers, porters, cleaners, caretakers, nurses and military personnel continue to come forward to say that they were exposed to asbestos in their respective workplaces.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady. The stories she tells about her father in the shipyards resonate with me and my constituency. They used to say that the asbestos was almost like clouds of snow; I wonder how anybody could survive that. Between 1985 and 1994, 527 asbestos-related deaths took place, with men making up 88% of them. That suggests that asbestosis continues to be a significant health concern, particularly among the older generations who were

[*Jim Shannon*]

exposed to asbestos in the workplace. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government must act now and that consideration has to be given to the older generations, who might have been exposed to asbestos in their working days and are now suffering with illnesses as a result?

Emma Lewell: I thank the hon. Member for cleverly pre-empting some of what I am going to say in my speech. He is absolutely right, but we also see people coming forward now, so it not just a historical issue. It is something we need to deal with right now, before it gets worse.

I pray to God that I do not end up suffering from it one day, but if our homes and public buildings have led to people being exposed, it is not a stretch to say that I and those around me could also have been exposed and could end up unwell. We know that from the point of feeling unwell to diagnosis can take up to and above 30 years.

Recently, the *Daily Mail*, as part of its ongoing campaign, revealed an asbestos ticking time bomb in our supermarkets. I am not being alarmist when I say that the investigative work undertaken by journalist Steve Boggan makes it clear that asbestos is all around us, including in this building. Of course, we know that it becomes a risk only when it is disturbed, which is why successive Governments have maintained the policy that if it is left in a reasonable condition, it should not be disturbed. But that is a risky strategy that I would say is no longer valid, because as asbestos ages, it breaks down, which means the deadly fibres are released and then inhaled. Asbestos-related disease is not only in our past and present; it will be in our future if we do not act.

Matt Rodda (Reading Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech and I commend her for the honesty and sincerity with which she deals with these very difficult issues. She is right that, across the country, a large amount of building stock and commercial properties have this terrible material, and that a large number of illnesses and deaths may well still to be come. Does she agree that it is important for the Government to look at the matter, investigate it further, and see what more can be done to try to prevent the worst?

Emma Lewell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I think my right hon. Friend the Minister would also agree, because in his 2022 Work and Pensions Committee report, he asked for a central asbestos register and a deadline for the removal of asbestos from non-domestic buildings. The previous Government rejected that recommendation. Even now, people are still shocked when they discover that, despite the 1999 ban, there is no national database or register and, as a result, the Government do not have a comprehensive picture of where asbestos is. Consequently, there is no strategic plan to have it safely removed.

I thank the Minister for his engagement with me on the issue to date, and for his consideration of a census, whereby it will be mandatory for the owners of non-domestic buildings to advise if their buildings have asbestos or, if the building was built before 1999, they believe it to be there. He has promised to meet me and

the Health and Safety Executive as it works towards timelines and a delivery plan, but I hope he can offer some updates today. As we continue to push for net zero and retrofitting, it makes sense that we start to remove asbestos as soon as possible.

I again make the plea that we start the census and the removal of asbestos in South Shields, and that the Minister helps me to discuss with our colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care a specialist clinical hub for South Shields, to improve diagnosis, care and support.

These are all familiar asks to the Minister, not just from me but from long-time campaigners such as the TUC, Asbestos Information CIC, Mesothelioma UK and so many more who have seen the pain that asbestos causes and are living with it daily. I pay tribute to the work that they have done and continue to do and, in particular, to the kindness that Liz Darlison from Mesothelioma UK and Steve Boggan showed me after I spoke about my lovely grandad at Prime Minister's questions.

My grandad, John Henry Richardson, was a sheet-metal worker. He worked in shipyards all over the north-east, and then went on to work in the Elsy Gibbons factory, making water tanks. While he was there, they introduced an annual health check scheme, and they found a shadow on his lungs. He retired at 62 through ill health.

Grandad always had a terrible cough and had struggled with his breathing for years, but because he worked in heavy industry, no one thought it was serious. In our area in the '80s and '90s, most men who worked in heavy industry had persistent coughs. As my mam said, everyone thought that was just part of the job. Grandad ended up with three inhalers and could not walk anywhere, even to the local shops. It would take him half an hour just to walk down the small flight of stairs in his house because he had to stop on every single one to catch his breath.

My grandad spent the first five years of his forced retirement travelling all over the country for medical tests, and at constant hospital appointments. He kept saying that the Government were hoping he would die before they had to pay out his compensation. When he was 69 years old, he was admitted to hospital with a heart attack because his heart could no longer take the pressure. After nearly a week in hospital, he suffered another heart attack. He was surrounded by my family, listening to the slow, dying breaths of this smart, kind, gentle, hard-working family man as his heart broke away. A little piece of ours broke away with him too. He died in a hospital that most likely had asbestos in it, and those caring for him have probably also gone on to suffer from this awful disease, which will continue to haunt the north-east and elsewhere for generations to come.

Ian Lavery (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a really powerful, personal speech, which is extremely important. Does she agree that it is not just the likes of her grandad and all those who worked in heavy industry, manufacturing, the pits and shipbuilding who are suffering from the likes of mesothelioma? As she said, it is now about where the asbestos currently lies—in Parliament, schools, police stations, town halls and NHS buildings. Asbestos-related diseases, particularly mesothelioma, have a latency period of up to 40 years, so the problem has not gone away. In this country, 5,000

people die of mesothelioma every year—more than in road traffic accidents—so we have got to get a grip on it.

Emma Lewell: I thank my hon. Friend, my colleague from the north-east, for that powerful intervention. He is absolutely right: in my grandad's time, we did not know about the risk from those devastating fibres, but we now do, so we absolutely cannot let this happen to anybody else.

The last time the House debated this issue was under a Conservative Government. We now have a Labour Government, and it is in our party's DNA to do right by workers and the people we represent. The memories of those we lost mean that the sufferers of this silent killer, and I, will certainly not be silent until the Minister gives us what we are asking for, and what he asked for previously before he was elevated to his current esteemed position.

4.13 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms): I am delighted to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Western—for the first time, I think—and I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Emma Lewell) for bringing this important debate to the House. She made the point that this is the first time under the current Government that we have had the opportunity to debate this issue, so I congratulate her on securing this debate.

I share in the grief of all those who, like my hon. Friend, have lost somebody close to them as a consequence of exposure to asbestos. As she and others reminded us, it is still by far the biggest cause of work-related deaths in the UK—it is responsible for 5,000-plus deaths per year—and many people live with the impact of asbestos-related disease. I join my hon. Friend in commending the work of the journalist Steve Boggan, who has highlighted this topic very helpfully.

Hanging in my office in the House of Commons, a few yards from here, I currently have a portrait of Mavis Nye and her husband, Ray. Ray Nye became an apprentice in the Chatham dockyard in 1953 and worked there for a number of years. Asbestos was everywhere. In 1957, during his apprenticeship, he met Mavis. He refers to that encounter as

“the most wonderful thing ever to enter my life”.

They married, and Mavis used to launder his overalls. At some point she breathed in asbestos dust. Fifty years later, in 2009, she was diagnosed with mesothelioma.

We have heard about very long latency periods. It appears that in Mavis's case, it was 50 years before she was diagnosed. Thanks to pioneering treatment at the Royal Marsden hospital, she lived for another 14 years. She and Ray established the Mavis Nye Foundation to inspire mesothelioma victims. She was a force of nature. She sadly died in 2023, but it was her wish that her portrait should be hung in the House of Commons. In fulfilment of that wish, it hangs in my office this afternoon. It will soon be returned to Ray, but I am glad that we have been able to fulfil that wish and help celebrate the contribution of a remarkable woman—just one of the many thousands who have died as a result of earlier asbestos exposure in the last couple of years.

In Britain we have a mature and well-established approach to the management of asbestos in buildings. The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012, enforced by the Health and Safety Executive and other regulators, requires duty holders to assess whether asbestos is present, what condition it is in and whether it gives rise to a risk of exposure. The duty holder must then draw up a plan to manage the risk associated with asbestos, which must include removal if it cannot be safely managed where it remains. There is an existing legal obligation for duty holders to remove degrading asbestos and to share details of asbestos in their premises with people who work regularly in a building and may potentially disturb or damage materials which contain asbestos.

