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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Thursday 3 July 2025

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Heritage Sector: Impact of Spending Review

1. **Pam Cox** (Colchester) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the Spending Review 2025 on the heritage sector. [904961]

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): I want to pay tribute to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the way she conducted the spending review. In the words of Diana Ross, she reached out and touched our Department with £8.2 billion, meaning we can make this world a better place. For the heritage sector, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is already investing an additional £20 million this year through the heritage at risk and heritage revival funds.

Pam Cox: Last month, I was pleased to host a true heritage champion, Dame Mary Beard, in Colchester. She came to visit an incredible sporting heritage site: Britain's only known Roman chariot racing track, the Colchester Roman Circus. She, like me, thinks that we should make much more of the site and that we are missing a national trick if we do not. Does the Minister agree that any new housing development adjacent to the site must make the most of this national heritage value, and will he visit the site, which surely combines both elements of his brief—actually, all the elements: sport, culture and media—in the most spectacular fashion?

Mr Speaker: Ben Hur.

Chris Bryant: Did you say Ben Hur, Mr Speaker? I do not think we are going to enact Ben Hur.

Mr Speaker: We could ride two chariots at once.

Chris Bryant: It is not rugby league, Mr Speaker.

As my hon. Friend knows, I fully support the project, which I know she has been engaged in since before she was an MP right through until now. I am delighted that she has Mary Beard involved and I am sure that by the end of this, she will be able to pronounce “Veni, vidi, vici.”

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): The Secretary of State and I are lucky enough to represent Greater Manchester constituencies, in a part of the country that played a pivotal role in our industrial heritage. Now, although Wigan is lovely, it is not Hazel Grove, so she will not have the junction of the Macclesfield and Peak Forest canal, she will not have our wonderful Marple aqueduct and she will not have one of the longest lock flights in the country. What support will the Minister give to communities like mine that are keen to see our area have world heritage site status so that these heritage assets get the support, funding and protection that they deserve?

Chris Bryant: Well, I have just been told that I am on the side of Wigan. [Laughter.] But there is a more serious point here, which is that the UK has 35 UNESCO world heritage sites. We are one of the two biggest contributors in the world to UNESCO and passionate supporters of it. There is a slight danger that if we have too many and we add too many to the list, people will start trying to take others off us, so we have to manage it carefully. None the less, the hon. Lady makes a good point about the historic sites in many of our constituencies that we need to preserve, not least as part of our tourism offer for international visitors.

Children's Access to Theatre

2. **James Asser** (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support children's access to theatre. [904963]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): Arts and culture were erased from both our classrooms and our communities for 14 years, and we are wasting no time in fixing that. I am really pleased that in February we were able to announce the £270 million arts everywhere fund, which will help a whole generation of young people to access theatre and the arts that they deserve, as part of their richer, larger lives.

James Asser: I recently visited Keir Hardie primary school in Canning Town, which has been involved in a scheme run by Disney that ended up with 42 of the children performing in “The Jungle Book” in the west end. The children are now absolutely enthused by the idea of performance and theatre, and the teachers tell me that their concentration is better, their confidence is better and they are showing benefits in their academic work. Does the Secretary of State agree that as well as the benefits of access to theatre, there are clearly academic benefits too? We need to see more opportunities like this, particularly in constituencies like mine, where circumstances often mean that children do not get access to this kind of thing.

Lisa Nandy: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and throw the Government's full weight behind the work he is doing to support this area? I have seen it for myself at Shakespeare North in Knowsley, where young people are developing communication and oracy skills that they would not otherwise have had, through the amazing work that those institutions do. That is why this Government are determined to turn around the appalling legacy that we inherited from the last Government.

We will shortly publish the interim report of our national youth strategy. I was appalled to find that only one in five young people in the last year has been able to access the arts in this country. We are determined that will change.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Secretary of State is getting a liking for visiting Northern Ireland. With that in mind, what discussions has she had with her counterparts in Northern Ireland on the importance of further engagement between local theatres and schools across Northern Ireland—the very thing the hon. Member for West Ham and Beckton (James Asser) mentioned—to ensure that young children can access drama in educational settings?

Lisa Nandy: We are very aware of the importance of the arts in Northern Ireland, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism has had discussions directly with our counterparts. It is a devolved matter, but it is the clear view of this Government that arts and culture belong to everybody. We are working closely with all nations and regions across the UK to make sure that wherever people grow up and whatever their background, there is no barrier to them being able to access the arts, which are an essential part of a richer, larger life.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): As we came into the Chamber today, we heard the tragic news of the passing of Diogo Jota, the Liverpool footballer, at the age of 28. I want to put on the record our condolences to his friends and family, and to Liverpool fans across the world.

These are the first DCMS orals since the spending review, which made real-term cuts to DCMS revenue and capital budgets. For months, we have been warning the Secretary of State not to let the Chancellor take money away from the creative industries, but it is quite clear that the Secretary of State and her Ministers failed to stand up for this key sector. She talks about the legacy of theatre for children, but of course, to have that, we need a thriving theatre sector. The Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre said that although the Government talk a good game on backing our creative industries, the figures tell a different story. They are right, aren't they? The Secretary of State and the Minister failed to stand up for our world-leading theatres and creative industries, didn't they?

Lisa Nandy: That is some brass neck from the Opposition given the appalling state of what we inherited—not only years of neglect of theatre in particular, but also the lack of investment in the infrastructure and the buildings, which left us with a situation where our great national institutions were struggling just to stay open. Across the country and in so many communities, the local theatre, which provided the access to the richer, larger life that we have been discussing, was allowed to close. The last Government showed a violent indifference to theatre and the arts in general. We have more than doubled investment into the creative industries and made them one of our eight priorities for growth. I am proud to be working with theatres, big and small, across the country to usher in a new golden era in which they can flourish.

Live Music: Creative Industries Sector Plan

3. **Mr James Frith** (Bury North) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to ensure the creative industries sector plan supports the growth of live music. [904965]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): May I take a moment to echo the shadow Minister's comments about Diogo Jota? We received the heartbreaking news before we came into the Chamber that he tragically lost his life at just 28 years of age. The whole House and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker) in particular will be heartbroken by this news, and I want to send our sympathies to his friends and family on behalf of the whole House.

The whole House should be proud of the creative industries sector plan. We worked on it with the creative industries as a whole and with Members across the House. I am really pleased that we have a transformative music growth package worth up to £30 million in that sector plan that more than doubles annual funding.