Ian Lavery: I place on record my sincere thanks to my right hon. Friend for the sterling work that he has done with regard to mesothelioma and asbestos-related disease in the past, but what has been mentioned is not working. We need the same as in other parts of this nation, where there has been a programme of statutory removal, but we are not doing that here in England. I wonder if my right hon. Friend can say why we are different from other nations of the UK.

Sir Stephen Timms: I will come on to address exactly the point that my hon. Friend raises. He is absolutely right to do so. Let me just make the point that asbestos does need to be removed before any major refurbishment work or before demolition. Under current arrangements it will eventually be removed, albeit over an extremely long time.

There are around 40,000 notifications of asbestos removal jobs every year. The HSE inspects to check that duty holders are managing asbestos effectively, both in the public and commercial sectors. Those inspections, I am pleased to say, have been significantly stepped up since the Select Committee on Work and Pensions report published in April 2022, at a time when I was Chair of the Committee, and to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields referred. That report was critical of the decline in the number of asbestos inspections and enforcement notices since 2010. The report pointed out that between 2011-12 and 2018-19, while the total number of enforcement notices from the HSE fell by 10%, the number of asbestos enforcement notices had fallen by 60% to less than 200 in the year 2018-19.

Increased activity by the HSE on asbestos since then has seen the overall number of enforcement notices climb to over 300 under the Control of Asbestos Regulations in 2024-25. Inspection activity is a means of providing assurance that the regulations are effective and that those with duties are complying with them. For example, between September 2022 and March 2025, HSE inspectors have visited over 1,000 schools to inspect their arrangements for managing asbestos. They found good levels of compliance in those 1,000 schools with the responsibilities to manage the risk of asbestos—albeit with 8% requiring enforcement notice action to improve their performance. This is particularly important given, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields pointed out, the proportionately higher number of cases of asbestos-related diseases among retired teachers compared with other professions. So it is right to focus on schools as a particularly pressing issue, along with hospitals and NHS premises, which she also mentioned. In the last year—2024-25—this work was expanded to include

[*Sir Stephen Timms*]

inspections of local authority head offices and premises. In his intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth and Ashington (Ian Lavery) referred to council buildings as being of concern, and he is absolutely right to do so, so current plans for this year—2025-26—include a further 600 visits to schools and local authorities to be completed by March next year.

The HSE is also focused on the management of asbestos in commercial sectors. In 2024-25, its inspections dealt with the management of asbestos more than 2,330 times. Of the buildings found to contain asbestos, 40% required either written advice or an enforcement notice. This was the first year of a multi-year focus on asbestos in commercial sectors.

Together with the guidance on asbestos published on the HSE website, communications campaigns are important in raising awareness and understanding. The Asbestos—Your Duty campaign was launched in January last year to reach those responsible for the maintenance and repair of non-domestic buildings built before 2000 and to raise awareness of the legal duty to manage asbestos. In his intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth and Ashington made the point that the current arrangements are not always working, and we need to draw people's attention to their legal responsibilities. That campaign is running alongside the Asbestos & You campaign, which focuses on reducing exposure to asbestos for tradespeople.

Ian Lavery: Can my right hon. Friend say if there are any records of the children who were in the same working environment as a lot of the teachers who, sadly, have passed on? Is it the duty of the inspectorate or a responsibility of a Department to hold records of the children in that working environment who might wait 10, 20, 30, 40 or 50 years before a little tick of asbestos dust triggers mesothelioma?

Sir Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend raises a very interesting point. I am not aware of any data about that. From time to time, however, one hears of or comes across people who have succumbed to mesothelioma in their 20s or 30s, and an obvious possibility is that they were exposed at school to the dangerous asbestos that led to that catastrophic outcome.

Both my hon. Friends have pressed the case for asbestos to be removed, and I want us to have a better understanding of the size and scale of the asbestos legacy in the built environment and an evidence base for future strategic decisions on removal. I have been working on this with the HSE since last July. I chaired a roundtable event with stakeholders last October to explore the issue and consider what we need to tackle Britain's asbestos legacy effectively.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields pointed out, the Work and Pensions Committee made a strong and compelling case for the establishment of a national digital register of all workplace asbestos, bringing together into one accessible place all the separate records maintained—all over the place—by law at the moment. The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 already require duty holders either to survey premises constructed before asbestos was banned or assume that it is present. A lot of duty holders commission external consultants to fulfil their obligations under the regulations, and

they maintain records on their own databases, so compiling a national register would be a less gargantuan task than may initially be assumed. Establishing a national register would require significant resource from duty holders and the Government, at a time when resources are tight. With the HSE, I am looking at how we can develop better information on asbestos in buildings, and on ways of gathering a robust and reliable dataset to provide the foundation to inform longer-term strategy for the removal of asbestos.

If we cannot at this stage commit to a national register, a one-off asbestos census may be the way to start, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields suggested. The solution is likely to be a phased approach to improving information on buildings containing asbestos, to help us build an objective and reliable evidence base. A better understanding of the costs and associated impacts for the Government's own estate—schools, hospitals and so on—would be a good place to start, before considering wider roll out. HSE is considering how best to take that forward in a way that will ensure we can obtain reliable, standardised data.

Alongside that, HSE is supporting digitalisation of built environment data, using building information modelling, or BIM. That approach enables improvements to the identification, recording, sharing and use of information on health and safety risks such as asbestos. The possibility of a surge in asbestos removal, triggered by actions on the part of the Government, needs to be planned for. Asbestos requires specialised waste disposal and removal, in many instances by licensed contractors. We would need to avoid the risk of duty holders removing asbestos without proper controls, and not disposing of it at licensed sites. That would present a significant exposure risk in itself.

In March, I attended part of the HSE's asbestos research summit, which took place in Manchester. That brought together world-leading experts on asbestos, with duty holders, employer groups and mesothelioma support groups. I am pleased to say Liz Darlison was there. The summit was to inform where we should focus our efforts to ensure we continue to understand the nature of the asbestos exposure risk across the country.

Emma Lewell: I can tell the Minister is coming towards the end of his comments. I know resources are tight but people are dying, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth and Ashington (Ian Lavery) said, at a rate of 5,000 a year. As the Minister knows from the start of my speech, that is happening in my constituency at a faster rate than anywhere else in the country. Could he consider beginning a census in my patch of South Shields so that we can trial it and see how it works?

Sir Stephen Timms: I welcome the opportunity to discuss that proposal with my hon. Friend, to see what we can do. At the research summit, we talked about the need to ensure that everybody involved in the asbestos ecosystem understood their role and the impact their behaviours can have in preventing exposure for themselves and others through their activity at work.

Ian Lavery: I wonder whether the Minister is aware of the Asbestos Victims Support Group's case against Cape plc, the producer of asbestos, and the claim for £10 million for research and development. If so, does the Minister support the claim?

Sir Stephen Timms: I am aware of that claim, and think there is a strong case. The HSE is working through the suggestions from the research summit to develop a broader programme and will publish the areas of focus for research later in the year. The aim is that that prospectus will shape work in this field for decades to come. There is a lot of work to do, a lot of work under way and a lot more progress still to be made. My hon. Friends are absolutely right to make the case for the goal of an asbestos-free Great Britain and a plan for asbestos to be removed across the country. I am grateful to them and others for continuing to press the case and for their support. I look forward to further discussions with them, and agree that we still need to do a great deal.

Question put and agreed to.

Political Prisoners

4.31 pm

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the detention of Jimmy Lai and other political prisoners internationally.

It is a real honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I speak today on behalf of my constituent Jimmy Lai, who has been detained abroad since December 2020. Mr Lai was on trial for alleged offences against national security and alleged sedition through his work as a newspaper publisher. The offence has been ruled unlawful and arbitrary by the United Nations working group on arbitrary detention. I called for this debate to draw attention to what Mr Lai has suffered over the course of his detention and to bring together parliamentarians from across the House to speak with one voice on the matter of his detention and the detention of other political prisoners abroad.

Mr Lai is a much-loved father and grandfather, and a British citizen. He is 77 years of age, and is being held in solitary confinement in the blistering Hong Kong heat. This will be his fourth summer suffering temperatures that regularly reach 40°.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I make this intervention with your indulgence, Mr Western, because I am engaged in another debate in the main Chamber, and I apologise to the hon. Lady because my intervention deals with another individual, although I fully support her and congratulate her on raising the Jimmy Lai case, which I have argued many times. I hope she makes her case, and I am sure she will—it is a terrible thing.

However, there are other cases, and the person I want to mention, who is often forgotten, is Ryan Cornelius. He has been incarcerated for 17 years in the United Arab Emirates. The UN has said exactly the same: this is an illegal incarceration for which there is no legal basis. He has often been in solitary confinement. The British Government—not this one, necessarily, but all Governments—have too often failed to raise his case in the way they should. I mention the case because the Foreign Office needs to do its duty in raising it, regardless of the business deals that it wants to make.

Rachel Blake: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support for our task today and for raising that important case.

Despite Mr Lai's being told that his trial would last only 80 days, today marks the 1,630th day of his detention. Every day that he is detained, his health deteriorates further and his family rightly worry about his chances of survival in prison. The detention of Mr Lai is a human tragedy that undermines the very principles of democracy, freedom and the rule of law on which our international order relies. The idea that a British citizen can be detained by a foreign Government for standing up and expressing the British values of democracy and freedom of speech is an affront to all of us in this House, and across the country, who hold those principles dear.

Mr Lai's son Sebastien has campaigned tirelessly and admirably for his father's release; I know that many hon. Members here have had the honour of hearing directly from him and Mr Lai's legal counsel. At this very moment, Sebastien is addressing the UN Human

[*Rachel Blake*]

Rights Council in Geneva, and recently he has been in the United States and Canada to meet senior officials and lawmakers in both countries. Next week, he travels to Brussels to meet European parliamentarians and the European External Action Service.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. She has just mentioned Canada; I understand that the Canadians are considering granting honorary citizenship to Jimmy Lai, as a small but significant contribution to demonstrating their commitment to him. Does she agree that that is something that the British Government could consider?¹

Rachel Blake: I welcome my hon. Friend's intervention; later in my remarks, I will come on to using all possible levers to secure Mr Lai's freedom.

When Sebastien is at home, he is my constituent—a man deeply concerned about his father's welfare. That is the position in which I speak to the Chamber today: as a Member of Parliament standing up for my constituents in the face of unbelievable, state-sanctioned cruelty.

I am grateful for the work of this Government and Members across the House to secure Mr Lai's freedom. Already, Sebastien has met people across Government, and it has been encouraging to see the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister call for Mr Lai's immediate and unconditional release. We cannot stay silent while Mr Lai remains detained. The Government calls for his release are welcome, but I want to see those included urgently in any trade negotiations and international meetings that Ministers of all Departments conduct with their Chinese counterparts.

I also support the calls for the Prime Minister to meet Sebastien to discuss his father's case. We must use every lever at our disposal to make the case for Mr Lai's safe return. The attention and time of our most senior politicians represent a clear signal from our Government that we will not let the international spotlight shift from Mr Lai's arbitrary and illegal detention.

Mr Lai is not the only British person to be detained politically overseas. He was not the first and he will not be the last, and this debate is about the wider issue of unlawful detention. We cannot forget Craig and Lindsay Foreman or Alaa Abd el-Fattah, British citizens who remain imprisoned in Iran and Egypt, respectively. The events of the past few weeks, months and years have shown that inter-state relations have significant potential to get more tense, not less, and with that comes the potential for more political imprisonment of British nationals. We need to ensure that all British citizens imprisoned overseas have the same support and advocacy that Jimmy Lai has had.

Every day that my constituent Mr Lai remains in detention abroad is a day that the life and health of a British citizen is put at risk by a foreign state, and another day when democracy is undermined across the world. We must bring him home and we must bring him home now.

4.38 pm

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) on securing this important debate. It is heartening—at least, I do not want to pre-empt the outcome of this debate, but I think there

will be cross-party unity on this issue, and an important statement from the UK Parliament not only to our Government, but to the world that we stand united behind the need to free Jimmy Lai. I am honoured to speak on his behalf.

Recently, I met Sebastien Lai and his legal team in Parliament. I was struck by the determination that Jimmy Lai's son is demonstrating, not just here in the UK, but around the world, to galvanise international diplomatic support. There are expressions of support from the US Congress, other international organisations and Parliaments around the world. I am afraid it feels as though the UK Government are lagging behind, particularly when we remember that we are talking about a British citizen.

As the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster said, Jimmy has now been imprisoned for more than four years. He has been imprisoned under the Chinese state's Hong Kong national security law, which effectively criminalises democracy and citizens' freedom of speech against the Communist dictatorship. He has been denied his choice of legal representation and refused access to independent specialist medical treatment in prison. In October last year, Amnesty International recognised Mr Lai as a prisoner of conscience, and in November the UN working group on arbitrary detention published its opinion that Jimmy Lai is unlawfully and arbitrarily detained, and called for his immediate release.

As I said, the call for Jimmy's release is backed by not just the United States of America, but Australia, the Canadian Parliament and the European Parliament. I learned from my meeting with Sebastien and the legal team that his trial has been the victim of an abuse of process; it was originally set for a date earlier this year, but it was pushed back and adjourned and we now have a trial date for 14 August this year. Procedural rules have been perverted and twisted against Mr Lai's legal team. We can see this for what it is: a perversion of justice and a distortion of human rights.

I am very concerned about the actions that the Government do not seem to be taking at this time. I come here in the spirit of collaboration and cross-party unity, but I worry about the backsliding by the Government, particularly in the case of Jimmy Lai. I have several questions for the Minister about the case, which I hope he will address. What conversations have there been between the Foreign Secretary and his opposite number in the Chinese Communist party? What specific discussions has the Prime Minister himself had about Jimmy Lai's case and prospects for his release? In their pursuit of closer economic ties with China, what actions have other Departments, notably the Treasury, taken to use the dialogue that they so value with the Communist party as an effective means of diplomacy and to do the right thing—in other words, to release Jimmy?

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): As the right hon. Lady is posing her questions to the Minister, perhaps she will come to this one, but if she does not, will she agree to add that the Government need to get together a coalition of international Governments who are on our side—she has already named some—to put significant pressure on the Chinese authorities to do the right thing and release Jimmy Lai?

1.[*Official Report*, 19 June 2025; Vol. 769, c. 2WC.] (Correction)

Suella Braverman: Absolutely. The irony cannot be lost on us that this is a clear case of human rights violations. I note that the legal team representing Mr Lai hails from Doughty Street Chambers—a renowned human rights chambers in London and the old stomping-ground of our very own Prime Minister. If there were ever a human rights case for the Prime Minister to work on and be an advocate for, this is it. I can imagine that many years ago, he might well have taken up this case, had it come through the doors of Doughty Street Chambers. We have our very own human rights lawyer in Downing Street; if there were ever a time for him to deploy his legal skills, his human rights zeal and his passion for civil liberties, it is here and now, on behalf of our British citizen Jimmy Lai. I thank the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) for his comments.

I will finish by recalling my experience at the Home Office and by asking the Minister some further questions on the broader issue of China. We are supposed to be challenging China, not appeasing it. At the Home Office, I saw the impact of Chinese bellicosity in the UK. The list is too long for this Chamber, but in recent years we have been on the receiving end of prolific and malicious cyber-activity by APT10—one of the best known hacking groups—on behalf of the Ministry of State Security and the People's Liberation Army; the targeting of UK parliamentarians and diplomats; vulnerable policing and security services due to the prevalence of the digital asbestos of Chinese technology; transnational repression of Chinese dissidents in the UK through “Chinese police stations”; Confucius Institutes throughout UK academia, many of which are run effectively by the Chinese Communist party under the guise of their “Chinese talent programmes”; covert and unlawful acquisition of data; espionage; supply chain disruption and control of critical national infrastructure disguised as investment.

As Home Secretary, I enacted the National Security Act 2023, which set about injecting more transparency into how China does business and carries out activities in the UK. I have been urging the Government to list China on the enhanced tier of the foreign influence registration scheme. They still have not done that, and they seem to be refusing to. I ask the Minister: on what grounds, particularly in the light of the human rights violations of Jimmy Lai, can the Government possibly justify not listing China on the enhanced tier of that scheme, if we are to take the threat posed by China seriously for the grave one it is? In conclusion, Jimmy Lai is an elderly man, a British citizen and the victim of grotesque human rights abuses. If we, in this House—and this Government—cannot stand up for him, then we do not deserve to be here.

4.46 pm

Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) and congratulate and commend her on all she is doing to help secure the release of Jimmy Lai, and her tireless work to keep his case high on the political agenda of this House, the media and the public.