Mr Frith: The Secretary of State will know that Oasis kicks off their world tour this week, and I am proud that their first English gig is in the borough of Bury—a brilliant moment for Manchester's world-class live music scene. Hosting the five sold-out shows with 72,000 fans a night brings the band 50 million quid, but it brings serious local pressure on licensing, safety, transport and clean-up, yet Bury receives no funding for those additional costs. The as yet unconfirmed suggested £25,000 community fund barely scratches the surface. While we are proud to host, should the legacy of such a global event really just be the prep and clear-up costs? Will the Secretary of State and her Department ensure that communities like mine see a fairer share of the benefit and not just the burden of hosting major cultural events?

Lisa Nandy: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is absolutely fitting that Oasis are returning to Greater Manchester, and Bury is a very fitting venue, not least because my hon. Friend has long championed live music and also indulged—or should I say inflicted?—live music on many of us for years. He will know that this Government are keen to ensure that the communities feel the benefit. In particular, the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism has been working hard with industry to introduce a levy on arena and stadium tickets to ensure that we support small venues and help more artists tour nationally. The arts and music in particular are an ecosystem, which we are determined to rebuild after 14 years of neglect.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I very much support the creative industries sector plan. I think it will do a lot of good in ensuring that live music is promoted, and I hope to see some of the trickle-down effect that the Secretary of State talks about, but the creative industries sector plan also talks about establishing a copyright regime that values and protects human creativity. Can she say when we might see the promised report, when the working groups might be set up, and who will be asked to serve on them?

Lisa Nandy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question, because I know this has caused considerable concern to many people in this House and the other place. We are absolutely committed to bringing forward legislative change that provides certainty and clarity both for AI and tech companies and for the creative industries, and to ensuring that transparency and remuneration are at the heart of that legislation. As he rightly says, the creative industries are central to the future of our economy and must be protected. The Government recognise that as well. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and I will bring forward the roundtables and working groups before the summer recess.

Major Sporting Events

4. **Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to support the delivery of major sporting events. [904966]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): We are absolutely committed to securing and delivering the biggest and best major sporting events, building on the UK's global reputation. I was delighted to announce recently over £500 million to support the delivery of world-class events, with an additional £400 million going to grassroots facilities across the UK, so that people across the country who are inspired by the incredible sporting events and amazing moments we are bringing to our towns, villages and cities can get involved.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Mr Speaker, I would like to thank you personally for hosting the women's rugby world cup reception in Speaker's House yesterday evening. It was a magnificent event. I took part in the competition in 1998—not this year, dash it all! With England hosting the women's rugby world cup it is vital and women and girls see the legacy of those who have gone before them and championed their country. Sport is so important to the future of women and girls. Will my right hon. Friend join me in committing to securing a legacy for women and girls who will be able to see rugby being played across England and the home nations?

My last point, if you will indulge me, Mr Speaker, is that the women's Euros kick off this week, and even though it is the wrong-shaped ball, I am excited to see the Lionesses and the Welsh football team in the competition. It is so important that we celebrate women in sport.

Lisa Nandy: My hon. Friend is an incredible champion for sports in general and rugby in particular—

Mr Speaker: Rugby union.

Lisa Nandy: I know it is the wrong sort of rugby as far as you are concerned, Mr Speaker. We are really proud of this incredible achievement for the UK. It is fitting that my hon. Friend asks this question with exactly 50 days to go until the women's rugby world cup kicks off. We want to make it the biggest ever. So far, 275,000 tickets have been sold.

Recently the Prime Minister and I were at St George's Park watching the Lionesses train. It was quite a challenge to stop the Prime Minister getting involved, although I am not sure he would have come off well, given the

level of skill on the pitch. What is so inspiring to the whole nation, whether they are fans of a particular sport or not, is the work the Lionesses have done to ensure that an entire generation of girls know that they belong on the pitch every bit as much as anyone else. We are determined to ensure that this women's rugby world cup does exactly the same for rugby.

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

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): I 100% back the words of the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) and send all our best wishes to the Lionesses as they start their competition shortly.

The Secretary of State will know that Royal Ascot last week attracted a viewing population of tens of millions, and "Glorious Goodwood" is about to do the same. Horseracing supports about 85,000 jobs across the UK and generates about £4 billion a year for the UK economy, but the Secretary of State will know that it faces a looming and imminent crisis. When will the Government really start to back British horseracing?

Lisa Nandy: Let me reassure the hon. Member on this point: we understand not just the joy that horseracing brings to millions of people in the UK and across the world but the huge economic benefits that it produces. We are absolutely determined to back British horseracing to the hilt. The Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley South (Stephanie Peacock), has had several meetings and discussions with industry, and we will continue to ensure we are present, walking alongside them in order to support them.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister—a former rugby league player.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): The Government are on the ropes after a grand slam of unforced errors. Since we last met, we have seen the Secretary of State placed under investigation after appointing a Labour crony to head the football regulator, the Chancellor slash the DCMS budget and the DCMS Government Whip resign in protest. Own goal, knock on, double fault—whatever our choice of sporting analogy, it is clear that they have royally ballsed it up.

With Labour's latest U-turn creating a fiscal black hole set to be £20 billion, what assurances can the Secretary of State give today that her Government will not go ahead with their planned tax raid on bingo halls, racecourses and sports betting, which will immensely damage sponsorship of major sporting events, fuel the black market and cost thousands of jobs across the country?

Lisa Nandy: I apologise; I could not make head nor tail of that, but this Government are absolutely determined to support bingo. It is something that I immensely enjoy—it is very popular in my home town—and will continue to do so.

British Musical Acts: International Promotion

5. **Mr Richard Holden** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): What steps she has taken to promote British musical acts internationally. [904967]

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): The new music growth package will invest up to £30 million to help emerging British artists access international markets with support for touring, showcasing and export promotion.

Mr Holden: I welcome anything the Government bring forward to support our new bands and musicians across the country, but the big thing that so many musicians are asking for is that we get touring rights sorted out with our European counterparts. Could the Minister update the House on what progress there has been, if any, and how we can go further to get our bands out there and their bands over here?

Chris Bryant: If only the right hon. Gentleman had been a Minister in the previous Government, when they failed to take the deal that was on offer from the European Union. I am absolutely determined to get this sorted. We got something—[*Interruption.*] If he wants to start promoting creative industries abroad, he might start thinking about film—for instance, “Chicken Run”. We want to make sure that British acts can prosper across the whole of Europe, and I am talking not just about the big names like Dua Lipa; I am also talking about young acts like Otto Aday, who performed at the Rhondda Arts Festival on Saturday and was amazing, and Caitlin Lavagna, whose song “Run a Mile” perhaps would suit the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): May I associate my party with the words said about Diogo Jota? It is a tragic loss to the world of football.

A few weeks ago, we stood in this place and talked about the UK-EU reset deal. My party welcomed the moderate progress, but we think the Government should go further, particularly on touring artists. The Minister asked us to talk about this with our European liberal colleagues. We have started those discussions. Can he update us on his discussions and reassure us that this is on the agenda for the next review? If he does not give us any good news soon on Europe, will he admit that we are close to the final countdown?

Chris Bryant: I had a horrible fear how that question was going to end. It is really important that we win this battle. This has to be a campaign that we wage across all of Europe—we need to get every single capital city in Europe on our side to make sure that, by the time we get to the next EU-UK summit, we can get this over the line. British acts are desperately wanted, apart from anything else, in lots of different venues and arts festivals across the whole of Europe. I have spoken to the commissioner who is in charge of this. I have also spoken to four of my European counterparts. My intention is to get round every single one of them so that we can get this over the line.

Women's Football: Financial Viability

6. **James MacCleary (Lewes) (LD):** What steps her Department is taking to support the financial viability of women's football. [904968]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): I established the women's football taskforce in 2024 in response to the Karen Carney review of women's football. The taskforce aims to achieve a financially sustainable women's football pyramid, raising minimum standards for players, fans and everyone involved in the game. As the Euros begin, I know the whole House will join me in wishing the Lionesses, and of course Wales, the very best of luck.

James MacCleary: I thank the Minister for her response; I know she is aware of some of the financial challenges that my local club in Lewes faces. With England about to start the defence of their European title in Switzerland against France on Saturday, does she share my concern that, despite the phenomenal rise in popularity of the women's game, domestic prize money for the women's FA cup still falls woefully short of that for the men's? It is frankly embarrassing that in 2025 we still tolerate that glaring inequality. Will she support my call for the Football Association and the Premier League to equalise the women's FA cup prize fund, so that women footballers are rewarded equally for the same achievement as their male counterparts?

Stephanie Peacock: I know that the hon. Gentleman is a huge supporter and champion of women's football, and I look forward to visiting his constituency in September. I have heard the calls from the Liberal Democrat Benches and across the House on the FA cup prize money. The FA has taken steps to increase the total fund for the women's FA cup and we are paying attention to what happens next.

Access to Live Events

7. **Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab):** What steps she is taking to help ensure that disabled people have equal access to live events. [904969]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): It is crucial that access to live events is open to disabled people. We are supporting Arts Council England and its partners to develop the All In scheme, which should significantly improve accessibility in that area. Last summer I was at the Paralympics, where I was horrified to hear from young people with disabilities about their lack of access to sport in particular. This Government are taking every action and using every lever at our disposal to change that.

Anna Dixon: In my Shipley constituency, the highly valued Bingley arts centre has made great strides in improving accessibility for disabled people. However, with 78% of arts centres behind schedule on essential building maintenance, it is clear that more investment is needed. I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement of the All In fund; can she assure me that local theatres such as Bingley arts centre will benefit from that investment to help them continue to make the arts inclusive?

Lisa Nandy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this matter, and I sincerely thank her for bringing it to the House; it is not something we talk about enough. The creative industries sector plan contained £150 million-worth of funding for the creative places growth fund. Much of that funding is being devolved to

local areas, and I will ensure that my colleagues and I work closely with my hon. Friend and with local leaders, particularly mayors of combined authorities, to ensure that as we roll out that funding, it is accessible to everybody.

Charities: National Insurance Contributions

8. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to employer national insurance contributions on charities. [904970]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): The Government highly value the charity sector and its positive contribution. However, we have had to take a number of difficult decisions on tax, welfare and spending to fix the public finances, fund public services and restore economic stability.

Sir Desmond Swayne: The National Council for Voluntary Organisations puts the cost at £1.4 billion. That is right, isn't it?

Stephanie Peacock: I reiterate that we really value the charity sector, but we have had to make some very difficult decisions.

Sports Governing Bodies: Supreme Court Judgment

9. **Jonathan Hinder** (Pendle and Clitheroe) (Lab): What discussions she has had with sports governing bodies on ensuring that they are compliant with the Supreme Court judgment in the case of *For Women Scotland v. The Scottish Ministers*. [904973]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): We have discussed the ruling with Sport England and UK Sport. It obviously has profound implications for sport as a whole, and those organisations are currently considering the implications for their own guidance. We are keen to support them in that, but my hon. Friend will know that national governing bodies set their own policies for who can participate in domestic competition.

Jonathan Hinder: More than two months after the Supreme Court clarified the law, there remains a long list of sporting bodies that are denying fairness to women and girls, including Parkrun and, remarkably, sports such as weightlifting and wrestling—the mind boggles. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is no need to wait for further guidance and that these bodies should take the advice of the Prime Minister and get on with it?

Lisa Nandy: As I said to my hon. Friend a moment ago, we have been working closely with sporting bodies to support them as they implement the recent judgment by the Supreme Court. As a Government, we have always been clear that, when it comes to women's sport, biology matters and our sporting bodies need to come up with policies that protect fairness and safety, while rightly ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate in sport in some capacity.

Access to Sport for Young People: Dormant Assets Funding

10. **Jessica Toale** (Bournemouth West) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of dormant assets funding on access to sport for young people in Bournemouth. [904975]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): The Government recently published their first ever dormant assets strategy, setting out how £440 million will be distributed in England. Some £132.5 million will increase disadvantaged young people's access to enrichment opportunities in the arts, culture, sport and wider youth services.

Jessica Toale: The Henry Brown centre in West Howe, in my Bournemouth West constituency, runs a range of activities for the community, including the Changes Are Made boxing club, which provides positive sport activities for local young people and aims to raise awareness about the dangers of knife crime. Like many community centres and clubs, it would like to expand but struggles to find the funds to do so. Will the Minister tell me how CAM and the Henry Brown centre can access the dormant asset funds to expand the amazing work that they are doing in the local area?

Stephanie Peacock: The Government will work with the National Lottery Community Fund to decide on the specific programmes, and we will outline how that funding will be allocated shortly. I pay tribute to the organisations in my hon. Friend's constituency for their work and activities, and I would happily meet her to discuss the issue further.