Today's debate references other political prisoners. I would like to highlight the current ongoing arbitrary detention of my West Dunbartonshire constituent, Jagtar Singh Johal. Jagtar is a British national, who has been

arbitrarily detained in India since 2017 on political charges carrying the death penalty, based on a confession extracted under torture. On 4 March 2025, Jagtar was acquitted of all charges in a case at the district and sessions court in Moga, Punjab, after the court rejected the allegations against him made by Indian authorities. Prosecutors had seven years to present credible evidence against Jagtar and failed to do so.

However, Jagtar has not been released because he is facing eight other cases, which are essentially duplicates—all are based on the same so-called “confession”: his name signed on a blank piece of paper after police tortured him with electricity and brought petrol into his cell and threatened to burn him alive. For Jagtar to remain imprisoned after his acquittal while standing trial in other cases based on the same facts, torture confession and inadmissible and unreliable witness evidence, would be a mockery of justice. Under the double jeopardy principle, which protects people from being put on trial twice for the same crime—and is enshrined in both international law and India's constitution—the remaining cases against him should be dropped.

Following his acquittal, Jagtar's conditions in prison have deteriorated significantly, and he has been placed in a solitary cell. Speaking to the all-party parliamentary group on arbitrary detention and hostage affairs on 2 April 2025, Jagtar's brother Gurpreet said:

“Jagtar's conditions in prison have deteriorated. He's had his basic privileges taken away, and he's isolated in a cell on his own, not allowed to speak to other prisoners...As a result, he's feeling mentally tortured.”

His family report that those more stringent conditions continue to date, and are affecting Jagtar mentally. As a result, Jagtar's family are becoming increasingly concerned for his wellbeing.

The UN working group on arbitrary detention found in May 2022 that, under international law, Jagtar's detention is arbitrary and lacks any legal basis, and that his fair trial rights had been gravely violated. It determined that Jagtar's detention was based on discriminatory grounds owing to his Sikh faith and status as a human rights defender, and that he was subject to torture. The UN called for Jagtar to be immediately released.

The UK Government must act now to secure Jagtar's release. This moment in time is a unique opportunity to secure a resolution with Indian authorities and bring this young British man back to his family in Dunbarton in my home of West Dunbartonshire. Without decisive diplomatic action, he faces being imprisoned for decades while the remaining trials drag on despite the complete lack of credible evidence against him.

I joined the APPG on arbitrary detention and hostage affairs because of my constituent's detention, and it was there that I learned about Jimmy Lai and the other UK citizens unlawfully detained across the world as political prisoners. I implore my Government to redouble their efforts in securing the release of Jimmy, Jagtar, Ryan and all our unlawfully detained constituents.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Matt Western (in the Chair): Order. I would like to get everyone in with about equal amounts of time. Hopefully, we can do so with four minutes each.

4.51 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I commend the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) for setting the scene so well. I have spoken about the imprisonment of Jimmy Lai on many other occasions in Westminster Hall and asked questions about it in the Chamber. I declare an interest as the chair of the APPG for international freedom of religion or belief, because I want to mention the human rights that have been denied to him.

Democracy has been ignored. The hard hand of China and the Hong Kong authorities has come down strongly on democrats, of which Jimmy Lai is one, whose only crime was to speak up for democracy, liberty and freedom. It seems to me that those democrats did that without violence, but with a verbal strength, and I commend them for it. Hong Kong was once a bastion of western principles. I have supported many debates on it and sponsored pro-Hong Kong democracy events in this House to highlight Jimmy Lai and others.

The Chinese Communist party has denied Jimmy Lai his right to worship his God with freedom. He is a practising Roman Catholic. He is not able to have the mass he wants or the freedom of religious worship that he had before he was put in prison—for some 1,630 days, let us remember. His health has deteriorated and he is in a worsened condition.

Jimmy Lai is a British citizen. I say this circumspectly and with great respect to the Minister and the Government: there was a time when a British passport meant more than it perhaps means today. There was a gunboat diplomacy in that. If a UK citizen was under threat, they could expect the full weight of British authority to be used on their behalf. That does not happen today. But what we do, or try to do—the Minister and the Government do this all the time—is exercise the diplomacy that we need to.

Jimmy Lai's staunch criticism of the Chinese Government led to his arrest in 2020. His story is a rallying point for those defending democratic values and human rights in the face of increasing authoritarianism. His trial began in December 2023, with his son Sebastien fighting for his release. Jimmy Lai testified for 52 days. Closing arguments were scheduled for August 2025. The 77-year-old has lived in Hong Kong since he was 12 years old. Having stowed away on a fishing boat from China and worked as a child labourer in a garment factory, he built up a fashion empire. He has been an advocate for democracy since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in China. He set up a magazine in Hong Kong.

Jimmy Lai has never held a Chinese or Hong Kong passport. Hong Kong authorities deem him to be a Chinese citizen because he was born in mainland China, even though he is as British as what you are, Mr Western, and what I am. Mr Lai has homes all over the world. It is only right that we advocate for his release.

I am reminded of Romans 12:18:

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

That is a call not only to personal conduct, but to public policy. It urges us to pursue peace, and I believe that we should do that in every way we can—not passively, but intentionally, as far as it depends on us.

My request today is to free Jimmy Lai. I hope the Chinese Government are listening—they are probably not listening to Jim Shannon, the MP for Strangford. Perhaps they are not listening to any of us. I am one of those people who could not go to China even if I wanted to. I have no wish to go to China, by the way, Mr Western. You will never see me on a plane going that way, and never see me on the beaches, wherever they have beaches in China. I am interested in human rights and freedom of religious belief. Jimmy Lai should be freed.

Several hon. Members rose—

Matt Western (in the Chair): Order. We will now formally make speeches four minutes long.

4.55 pm

Tony Vaughan (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): It is a privilege to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) for securing this vital debate. I commend her for her work fiercely fighting for her constituents. I declare an interest in this debate as the chair of the all-party parliamentary China group.

Jimmy Lai's situation is desperate and his treatment wholly unacceptable. I am deeply concerned by the treatment that Mr Lai, a 77-year-old British citizen, has received at the hands of the Hong Kong authorities. He has been a tireless campaigner for democracy and human rights in Hong Kong. He has already been sentenced to five years and nine months in prison for a separate case relating to his now closed newspaper, *Apple Daily*. His lawyers have confirmed that he has been denied independent medical care and is allowed out of his cell for a mere 50 minutes a day. That is inhuman treatment. He is a frail, elderly man who is 77, has diabetes and has lost considerable weight, yet he remains a man of immense courage and unyielding spirit—qualities to which I want to pay tribute today. If he is found guilty he faces the prospect of spending the rest of his life in prison.

As chair of the APPG, I have raised Jimmy Lai's case in person several times with Chinese officials, including in January when I visited Beijing as part of a visit by a cross-party group of parliamentarians. The Chinese believe it is an internal matter for them, but raising his case firmly has been my duty. It is important that a message is sent by this House and by UK parliamentarians that his treatment is not acceptable.

Blair McDougall (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes an important point about making the case to China. Does he agree with me that this is about more than just Jimmy Lai, because the rights that Jimmy Lai was exercising when he was arrested were guaranteed under the joint declaration, and that brings into question whether China is a reliable partner on all sorts of other international agreements, too?

Tony Vaughan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We must not forget that Hong Kong still, it is said, has a common law system, so Hong Kong must observe the common law and the basic principles attached to a fair trial. That is the bedrock of what the common law is about. It has been a privilege and inspiring for me to meet Sebastien Lai and his father's lawyers. I pay tribute to them and their work.

Because of our fundamentally different political and economic systems, conceptions of democracy and human rights in China and in Britain will inevitably be different. But we must not relent from pushing and raising the case, given that Hong Kong has a common law system, and the international obligations that apply to China and Hong Kong must be upheld. I was encouraged to see that the Prime Minister raised Jimmy Lai's case when he met President Xi at the G20 in Brazil. I urge the Prime Minister to meet Mr Lai's son and his lawyers. The UK must of course work closely with our allies to continue to raise his case with officials at every level of the Chinese Communist party. China and Hong Kong should understand that Mr Lai's case and the treatment that he has received is damaging the standing of China and Hong Kong in the world.

But beyond questions of legality, reputation and soft power lies the case of a frail, elderly man who deserves better, more humane treatment. I call on the Hong Kong authorities to release Jimmy Lai.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Matt Western (in the Chair): Order. I am afraid I am going to have to reduce speeches to three minutes.