Creative Industries Sector Plan

11. **Lewis Atkinson** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): What recent progress her Department has made on delivering the creative industries sector plan. [904978]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): The UK is a creative superpower and we are determined to take off the brakes that have been on for far too long. Our creative industries sector plan is the start of a 10-year journey that will firmly establish the UK as the leader in this, and we are working with creative businesses, big and small, in every part of the country to implement and build on this amazing ambition.

Lewis Atkinson: Thanks to a Labour council, mayor and Government working together, diggers are now in the ground at the Crown Works site in my constituency, preparing it for transformation into film studios. The selection of a private sector partner is now starting, so can the Secretary of State say how the Government's industrial strategy for the creative industries, which specifically mentions this project, will ensure that the scheme is delivered, while also supporting the wider screen industry cluster in north-east England?

Lisa Nandy: Anyone who has ever visited Sunderland will know why the film industry is based there and why it is thriving there. We are determined to support that. We are working with Sunderland city council and the North East mayoral combined authority. They are confident

that a private investor will be secured to support Crown Works film studios. I thank my hon. Friend for the incredible work that he is doing to support the project, bring great jobs and growth to north-east England, and help our amazing film industry thrive.

Rebecca Smith (South West Devon) (Con): Last week, I spent time at the Box museum in Plymouth, before heading to Plympton in my constituency for the unveiling of a blue plaque to honour the life of Sir Charles Lock Eastlake, who was the first director of the National Gallery and chair of the commission to procure art for the new Palace of Westminster. One question that was raised was about tax incentives for philanthropic giving to museums and art galleries. I note the tax relief mentioned in the creative industries sector plan, so will the Secretary of State tell me if that will address the question raised with me by the sector last week?

Lisa Nandy: We are working on a plan to bring forward more philanthropy in the UK, as well as social impact investing. We think there is enormous untapped potential, and we are looking at all aspects of that. We will bring more detail to the House shortly.

Topical Questions

T1. [904981] **Alison Hume** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): This Government are betting big on the creative industries. We have put them at the heart of our industrial strategy, with a sector plan backed by £380 million of investment that will boost regional growth, stimulate private investment and create thousands more high-quality jobs. Talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not, and this Government have wasted no time in turning that around.

Alison Hume: Scarborough Athletic football club is proudly 100% fan owned. Recently, the home ground that it rents from North Yorkshire council was declared unfit to play on due to botched astroturf installation. The club faces significant financial losses now that they need to play matches at another ground. Will the Minister meet me to discuss what support is available to secure the future of this beloved club, which is at the heart of our community?

Lisa Nandy: I thank my hon. Friend for her work championing such an amazing local club, and we are pleased to support her in that endeavour. I encourage her to explore the support available via the premier league stadium fund delivered by the Football Foundation. The Government are pleased to be supporting grassroots clubs with £98 million of funding for the multi-sport grassroots facilities programme through the next financial year, which will build new facilities and upgrade facilities. If she wants to get in touch with me directly, we will work together to ensure that that benefits Scarborough, like every other part of the country.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Stuart Andrew (Daventry) (Con): I associate myself with the tributes to Diogo Jota. I understand that his brother was also killed in the accident, and my heart goes out to their family.

Since the Secretary of State's statement on Glastonbury on Monday, it has come to light that the act in question had spouted equally vile rhetoric at another concert just a few weeks ago. Given that the BBC is seemingly able to pull live broadcasts when things go wrong at football matches, for example, it is extraordinary that it did not happen on that occasion. Will the Secretary of State update the House on the discussions she has had with the BBC? Why did the same thing not happen on this occasion? What due diligence did it carry out about the acts that were performing? Given that we are still waiting for a response on the previous Hamas documentary, is she satisfied with the conversations she has had and the urgency with which the organisation is acting?

Lisa Nandy: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising that matter, and I agree with him. The answer is that I am not satisfied with the response I have had. I can update the House, as I promised to do on Monday, that I have received a reply to the very many questions raised by colleagues from all parts of the House, and I am not satisfied with it. I have gone back to the BBC leadership to ask for further information, in particular—as the right hon. Gentleman mentioned—about the failure to pull the live feed, the due diligence that was done prior to deciding to screen that act and the level of senior oversight that took place in the BBC during the Glastonbury weekend. I think that the BBC leadership has heard and will hear the strength of feeling in this House on this issue, and I expect further answers to be forthcoming imminently.

Stuart Andrew: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. I have to say that I am as disappointed as she is that the BBC has not been able to come back with even basic facts. There were hundreds of BBC staff there, and it is not acceptable that it is unable to identify who ultimately had the final decision on whether to broadcast. The chairman needs to inform her, as a matter of urgency, who that was and what action they are going to take. While I absolutely understand the independence of the BBC, just as artists cannot hide behind artistic expression for vile commentary, the BBC cannot hide behind independence from accountability. I hope the Secretary of State knows that she has the full support of the Opposition as she pushes it for greater clarity.

Lisa Nandy: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that and for making the very important distinction between independence and accountability. We heard in this House, and I was able to bring to the House, the absolutely shocking stories of the impact that this issue has had on the Jewish community in this country. Given the seriousness of what happened, I expect there to be accountability at the highest levels.

T2. [904982] **Mr Richard Quigley** (Isle of Wight West) (Lab): While it could be said that the Conservative party could fit into a children's paddling pool, we in Isle of Wight West take swimming—as well as our issue with ferries—very seriously. *[Laughter.]* I thought hon. Members would like that one. West Wight sports and community centre is an excellent community-run

facility that needs to replace its swimming pool after 50 years. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how it might access grants to do so?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): My hon. Friend is a good champion for his constituency. The Government recognise that sports facilities, including swimming facilities, are incredibly important, and I would be delighted to meet him to discuss it further.

T3. [904984] **Liz Jarvis** (Eastleigh) (LD): My constituency is the home of Hampshire Cricket. Last Thursday, I visited Fair Oak cricket club, which has a fantastic new pavilion and a thriving community of players, coaches and volunteers who are passionate about growing the game. In April 2024, the previous Government announced a £35 million investment in grassroots cricket facilities and widening access to the sport within state schools. Can the Minister confirm when the Government plan to release that funding to ensure that girls and boys in all parts of Eastleigh and across the country have the opportunity to become the next Lauren Bell or Joe Root?

Stephanie Peacock: I look forward to attending the cricket at Edgbaston later today, and I know it is hugely important to communities up and down the country. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Member to discuss her question in more detail.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): Will the Minister join me in praising all the staff past and present, the council's chief officer for leisure and wellbeing, Tom Kittendorf, and the portfolio holder, Councillor Maggie O'Rourke, on the recent 25th anniversary of the Rugby art gallery and museum? I was glad to attend and pay tribute to staff for the huge contribution they make to the three C's: creativity, culture and community. Does my right hon. Friend agree that municipally run institutions such as that are gems shining bright in our towns, and that this Government will do all they can to empower them?