4.59 pm

Mr Connor Rand (Altrincham and Sale West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. I join other Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) on securing this debate and on her powerful advocacy.

I want to focus specifically on the Jimmy Lai case and what it means to the sizeable Hong Kong diaspora that I am fortunate enough and proud to represent in Altrincham and Sale West. First, I briefly pay tribute to Jimmy Lai and the Lai family. I have been fortunate enough to meet Sebastien Lai, and I was struck by his dignity and resolve in the face of unimaginable difficulty. He told me in stark terms of his fear for his father's health, and he was honest in saying that we are in a race against time to secure Jimmy's release. I told Sebastien that I would do whatever I could to push and press our Government for his father's release.

I have made the same promise to my Hongkonger constituents because for them the case feels deeply personal. It is a poignant illustration of why they were forced out of their homeland and a chilling reminder of what could happen to the loved ones they left behind. It is a reminder that, as one of them said to me, "If it can happen to Jimmy, it can happen to anyone."

Every day that Jimmy Lai spends in jail, every bounty placed on pro-democracy activists and parliamentarians, and every act of Chinese aggression here and abroad strikes yet more fear into the hearts of Hongkongers in my community and around the world. That is one of the reasons why the case matters so much: not just because Jimmy's release is morally right and not just because it would reunite an innocent man with his loving family, but because his ongoing imprisonment sends a message that China can disregard freedom with impunity. We must change that.

I know that the Government have raised the case repeatedly, but the situation has not changed—things are clearly not working, and historically the UK has a

poor record of securing the release of UK citizens detained abroad. I ask the Minister: what new strategies can we adopt? Other Members have referred to trade talks, but surely, alongside important security considerations, the case must be an influencing factor in the decision on whether to approve a Chinese mega-embassy here in London.

I know that the Government will consider those questions and what more they can do to secure Jimmy's release, in keeping with our party's proud history of standing up for human rights wherever we can.

5.2 pm

Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) for securing this important debate. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Douglas McAllister), sitting on my right, who is Jagtar Singh Johal's MP. It is about Jagtar that I will speak this afternoon.

Jagtar Singh Johal is a Sikh, as my hon. Friend mentioned. Although Jagtar is not one of my constituents, I represent the Wolverhampton West constituency, which has a large and engaged Sikh population. Not only the Sikh population but non-Sikh constituents have expressed deep concern about Jagtar's treatment and have consistently urged me to encourage the UK Government to take meaningful action. The allegations of torture, the length of detention without trial and the lack of due process in Jagtar's case amount to a serious and unacceptable breach of international human rights. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has concluded that his detention is arbitrary and in violation of international law.

On 6 November 2024, during Prime Minister's questions, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire mentioned that Jagtar's imprisonment had reached its seventh year. The Prime Minister replied:

"We are committed to pushing the Government of India on this important case. The Foreign Secretary has raised it and will continue to do so".—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2024; Vol. 756, c. 302.] I would like to know what developments have taken place since then.

In March this year, the Punjab district court found that there was no credible evidence for the terrorism and conspiracy charge brought against Mr Johal, and that he was not a member of a terrorist gang. However, he still faces eight charges, which are based on the same alleged confession and evidence on which his acquittal took place. He faces the death penalty. Jagtar has never been convicted of a crime, yet is in solitary confinement 24/7 and subject to surveillance.

Following the acquittal on the charges mentioned earlier, we now have a window of opportunity to secure Jagtar's release and bring him home to his country and family. We must use all the diplomatic channels available to us to press for Jagtar's release; the situation cannot be allowed to continue. As we often say, justice delayed is justice denied. Like others mentioned this afternoon, Jagtar Singh Johal has waited for far too long.

5.5 pm

Tim Roca (Macclesfield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and

[Tim Roca]

Westminster (Rachel Blake) on securing this important debate. I put on the record my interest as the vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on arbitrary detention and hostage affairs.

I am going to speak in general terms about the issue of state hostage taking and arbitrary detention. Hon. Members have spoken eloquently about some of the cases and the constituents for whom they are fighting for so powerfully. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) talked about Ryan Cornelius, who has now been in prison for 17 years and in May 2018 was sentenced to a further 20 years, meaning that he will not leave prison in the Emirates until he is 84. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Douglas McAllister), who spoke strongly about his constituent, Jagtar Singh Johal. Many of us will know of the case of Alaa Abd El-Fattah as well. The individuals in those cases, along with Jimmy Lai, have something in common: they are considered by the UN working group on arbitrary detention to be arbitrarily detained. Their rights have been trampled on and they are being incarcerated effectively unlawfully, without any due process or regard.

When we talk about victims of arbitrary detention, we need to remember the impact on their families as well as on them. Ryan Cornelius's son was six years old when his father was imprisoned; he is now 23. Alaa Abd El-Fattah's mother, Laila, has been on hunger strike for some time now. The impact still scars those lucky enough to have been released. I saw Matthew Hedges last week and hon. Members will have met Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and her husband Richard, who fought so powerfully for her release.

We need to have a conversation about why the UK struggles, in some cases, to free its citizens from arbitrary detention abroad. I have the highest regard for the Minister and our excellent diplomats, but the Foreign Affairs Committee report "Stolen years", from the previous Parliament, highlighted some clear failings in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office approach to those who are arbitrarily detained. It talked about the need for urgency and to be clear about when our citizens are facing torture, interrogation and having their rights trampled on. Indeed, the case of Ahmed al-Doush is being considered at the moment by the UN working group on arbitrary detention because the UK has not explicitly said that it believes his rights are being trampled on. Saudi Arabia has said, "Well, the United Kingdom has not raised any issue about his rights being trampled on" and uses that as an argument in the working group itself. We have to be extremely clear when we see our citizens' rights being traduced.

James Naish: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. The number of organisations involved was referenced earlier; in the case of Jimmy Lai, different countries and Congress have also lined up in support. What are my hon. Friend's reflections on the fact that even the support of all those organisations is still not making a difference?

Tim Roca: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It sometimes seems that the full glare of publicity is needed to make any progress with a case; I am thinking particularly of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. As hon. Members have said, perhaps there is an argument for our being

much more assertive in dealing with such cases—not to look solely through the lens of geopolitics, but to consider clearly and squarely the first priority of all Governments: defending their citizens. Other countries seem to have a better record on that.

Clearly, there are things that we can be doing. I am looking forward, hopefully, to a Government announcement about a special envoy of some sort whose sole role would be to focus on getting British citizens out of these horrible situations. I believe that a cultural change probably needs to happen in the FCDO as well. We need to change what Chris Patten calls "by the way" diplomacy; he mentioned it when he was with Sebastien Lai at one of our hearings. At the end of a high-level conversation between a Foreign Secretary or Prime Minister it is, "By the way, this person is arbitrarily detained by you." That does not give the sense of urgency and importance that the case deserves.

We can do much more. I am sure that the Government will be enacting the recommendations. I look forward to hearing what the Minister says because the issue is about serving British citizens and getting them out of horrible situations.

5.9 pm

Bobby Dean (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) on bringing forward this debate on behalf of not only her constituent, but everybody who cares about freedom and democracy across the world.

The Liberal Democrats are concerned about British nationals being detained abroad without due process or fair legal justification. That is not just a matter of foreign policy, but one of principle, human rights and our duty to protect British citizens wherever they may be. Jimmy Lai is a British citizen. He is a courageous journalist, a businessman and a tireless advocate for democracy in Hong Kong. Since 2020, he has been unjustly imprisoned by the Chinese authorities.

Jimmy Lai is also a father, and his son has continued his good work with the same courage. I had the privilege of meeting Jimmy's son Sebastien and hearing at first hand the story of his father's resistance to being silenced. Sebastien spoke movingly about the family's ordeal following his father's imprisonment, and of his father's unwavering commitment to the values of freedom and democracy. It was a powerful reminder that behind every political prisoner is a resilient family enduring unimaginable emotional pain.

For nearly two years, Mr Lai has endured solitary confinement, but his crime is nothing more than speaking up for the freedom and democracy we all believe in. This man has risked everything for the values we hold dear, yet the UK Government have failed to secure his release for the last five years. Can the Minister update the House on the detail and nature of the conversations he has had with his Chinese counterparts? On the point made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Tim Roca), we are worried that they may have part of "by the way" diplomacy and that the issue has not been raised in enough serious detail. The read-outs from the high-profile visits have not really told us anything, so I would appreciate it if the Minister told us more.

I also question the merits of high-profile visits when so little progress has been made on key diplomatic issues such as this one and on the transnational repression happening on our shores. Can the Minister tell us when the long-promised China audit be published, and will he intervene on the plans for a Chinese super-embassy in our capital?

Jimmy Lai deserves to be at the top of our diplomatic engagement with China, but he is not alone. We are also deeply concerned about the continued detention of Jagtar Singh Johal in India. Arrested in 2017, Mr Johal has reportedly been tortured and held without due process. A UN working group has declared his detention arbitrary and called for his immediate release, yet the UK Government have still refused to take a clear position. That must change.

In Egypt, British citizen Alaa Abd el-Fattah remains in prison for the simple act of sharing a Facebook post. He has endured hunger strikes, inhumane conditions and the heartbreak of a family fighting for justice. His mother Laila has been hospitalised in protest, and we must do more.

These are not isolated incidents, but part of a disturbing pattern in which British nationals are detained abroad without fair trial, without consular access and with the Government's diplomatic efforts falling on deaf ears. I believe that says something about Britain's new standing in the world. After pulling back on multiple fronts, the Government must act now to restore our global role.

The Foreign Office claims to support 20,000 to 25,000 British nationals abroad each year, including thousands who are detained, but too often that support is discretionary, inconsistent and opaque. That is why the Liberal Democrats are calling for a legal right to consular assistance for all British nationals, including dual nationals, who are politically detained or face human rights violations abroad. We also support the appointment of a dedicated envoy for hostages and detainees, although that must not come at the expense of ministerial accountability.

Britain should never abandon its own people for the sake of tiny diplomatic gains. Nations such as China and others are not weighing up whether we have been polite about them when drawing conclusions on large economic trade deals; they are calculating the cold hard facts. It is our duty not to be silent in the face of injustice, and I believe that doing so also signals our strength. We should not rest until Jimmy Lai and all others unjustly detained are free.

5.13 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Western. I commend the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) for securing the debate and for defending so courageously Jimmy Lai. He is not merely her constituent; he is one of us. He is a British citizen, and as such he deserves the full protection, advocacy and diplomatic support that the United Kingdom extends to all its nationals under threat abroad.

I thank all the hon. Members who have spoken up today for Jimmy and other political prisoners who are unlawfully detained. His Majesty's Opposition will always support the Government in all their efforts to free British citizens who are locked up unlawfully in parts of the world where regimes carry out such atrocities.

Mr Lai, of course, is currently imprisoned in Hong Kong under Beijing's draconian and unaccountable national security law, which has criminalised dissent and dismantled every safeguard that once distinguished Hong Kong from the Chinese mainland. Jimmy Lai is being persecuted for the crime of believing in democracy, for founding *Apple Daily*, one of Hong Kong's most popular pro-democracy newspapers, and for calling out the encroachment of the Chinese Communist party into the life of the city that once, under the British Crown, enjoyed liberty, autonomy and the rule of law. He has done all that at the age of 77, despite his serious health conditions.

Beijing has trampled on the promises made in the Sino-British joint declaration, a treaty lodged at the United Nations and signed in good faith. That agreement guaranteed Hong Kong's freedom, rule of law and way of life, but today those guarantees lie in tatters and people such as Jimmy are paying the price.

Despite the cruelty inflicted upon him, Jimmy Lai's spirit remains unbroken. His quiet defiance calls to mind the courage of dissidents during the final years of the cold war—acts of resistance that were welcomed and celebrated by leaders across the democratic world, not least by our own former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. The same unwavering belief in liberty should, I believe, stir the conscience of every free nation today, just as it did then, and shame us into action.

The British Government have said that Jimmy Lai's case is a "priority". I welcome that, but I must ask the Minister what the Government mean by that in practice. What do they consider success in Jimmy Lai's case—his release, or simply raising the issue diplomatically? Surely, rather being seen as simply a complex consular case, it needs to be seen as one with serious geopolitical ramifications. From where I stand, the message coming from Downing Street is worryingly vague. It appears—I say this with regret—that the defence of human rights is being quietly traded for economic expediency.

What is worse is that what is happening to Jimmy Lai is not an isolated injustice; it is part of a wider campaign by Beijing to silence criticism, intimidate the diaspora and exert extraterritorial pressure on sovereign nations, including our own. Will the Minister call on the Prime Minister to meet the Lai family, listen to their story and understand what is at stake? We are concerned that Jimmy's health is deteriorating and, as every day passes, we lose time.

If the Government are not prepared to stand by Jimmy Lai—I hope that the Minister will confirm today that they are—then the United Kingdom simply looks weak. We must be prepared to defend our British citizens, our values and our international obligations—or we look away and, by our silence, give permission to authoritarian regimes to target our people, suppress the truth and redefine the rules of the international order. The world is watching, and so is Jimmy Lai in his cell in Hong Kong—imprisoned not because he committed a crime, but because he dared to be free.

5.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr Hamish Falconer): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Western. I will try to keep my remarks brief in order to be able to hand back to my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake).

[Mr Hamish Falconer]

I will make some progress through the cases that have been raised, as well as the general policy, and then I will be happy to take interventions.

The Government remain gravely concerned by the politically motivated prosecution of Jimmy Lai, who is a British citizen, as so many Members have pointed out. His case remains a top priority. We continue to call on Beijing to repeal Hong Kong's national security law, and we call on the Hong Kong authorities to end the prosecution of all individuals charged under it and immediately release Mr Lai.

As many Members know well from their constituencies—just as I know from Lincoln—the UK has deep and long-standing ties with Hong Kong, but the continued erosion of rights and freedoms threatens Hong Kong's way of life. China's imposition of the national security law has seen opposition voices stifled and dissent criminalised. Mr Lai is just one of those voices; prominent and outspoken, he has been silenced through a politically motivated prosecution.

The Foreign Secretary has committed to raising Mr Lai's case with China at every opportunity. We have stood firm on that promise, and it is of the utmost importance to this Government. Ministers have regularly and repeatedly made clear the damage that Mr Lai's ongoing imprisonment has done to Hong Kong's reputation and the challenge that it presents to UK-China relationships more broadly.

Hon. Members asked me a number of questions about which Ministers have raised Mr Lai's case and how. The Prime Minister has done so with President Xi, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Tony Vaughan) highlighted, and the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Foreign Office Ministers—in particular, the Minister with responsibility for China, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Friern Barnet (Catherine West)—Trade Ministers and Science Ministers have all raised Jimmy Lai's detention with their Chinese counterparts. We will continue to do so.

Our diplomats have attended Mr Lai's trial throughout, alongside our partners, to make it known that the world is watching. I was asked about the role of other countries. We welcome the support from many of our partners in raising Mr Lai's case. Just yesterday, the Foreign Secretary again met Mr Lai's son, Sebastien, who has indeed campaigned tirelessly for his father's release. The Foreign Secretary updated him on his recent engagements with China and offered his full support, including on behalf of the Prime Minister, who is closely following Mr Lai's trial.

The Government are taking a consistent, long-term and strategic approach to managing the UK's relations with China, rooted in the national interest, precisely so that we can have direct and often difficult conversations in the interests of the British people, including Jimmy Lai. I say in response to the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Bobby Dean), that the China audit should be published soon.

I turn now to the important points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Tim Roca) on consular prisoner policy. As a former official as well as a Minister, I know well the terrible impact that being incarcerated has on not just the individual in question

but their family. I know from my own personal experience how different every case is and how difficult it can be to secure progress. I know the importance of commitment, of determination and of finding every possible route to secure release. I can assure hon. Members that the health and welfare of detainees is at the heart of our consular work. We will support families wherever we can.

I recognise the complexity of Mr Lai's case and some of the others that have been referenced. In such cases, we use a taskforce approach, drawing in expertise from specialist teams, geographic experts and our embassies around the world to determine our strategy. Teams examine the circumstances of each case individually and develop tailored approaches based on careful judgments of what is likely to be most effective. We are examining options to strengthen our approach, with the appointment of a special envoy to work with families on the most complex detention cases, and we will announce further details in due course. We are also committed to introducing a new right to consular assistance in cases of human rights violations, and consultations are ongoing.

The Liberal Democrat spokesperson made an important point about the accountability of Ministers. I am the Minister with responsibility for consular affairs. The appointment of an envoy will complement our efforts; it will in no way displace my responsibility to hon. Members and to this House, or, indeed, the responsibility of the Foreign Secretary and others to account for their actions on all these cases.