Lisa Nandy: I absolutely share my hon. Friend's commitment to municipal facilities, which are often the only access that people have to amazing sports, art, culture, museums and galleries. Like him, this Government are determined to do everything we can to support them.

T4. [904985] **Olly Glover** (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): I recently visited the Cornermen project in my Oxfordshire constituency. Based at South Moreton boxing club, it provides professional mental health support for men in a sporting environment. Does the Minister agree that sports and leisure can open the door to mental health provision? What more can the Government do to nurture organisations such as the Cornermen?

Lisa Nandy: Recently, I was pleased to host a roundtable with many sports clubs from different sports, including football and rugby league. I was delighted to have Kris Radlinski there from Wigan Warriors—the greatest rugby league club in the history of the game—to talk in particular about the mental health crisis facing young men. It is not lost on us as a Government that sport, arts, and all the sectors we are responsible for often play a major role in helping to support people with what is

becoming a crisis for young people. I am working very closely with my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary to develop those plans further.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): Morecambe football club is in crisis. The current owner is delaying a sale, despite us already having a buyer ready and approved by the English Football League. The staff have only been paid one third of their wages, and the board has been dismissed without proper process. Can the Minister outline how the Government are working to prevent other towns like Morecambe from suffering in this way?

Lisa Nandy: I am really grateful to my hon. Friend. She has not just raised this issue in the House; she has raised it with me and with the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley South (Stephanie Peacock) as well, and we are determined to support her. I have been through this appalling experience with my own club, Wigan Athletic, and we are determined to make sure that nobody has to go through it ever again. The Under-Secretary of State has been working very hard with Members of this House to pass the Football Governance Bill, to ensure that we rectify this situation and prevent it from happening elsewhere, but in the particular case of my hon. Friend's club, I am extremely keen to see a sale as soon as possible.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): The charity sector includes hospices, such as Acorns children's hospice in Walsall. Hospices are being hit by the Government's damaging rise in employer national insurance, which was mentioned in an earlier question. Given that in his opening remarks, the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism praised the Chancellor for his success in securing funding for his Department, will he speak with the Chancellor and urge her to do all she can to reinstate long-term funding for our hospice sector?

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): The hospice sector is not specifically my responsibility, but of course I value hospices. To go back to the earlier point about the state of the finances in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, this is the first Secretary of State who has managed to get £3 billion for investment in capital funding. That is going to be vital for many of our artistic and sporting institutions in this country, and I think she deserves praise.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Apprentices

1. **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What steps the Commission is taking to increase the number of apprentices in the House of Commons. [905002]

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney): Apprenticeships help us to build a more skilled and adaptable workforce. The House of Commons Commission is increasing the number of apprentices by participating in National Apprenticeship Week and attending careers fairs. Additionally, the administration supports the Speaker's Apprenticeship Academy; we are currently recruiting a second cohort to that academy, and we are also recruiting 12 security officer apprentices. Adil Rashid is a Speaker's apprentice in my Administration Committee team. He has a strong work ethic and is a good team player, and I am grateful for his support.

John Lamont: I am grateful to the hon. Member for that answer. Everyone should have the potential to work in Parliament, not just those who live in and around London, so can he confirm how many apprentices have been recruited since the introduction of the UK Parliament's apprenticeship scheme, and in particular how many were recruited from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

Nick Smith: We currently have 32 apprentices, and another 19 will be recruited this year. There have been approximately 90 since 2017. Parliament recruits apprentices under the English apprenticeship scheme. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have their own programmes and funding structures.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

People on Low Incomes in Rural Communities

2. **Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Church of England is taking to support people on low incomes in rural communities. [905003]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Marsha De Cordova): Our most recent figures show that the Church of England was involved in more than 31,000 community projects across the country, including in my hon. Friend's constituency of Harlow. In addition, funding for churches in the lowest income communities is set to increase from £91 million in the past three years to £133.5 million.

Chris Vince: In the local authority of Harlow, 30% of children are living in poverty, according to research by Loughborough University and the End Child Poverty coalition. Poverty also exists in rural areas of my constituency, such as Sheering and Nazeing. Many families turn to their local place of worship for support. Luckily, Harlow has several places of worship of different faiths and denominations offering help. Can my hon. Friend say a little more about what the Church is doing in the area to support families struggling with the cost of living?

Marsha De Cordova: My hon. Friend is a good representative for the people of Harlow. In his constituency, St Mary Magdalene church runs a vibrant Sunday school and mothers' union, with lots of events and activities for all the community. St Stephen's church

runs a parent and toddler group while also supporting local care homes. St Paul's and St Mary's churches partner with the local food bank and run a Bounty club with the Michael Roberts Charitable Trust, offering good, healthy food at a low cost.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): With the closure of many churches in rural communities in England and in Scotland, too, are the commissioners concerned that people living in rural areas, particularly those on low incomes, might not be able to access worship within easy reach of their own communities?

Marsha De Cordova: The right hon. Gentleman asks an important question. The Church values all its rural communities, and that is why we have so many different projects to ensure that places of worship not only exist, but operate as a community hub to ensure that people in those local areas have places to go, whether that is for worship, a local food bank, or a mother and baby group.

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

3. **Louise Jones** (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the potential impact of the £25,000 cap in the listed places of worship grant scheme on levels of church repairs. [905004]

8. **Jayne Kirkham** (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Church plans to take to support listed places of worship with repairs and renovations after the conclusion of the listed places of worship grant scheme. [905009]

10. **Jen Craft** (Thurrock) (Lab): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the potential impact of the £25,000 cap in the listed places of worship grant scheme on levels of church repairs. [905011]

Marsha De Cordova: The Church estimates that around 260 church buildings will be impacted by the changes to the listed places of worship grant scheme. Some 206 of those have multi-year projects already under way that will need to find further funding. I recently met representatives from churches that have been impacted with the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley South (Stephanie Peacock), so that they could share their concerns with her. I hope, following the spending review settlement, that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will clarify the support that churches will get and that will be available to them going forward.

Louise Jones: In North East Derbyshire, we are proud to have many historic, beautiful churches that reflect the many broad traditions within Christian faith in this country. Can my hon. Friend please provide clarity on the future of the listed places of worship scheme so that we can continue to treasure these places for many generations to come?