I will turn to some of the other cases that have been raised, including tirelessly by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Douglas McAllister). We continue to express concerns about Mr Johal's prolonged detention to the Government of India at every appropriate opportunity, emphasising the need for a prompt, full and just resolution of his case in India's independent legal system. We continue to provide consular support to Mr Johal and his family. The Foreign Secretary met Mr Johal's brother on 8 May and raised Mr Johal's case with his Indian counterpart on several occasions, including most recently on 7 June. The Prime Minister raised Mr Johal's case with Prime Minister Modi on 18 November and with the Indian Minister of External Affairs on 4 March.

As several hon. Members mentioned, many Members are focused on Alaa Abd el-Fattah in Egypt and on his mother, Laila. The Government are committed to securing Alaa's urgent release and we continue to engage at the highest levels of the Egyptian Government. The Prime Minister raised the case with President Sisi on 22 May and the Foreign Secretary with Foreign Minister Abdelatty on 1 June. I am, of course, concerned by the hospitalisation of Laila, Alaa's mother. I have met her and the family on a number of occasions, and I met her with Prime Minister on 14 February. I share her desire for an urgent resolution. I have impressed the urgency of the situation on the Egyptian Government and the Egyptian ambassador on repeated occasions. I assure the House that the case remains a top priority for me personally.

I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster of the priority that the Government place on the fate of her constituent, Mr Lai.

Jim Shannon: With the utmost respect to the Minister, I made the case for Jimmy Lai being denied his right to religious worship. He is a practising Roman Catholic,

but cannot have his mass or worship his God in the way he wants to. With that in mind, and as chair of the APPG for international freedom of religion or belief, I ask the Minister what has been done to ensure that Jimmy Lai has the freedom of religious belief that he should expect.

Mr Falconer: I welcome and commend the hon. Member's efforts on freedom of religious belief, not just in Hong Kong but across the world. We have raised the circumstances of Mr Lai's detention and will continue to do so. The UK will not stop pressing for consular access in that case, and indeed in all other cases where consular access is denied, and we will not stop calling for Mr Lai's immediate release.

James Naish: I thank the Minister for that. I referred to Canada and the gestures that it has made. What more can we do, in gestures or actions, specifically in the case of Jimmy Lai? What more could be done practically? I appreciate all the warm words and the efforts that have been put in, but are there not more physical things that we can be doing?

Mr Falconer: In each case, different things are likely to make progress. I am very conscious of my own experience—I negotiated the release of British nationals with the Taliban over a long period. I am sure that in that case publicity would have made the release more complex. It will vary case by case, and I am sure the Minister responsible for China will be happy to discuss these matters further.

I will end my remarks there in order to give my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster the chance to respond.

5.28 pm

Rachel Blake: I thank all the participants in the debate: the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) for raising the case that

he did; the right hon. and learned Member for Fareham and Waterlooville (Suella Braverman) for highlighting the injustice; my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Douglas McAllister) for raising the case of Jagtar Singh Johal; the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for talking about religious freedom; my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Tony Vaughan) for talking about his great work on the APPG; my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand) for talking about the diaspora; my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton West (Warinder Juss) for highlighting, too, the cause of Jagtar Singh Johal; my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Tim Roca) for setting out the impact of detention on families; the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Bobby Dean) for talking about detained people and Alaa Abd el-Fattah; and the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for setting out the Opposition's determination on the release of Jimmy Lai.

Jimmy Lai, Jagtar Singh Johal and others have all suffered grievous injustice against their human rights. That matters because it could be any one of us; it could be our mums, our dads, our sons or our daughters. It matters for democracy and for freedom of the press. I am really heartened by the Minister's remarks. I am also heartened that, when I raised Jimmy Lai's case with the Foreign Secretary, he referred to a "massive" international coalition to tackle it, and that the Chancellor raised it when she visited China. I will continue to fight for the freedom of my constituent, Jimmy Lai, in order to honour his family's campaigning work and his own human rights.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the detention of Jimmy Lai and other political prisoners internationally.

5.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 18 June 2025

BUSINESS AND TRADE

UK-US Economic Prosperity Deal

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): On 8 May 2025, the Prime Minister and the President concluded a landmark economic deal between the United Kingdom and the United States. The deal was defined in the general terms for the economic prosperity deal. Both countries agreed to begin negotiations on the EPD immediately, to develop and formalise the proposals in the general terms. The Government remain relentlessly focused on securing the best outcomes for UK industry, and ensuring that businesses up and down the country can feel the benefits of the deal as soon as possible.

On 16 June, the Prime Minister and the President agreed further progress towards that goal.

As outlined in paragraph 1(c)(i) of the general terms, the US will create a 100,000-unit quota for all UK car exports to the US, reducing US tariffs from 27.5% to 10%. This will be administered on a quarterly basis. This has been signed by the President through Executive order, and we expect that these arrangements will come into force by the end of the month. This 10% tariff will also apply to UK part exports attendant to finished passenger cars that UK manufacturers export to the US.

The UK will implement its commitments in paragraph 1(b) of the general terms relating to beef. We will execute the legislative process to create a preferential duty-free quota for US beef of 13,000 metric tonnes (mt) per calendar year. Alongside this, the UK will remove the 20% tariff on US beef imports under the existing World Trade Organisation quota shared between the US and Canada of 1,000 mt per year. The UK will lay legislation in Parliament to bring the quota into effect. Under paragraph 1(b) of the general terms, the United States confirmed its commitment to reallocate to the United Kingdom 13,000 mt of its existing “other countries” tariff rate quota for beef at most favoured nation rates. That re-allocation will take place as quickly as possible and at the latest by 1 January 2026. As confirmed in the general terms, the United Kingdom and the United States affirm that imported food and agricultural goods must comply with the importing country’s sanitary and phytosanitary standards and other mutually agreed standards. Paragraph 2(a) of the general terms outlines how the UK and the US will seek to strengthen bilateral agricultural trade.

The UK will also execute the legislative process to create a preferential duty-free quota for US ethanol of 1.4 billion litres per year. The UK will lay legislation in Parliament to bring the quota into effect.

The US and UK will continue to work together at pace to implement paragraph 1(a) of the general terms, covering other tariffs. The US and the UK will continue to work together to conclude this negotiation and implement reductions as soon as possible. Each country intends to continue to improve market access under the EPD.

The US and the UK will take forward the remaining provisions contained in paragraph 1(c) of the general terms. The UK and US are conducting rapid discussions to create a quota at most favoured nation rates for the export of steel, aluminium and certain derivative products from the UK to the US, and intend to finalise implementation as soon as possible.

The US commits to reducing tariffs on imports of aerospace goods from the UK from current levels back to MFN rates. This has been signed by the President through Executive order, and we expect these arrangements to come into force by the end of the month.

Both countries remain focused on securing significantly preferential outcomes for the export of pharmaceutical products from the UK to the US and other sectors that may be subject to section 232 investigations or other tariff measures.

[HCWS709]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Radio Teleswitch Service Switch-off

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Miatta Fahnbulleh): Today I can confirm that my Department has stepped in to ensure that there will be a managed and more controlled start of the radio teleswitch service phase-out from 30 June. People with an RTS meter will not face any unexpected disruption to their heating or hot water at the end of the month.

The radio teleswitch service uses radio signals to switch older electricity meters between different tariffs such as peak and off-peak, and can also be used to turn heating and hot water systems on and off at specific times of the day.

The technology behind RTS is reliant on infrastructure that was introduced in the 1980s that is due to be switched off as it is reaching the end of its operational life. The phased approach to switch-off was agreed with relevant industry parties on behalf of energy suppliers.

For years the pace of RTS replacements by industry has been too slow—leaving 314,935 RTS meters still in premises as of 30 May 2025.

My Department has worked to ensure that industry will pursue a more controlled approach to the phase-out, beginning with a very small number of homes and businesses in carefully targeted local areas. During this process, the Government and Ofgem will closely monitor supplier that readiness to ensure the process is smooth and vulnerable consumers are identified and protected.

These steps will help to ensure that suppliers are ready to respond quickly in case of any issues and that working families and the elderly are protected throughout the phase-out process.

The Government are working closely with the industry and Ofgem to ensure this next period is planned effectively and that consumers, particularly those who are vulnerable, are protected. The Government are clear that suppliers must fulfil all their legal obligations to their customers, and will work with Ofgem to hold suppliers to account.

I will continue to meet Ofgem and Energy UK on a fortnightly basis to review how the gradual and targeted phase-out is progressing, with a particular focus on Scotland—where over 100,000 RTS meters are installed—as well as remote and rural areas, to ensure that all efforts are made to reach these households.

To provide additional protection to consumers, Ofgem has recently consulted on plans to introduce new RTS-specific licence conditions for energy suppliers. These will include a provision that suppliers must take all reasonable steps to provide a tariff that leaves their consumers “no worse off” than under their existing arrangement as a result of an RTS meter replacement. Ofgem will publish its response to the consultation shortly.

Suppliers will continue contacting consumers to book replacement appointments and consumers are urged to respond as soon as possible. In most cases, this will involve replacing the RTS meter with a smart meter—which can work in the same way as RTS meters, with automatic peak and off-peak rates, and the ability to turn heating and hot water systems on and off—ensuring minimal disruption to households.

In advance of any phase-out activity in their area, households and businesses will be contacted by their energy supplier to inform them well ahead of time if their meters will be affected.

The Government have also made it clear to industry that suppliers must fulfil all their obligations to consumers and drive up the rate of RTS meter replacements. In recent months, suppliers have taken various steps to speed up their replacement rates, and this must continue. The Department continues to impress upon suppliers the importance of resourcing themselves effectively to ensure that they can reach all their RTS consumers in good time, including those in rural areas.

Although the RTS and the work to replace it is industry-owned and led, this Government are doing everything we can to ensure that all consumers, particularly those who are vulnerable, are protected from any negative impacts.

[HCWS711]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Windrush Commissioner

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Malhotra): I am delighted to announce that the Rev. Clive Foster MBE is to be our new and first Windrush commissioner.

This appointment delivers on a manifesto commitment and follows on from the Home Secretary’s statement to the House in October last year. It is a pivotal step in resetting the Government’s response to the Home Office Windrush scandal and delivering the change that the victims of this scandal want and deserve to see.

As Windrush commissioner, he will play a crucial role, providing independent oversight of the Government’s ongoing commitment to address the impact of the Home Office Windrush scandal and ensure that the voices of those affected remain at the heart of efforts to

deliver justice. The commissioner will engage with victims, communities and stakeholder organisations, and provide advice directly to Ministers, to help ensure that lasting, tangible change is delivered and that the lessons of the past are truly learned. He will also work alongside the Windrush unit, which was re-established last year, to oversee the Department’s response to the scandal and embed permanent cultural change.

The Rev. Clive Foster is a hugely experienced and capable individual, and well placed to represent the interests of the Windrush communities. With personal connections to the Windrush generation through his parents, who migrated from Jamaica, he brings both lived experience and professional expertise to the role. He is the founder of Nottingham Windrush Support Forum, vice-chair of the Windrush National Organisation and a senior pastor at the Pilgrim Church in Nottingham—demonstrating valuable experience in community leadership and social justice.

We look forward to working closely with the Rev. Clive Foster as we continue our vital work to re-build trust and ensure that dignity is restored and justice delivered to Windrush generations, as is rightfully deserved; that those who have suffered receive the status and compensation they deserve; and that an injustice such as this can never happen again.

[HCWS710]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

National Housing Bank and National Housing Delivery Fund

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): I am today updating the House on further steps the Government are taking to deliver our ambitious plan for change milestone of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in this Parliament.

National Housing Bank

To accelerate house building across England, we intend to establish a new, permanent national housing bank to act as the Government’s investment arm.

Established as a public financial institution, and operating as a subsidiary of Homes England, the new bank will deliver a long-term financial return for the Government, drawing on the approach taken to the national wealth fund. The bank will deploy finance in line with the Treasury’s financial transaction control framework, which will ensure long-term value for money.

By giving Homes England greater autonomy and freedom to flexibly deploy loans, equity and guarantees, the new bank will support additional housing development and reinforce our ongoing efforts to reform the housing market.

Today’s announcement sets out an initial allocation of £16 billion of new financial capacity for the bank—comprising £10.5 billion of investment capital and £5.5 billion of contingent liability capacity that can be used to deploy housing guarantees. The £10.5 billion

investment capital package includes £2.5 billion of low-interest loans for social and affordable housing providers to further boost their capacity to invest in new developments.

The bank will offer a broad range of products, including direct lending to SMEs to help them to grow, equity investments to support new platforms that can bring new capital into housing, and guarantees to leverage private investment into complex development projects.

The bank will build on Homes England's impressive track record of investment. Since October 2016, the agency has deployed over £9.6 billion of capital through existing investment programmes, working alongside delivery partners to attract an estimated £48 billion of private sector investment into the vehicles it supports. This investment will deliver or unlock over 600,000 homes.

The detailed investment strategy for the bank—which will form a key part of Homes England's overall strategy – will be developed in the coming months and agreed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and HM Treasury. Subject to the development of that investment strategy, our current estimates are that, over the lifetime of the initial £16 billion investment allocation, the bank will support the delivery of over 500,000 homes in all parts of the country and of all different tenures, create hundreds of thousands of job opportunities in the construction sector, and leverage in an additional £53 billion of additional private investment.

The national housing bank will work closely with mayors and local leaders to develop integrated packages of financial support to deliver on the housing and regeneration priorities of local areas, alongside wider land and grant funding. Following this announcement, MHCLG and Homes England will engage mayoral strategic authorities to agree an approach that works best for the needs of each place.

MHCLG will work with the Mayor of London to establish a City Hall developer investment fund—supporting London's ambition to build over 80,000 homes per year,

and support housing regeneration around London Euston. We will also extend the successful Greater Manchester housing investment fund, which has supported over 10,000 homes since 2015.

The creation of the national housing bank will not change the delivery of Homes England's existing investment programmes or impact arrangements for customers with help to buy loans provided by Homes England.

I must make clear that Homes England is not currently designated as a public financial institution. However, the Government will designate a subsidiary of Homes England as a public financial institution once established in line with the Government's financial transaction control framework. MHCLG, HM Treasury and Homes England will work together to agree the changes to Homes England that are needed prior to establishing the bank.

The name “national housing bank” is provisional and will undergo all normal regulatory approvals before the bank is established.

New capital grant funding for investment in infrastructure and land

In many cases, Government grant funding is critical to making large-scale, complex and transformational housing regeneration and infrastructure projects viable. That is why, alongside the intention to establish the national housing bank, we are announcing £5 billion of new capital grant funding for infrastructure and land.

This additional grant funding will be administered by a new, single national housing delivery fund that will complement investment from the national housing bank. This fund will be fully operational from 1 April 2026.

MHCLG and Homes England will work with mayors and local partners to understand priorities for this investment and will set out further detail on funding later this year.

[HCWS712]

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 18 June 2025

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
PRIME MINISTER	364	WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—continued	
Engagements	364	Educational Outcomes for Boys	357
WOMEN AND EQUALITIES	355	Endometriosis	359
Banning Conversion Practices	355	Topical Questions	363
Digital Exclusion	358	Violence against Women and Girls	361
		Welfare Reforms: Impact on Disabled People	361

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 18 June 2025

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS AND TRADE	11WS	HOME DEPARTMENT	13WS
UK-US Economic Prosperity Deal	11WS	Windrush Commissioner	13WS
ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	12WS	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND	
Radio Teleswitch Service Switch-off	12WS	LOCAL GOVERNMENT	14WS
		National Housing Bank and National Housing	
		DeliveryFund	14WS

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CONTENTS

Wednesday 18 June 2025

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 355] [see index inside back page]

Minister for Women and Equalities
Prime Minister

HS2 Reset [Col. 377]

Statement—(Heidi Alexander)

Point of Order [Col. 396]

Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment [Col. 396]

Bill presented, and read the First time

Right to Manage and Leasehold [Col. 397]

Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Rachel Blake)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time

Crime and Policing Bill [Col. 400]

As amended, further considered; read the Third time and passed

Petition [Col. 542]

Post-industrial Towns [Col. 544]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Future of the Gas Grid [Col. 85WH]

Marriage between First Cousins [Col. 110WH]

Businesses in Rural Areas [Col. 118WH]

Asbestos Removal: Non-domestic Buildings [Col. 146WH]

Political Prisoners [Col. 154WH]

General debates

Written Statements [Col. 11WS]