Marsha De Cordova: As I have highlighted, we value our churches and our listed places of worship, and it is important that the Government hear these calls and provide some clarity and certainty about the future of the scheme. The Church Commissioners have funded

many projects, providing around £9 million of grants for repairs to churches, and church building support officers are also in place to advise on management, how repairs can be carried out and the essential development of these places of worship. I hear my hon. Friend, and I invite her to lobby the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to give us some certainty about the scheme.

Jayne Kirkham: I have been visiting places of worship in my constituency, including St Probus and St Grace church, with the tallest church tower in Cornwall, and St Gerrans church, with its distinctive tower and spire. Both need extensive and expensive works to keep them watertight, so all that good work with food banks, coffee mornings and warm hubs that goes on there can continue to happen. They are both concerned about the new annual cap, as they have costed their schemes, and the potential ending of the listed places of worship grant scheme next year. What alternative support will be available to them and others now that the scheme is reduced and potentially ending? Of course, I will be lobbying DCMS, too.

Marsha De Cordova: I commend the work of the churches in my hon. Friend's constituency. She highlighted St Probus and St Grace church, which was founded in 930 AD. I understand that it is a truly wonderful building and establishment, but it needs a new roof, and the fundraising is under way to try to ensure that it gets the funding. I highlighted earlier the Church Commissioners' building emissions fund. This issue has been raised every time I stand here and respond to questions on behalf of the Church. It is vital that the listed places of worship grant scheme continues and that the Government provide clarity on the future of the scheme, so that all the wonderful listed places of worship in all our constituencies have certainty going forward.

Jen Craft: The changes to the grant scheme, and the uncertainty over its future, present significant challenges for historic churches in need of maintenance, as my hon. Friend has just set out so well. These include the grade I listed St Nicholas church in Ockendon, in my constituency of Thurrock, which, as the warden told me this week, carries a significant burden in repair work due to its age. Can my hon. Friend assist me to understand what support is available for parishes facing these challenges to ensure that they continue to thrive at the heart of communities, as they have done through hundreds of years of history? I will be lobbying DCMS as well.

Marsha De Cordova: As I highlighted, there are other funds, and I will write to my hon. Friend to set out some additional support that might be available. I understand that works at St Nicholas church will cost around £200,000, which is a great deal of money. I am very pleased to hear that she, too, will be lobbying the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for certainty about the listed places of worship grant scheme. I really think I have done my job in calling for that today.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for her answers. Like other Members, I will ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether there will be more money for churches, given that the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism says that funding is now available. Churches are more

than just buildings for people in rural communities; they are hubs for worship and social engagement. Let us be honest about the £25,000 cap: building materials cost maybe 30% to 50% more than they did a year ago, which means that the grant does not go very far. The heritage lottery fund gives some moneys, but what can be done to work with other organisations to ensure that moneys can come from other groups that may be anxious and willing? I have a church in my constituency that got a six-figure sum, which gives the House an idea of what moneys can be gained through co-operation and partnership.

Marsha De Cordova: The hon. Gentleman rightly highlights that there are other ways to acquire funding, such as through the heritage lottery and so forth. I will certainly write to him if there are specific places that he is concerned about. Although the grant scheme is for the Church of England, I am certain that there is other support for churches, and I can certainly put him in touch with the relevant people, if that is helpful.

Community Cohesion

4. **Kevin Bonavia (Stevenage) (Lab):** What steps the Church of England is taking to support community cohesion in its parishes. [905005]

9. **Sarah Smith (Hyndburn) (Lab):** What steps the Church of England is taking to support community cohesion in its parishes. [905010]

Marsha De Cordova: Through the parish system, the Church of England has a presence in every community. Long-term relationships are vital for building trust and understanding in all our communities, and the Church has worked closely with faith organisations, local authorities, the police and so forth—all in aid of building better relations.

Kevin Bonavia: I would like to take this opportunity to commend the contribution of the churches in my constituency, from All Saints in Datchworth, which is currently celebrating 850 years of service, to St Mary's in Aston, where the Rev. Canon Jenny Gray has recently retired. However, another church, St Andrew & St George in the centre of Stevenage, is facing the ongoing problem of theft of copper from its roof—an expensive loss to the church. What can be done to safeguard our churches from such antisocial and criminal behaviour?

Marsha De Cordova: I thank my hon. Friend for asking two really important questions. I congratulate the Rev. Canon Jenny Gray on her retirement. Her exemplary service to the community was recognised by the diocese in 2023, when she was made an honorary canon of the cathedral.

On metal theft, my hon. Friend is absolutely right that it is criminal and antisocial, and it causes real harm. The Church has been doing a lot of work on this since 2013, and I am happy to write to him to set out that work in more detail.

Sarah Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for the work she is doing representing the Church Commissioners. The community of Hyndburn is vibrant and rich in its diversity, and I was proud to see how we responded to the awful riots last summer. What conversations has she

had with the Church Commissioners on how the Church can continue to strengthen its work on integration and work with the Government as they develop a community cohesion strategy following the immigration White Paper?

Marsha De Cordova: I pay tribute to the social cohesion work happening in my hon. Friend's constituency. I would just highlight that bishops and church officials have been in discussion with the Minister for Faith in the other place on community cohesion issues. The Church did write to the Prime Minister following the publication of the White Paper to call for a more holistic integration strategy, and this has also been raised in meetings. I commend all our church and faith organisations that came together during the riots last summer, and demonstrated how we can work collaboratively across all our communities.

James MacCleary (Lewes) (LD): A really positive example of community cohesion in action is the Rewild the Church project, with the Lewes Climate Hub and churches in Lewes joining forces to tackle biodiversity loss and bring people together through their parishes. They are working towards the inspiring goal of rewilding 30% of Church-owned land by 2030. Will the Second Church Estates Commissioner join me in congratulating them on this important work, and support this ambition for the Church of England to lead by example in restoring nature and supporting local communities to come together in doing so?

Marsha De Cordova: I congratulate the hon. Member and those in his constituency on the work taking place on that really important issue.

Christians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

5. **Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab):** What support the Church of England is providing to Christians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. [905006]

Marsha De Cordova: We continue to see the Christian community attacked by Israeli soldiers and settlers, as happened as recently as last week. Anglican aid agencies are providing financial assistance to Church institutions, including the Princess Basma Centre in East Jerusalem, St Luke's hospital in Nablus and the Arab Evangelical Episcopal school in Ramallah. This work is ongoing, and there is a global appeal for support for these aid agencies.

Douglas McAllister: The UK Government have begun to issue visas for critically injured and sick Gazan children in need of specialist expert medical treatment, but only a handful of children have been granted visas and brought to the UK for urgent treatment. What support can the Church provide to not just Christian children, but all children in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in desperate need of medical evacuation?

Marsha De Cordova: I thank my hon. Friend for his important question. There is no safe space for children in Gaza, where we know that over 56,000 people have lost their lives, including more than 17,000 children. The Church has rightly condemned the attacks on hospitals and civilians, but we can certainly do more and the Church must do more. The Church must continue to be a voice for the voiceless, and Gazan children are

the voiceless. I encourage the Government to enable medical evacuations, heed calls for the creation of a Gaza family visa scheme and take concrete steps to ensure Israel allows vital medical aid into Gaza.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The Christian town of Taybeh is the same town as Ephraim in John's gospel where Jesus went before his passion. This town is entering a new passion: there was a violent attack by extremist Israeli settlers on the town on 26 June. There is a continuing pattern of crops being destroyed and outposts being set up, and it is happening all over the west bank. This is outrageous racial cleansing, deliberately designed to prevent a two-state solution and to drive out the people who have tended their crops there for 2,000 years. Will the Church of England call out this outrage every day of the week in an attempt to put some sort of pressure on the Israeli Government?

Marsha De Cordova: I thank the Father of the House for his question. He is absolutely right: the attacks that took place in Taybeh last week were outrageous and should not have been allowed to happen. If we are all going to be the hands and feet of Jesus, we have to speak out when we see such atrocities happen. We must be a voice for the voiceless. I hear him when he says that the Church must speak out every day against what is happening in Gaza, and indeed across the whole occupied territories.

Project Spire

6. **Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con):** What statutory powers the Church plans to use to facilitate Project Spire. [905007]

Marsha De Cordova: I thank the right hon. Member for his question and draw his attention to a written response I gave on 22 April. It is the Church's intention, subject to the approval of the trustees, for the Church Commissioners to make an application to the Charity Commission to authorise an ex gratia payment under section 106 of the Charities Act 2011 on the basis of moral obligation.

Sir Desmond Swayne: A number of Members this morning have lobbied for expenditure to repair their churches, and the hon. Lady has told them to lobby the Government—the Department for Culture, Media and Sport—for that money. At the same time, the Church has already spent £5 million on this project, with the aspiration of taking it to £1 billion, when the Charity Commission has yet to deliver its verdict on whether that is within the charitable objectives allowable. How has that been allowed to happen?

Marsha De Cordova: These are two separate issues. What is going on in relation to funding for Project Spire is totally separate to any other funding—the listed places of worship grant scheme is a separate scheme. The buildings for mission fund that supports our churches is totally separate.

Al-Ahli Hospital

7. **James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab):** What information the Church holds on the operational situation of the Anglican al-Ahli hospital in Gaza. [905008]

Marsha De Cordova: The Israeli attacks on patients and medics at hospitals are abhorrent, as I have said on many occasions. The Church is in close contact with the diocese of Jerusalem, which oversees the al-Ahli hospital in Gaza. The challenges of operating while under attack by Israel, and with the hospital and church buildings having been struck directly on eight separate occasions, mean that the hospital is in chaos. It will soon run out of fuel and medical supplies.

James Asser: I raised the al-Ahli hospital at the end of last year, when it suffered quite a lot of damage. The situation has deteriorated rapidly since then. I understand that the hospital, as my hon. Friend outlined, has suffered further damage, including the loss of its emergency room. Given it is one of the few functioning hospitals left in Gaza, does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital that it stays open? Given it is one of the oldest hospitals, operating for almost 140 years, its loss would be an absolutely damning indictment of the disregard for the medical facilities, and for the health and lives of the Palestinian people.

Marsha De Cordova: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The diocese of Jerusalem has informed us that the hospital continues to provide critical medical services—but only just. Food, fuel and medical supplies are critically low due to Israel preventing aid from getting into Gaza. The Church Commissioners repeat the diocese's urgent calls for a renewed ceasefire, and the establishment of safe and sustained humanitarian corridors. I urge the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to pressure Israel to allow in fuel and vital medical supplies.

Poverty

11. **Emma Lewell** (South Shields) (Lab): What steps the Church of England is taking to help to tackle poverty.
[905012]

Marsha De Cordova: Churches and all our faith communities make a powerful difference in the lives of all our constituents every single day, and Church of England parishes provide more than 31,000 social action projects in church schools and educate millions of children each day. Parish initiatives include food banks, credit unions, warm spaces, school clubs and other forms of family support.

Emma Lewell: For too long, charities, faith groups and churches such as my own, St Bede's, have been supporting people struggling to get by. Does my hon. Friend agree that our child poverty taskforce needs to seriously consider scrapping the awful two-child benefit cap, because relying on charity to lift children out of poverty is simply unsustainable?

Marsha De Cordova: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Everyone has a responsibility to tackle child poverty, and we should all commend and thank the Church for the role it has played in this space. I know that the Bishop of Derby hosted Baroness Sherlock, the child poverty unit and colleagues for a roundtable, where many issues were discussed.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): Churches across the country are doing amazing work tackling poverty, but they could be doing more. Many of my constituents will be surprised that the Church Commissioners have already spent £5 million on Project Spire when it is not within their charitable objectives, and that they plan to spend £100 million when the Charity Commission has not signed that off. Why are the Church Commissioners doing something that is not within their charitable objectives?

Marsha De Cordova: No decision has been taken on that. When the board of governors and the Church of Commissioners make that decision, they will follow the right processes to do so.

Business of the House

10.36 am

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House give the House the forthcoming business?

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

MONDAY 7 JULY—Second Reading of the Pension Schemes Bill.

TUESDAY 8 JULY—Remaining stages of the Football Governance Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 9 JULY—Committee of the whole House and remaining stages of the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill.

THURSDAY 10 JULY—General debate on the attainment and engagement of boys in education, followed by general debate on children's health. The subjects for these debates was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 11 JULY—Private Members' Bills.

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

MONDAY 14 JULY—Committee of the whole House and remaining stages of the Deprivation of Citizenship Orders (Effect during Appeal) Bill, following which the Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration.

TUESDAY 15 JULY—Opposition day (9th allotted day). Debate on a motion in the name of the official Opposition. Subject to be announced.

Jesse Norman: I am sure the Leader of the House and all Members will want to join me in recognising this year as the 81st anniversary of the announcement by the Government of a national health service, by Sir Henry Willink in 1944.

Most of us wishing to celebrate an anniversary would probably have a bit of a party—maybe get a few friends round, order in some pizza and put up decorations. Only the Labour party would seek to celebrate its first year in office with the kind of Charlie Foxtrot multidimensional legislative omnishambles that we have seen in the past few days.

Given their three massive reverse ferrets of recent weeks, I must say I had thought that the Government had perfected the art of the U-turn. After all, they had had U-turns on winter fuel payments and the two-child benefit cap—each, in its own way, a little masterpiece of slow-motion dithering and indecision. But then, the other day, the Government upped their game significantly by executing a comprehensive 180° U-turn on their decision to hold a statutory inquiry into grooming gangs, having repeatedly said that it was not necessary. Brilliantly, the Prime Minister managed to U-turn at the same time on his own speech about the UK being an island of strangers.

I naively believed that that was the state of the art—the Government had maxed out on U-turns and nobody could be more bewilderingly incompetent than that. How wrong I was. On Tuesday, we saw something that was almost unheard of in the 750 years of our

Parliament—a Minister pulling out his chainsaw and disembowelling his own Government's flagship welfare Bill in mid-air on live television from the Dispatch Box. Really, Mr Speaker, that outstrips my poor powers of description. We need the pen of a Shakespeare or a Thackeray to do it justice; it is the quintessence of cock-up.

But, actually, Mr Speaker, this past week has been much worse even than that. Just as Nick Clegg was defined by his U-turn on student fees, so the Prime Minister will be defined by this moment: a new and supposedly reforming Government with an enormous majority have been unable not to cut, but to reduce the rate of increase in public spending on benefits, let alone make any serious actual reforms to protect people.

There has been a remarkable complacency about this Government and this past week has shown it up. They regard disagreement as something to be ignored or crushed: they do not answer questions at the Dispatch Box; they obfuscate on written questions; they try to ignore the Opposition; they dismiss the House of Lords; and they spurn their own Back Benchers.

Loyal Labour MPs, concerned about disabled people, have been trying to get a hearing on this issue for months, only to be repeatedly rejected, and this has been the result. Three things follow from it. First, there are the immediate consequences. It will be next to impossible now for the Government to achieve meaningful reform of the welfare system. They have shown that they have no ability to make savings. Taxes will go up while the economy continues to stall. Little wonder the gilt market exploded during Prime Minister's questions yesterday.

Secondly, the Prime Minister has opened the door to future rebellions. Indeed, he has gone further than that; he has written the playbook for them. Doubtless, he will have a reshuffle sometime soon. Loyal dissenters will be punished, the talented cast out, and Select Committee Chairs bought off, but that will make no difference. There will be others—the Select Committee Chairs have shown that they are a powerful new force in Labour politics.

Finally, the Prime Minister has massively damaged his own reputation. He has endlessly harped on about the need for professional competence and moral seriousness, but this has been a year in government that started with a host of undisclosed personal gifts received and has ended with utter political humiliation. He has shown that he is in office, but not in power. What is the point of this Government? No one knows, not even the Prime Minister.

Lucy Powell: I start by sending all our condolences to the friends and family of Liverpool football club star, Diogo Jota, following the shocking news of his and his brother's death in a tragic car accident. It came only two weeks after his wedding and after winning last season's premier league. I am sure the thoughts of the whole House are with his family, friends, Liverpool teammates and former Wolves teammates. I also send my best wishes to the Lionesses at the start of the Euros.

Tomorrow is Action Mesothelioma Day. I commend all the campaigners who continue to fight for justice for those who have died or are ill as a result of asbestos cancer. My dear friends and former colleagues, Tony Lloyd and Paul Goggins, sadly no longer with us, were real champions of this cause and I pay tribute to them.

May I take this opportunity, Mr Speaker—I would rarely do this—to put on record how proud I am of my friend, the first female Chancellor, who has been doing a very difficult and formidable job. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] Quite honestly, she has more class than most Opposition Members—including, I am sure, some on the Front Bench. As the shadow Leader of the House has asked me to do so, may I update the House on the universal credit Bill, as it will soon be renamed? I completely acknowledge that how this business was managed was not the way that it should have been. The process did not live up to the standards to which I and the Government hold ourselves. However, as I said last week, we value the contributions of Members, especially those with particular experience of and interest in these issues. Critical to any good legislation is that it reflects parliamentary opinion, and I believe the Bill now does that. I think it is actually a good thing that we are prepared to listen and change, but Members should rest assured that we will take stock and reflect on how we can do things better going forward.

The Bill as amended, and the Timms review alongside it, now reflect the reform and safeguards that the House wants to see, and we will consider its remaining stages next week. The Bill’s title will become the Universal Credit Bill, as it will be narrower in scope. It will focus on ending the perverse incentives in universal credit, protecting the incomes of those currently in receipt of the universal credit health element and ending the reassessment of those with the most severe conditions, and clause 5 relating to personal independence payments will be deleted. Any future changes to PIP will come only following the Timms review, co-produced with disabled people and the bodies that represent them.

We can all agree that the welfare system needs reform and needs to be sustainable. The Conservatives should quite frankly be ashamed of their legacy, which needs addressing. It is a legacy of one in 10 working-age people on sickness or disability benefits; a legacy of a generation of young people with no mental health support and too few opportunities; a legacy of over 7 million people on NHS waiting lists, many unable to work; a legacy of stagnant growth and no plan for job creation. It is this Government who are tackling those long-term challenges.

The shadow Leader of the House wants to talk about the Government’s anniversary. I am really happy to talk about our anniversary, because I am proud of our first year in office: our 10-year NHS plan coming out today, and waiting lists coming down month on month; a new, ambitious industrial strategy, creating job opportunities around the country; mental health support and the skills revolution; British jobs for British workers, with decent pay and conditions; the biggest investment in affordable and social housing in 50 years; finally clearing up our rivers and seas; bringing the railways into public ownership; creating GB Energy and getting bills down; half a million more children getting free school meals every day, and new free breakfast clubs; wages going up, and the biggest ever wage rise for the lowest-paid workers. That is the change that people voted for, and that is the change that we are bringing in.

Tomorrow is another anniversary—one that the Tories do not want to talk about: their worst ever election defeat. They were utterly rejected, and one year on, it has got no better for them—it is just getting worse and

worse. They have not learned, they have not reflected, they have not apologised. The shadow Leader of the House talks about U-turns, but no one knows more about changing position and changing direction than the Conservatives. They changed Prime Ministers three times in three months! They went from austerity one month to spaffing money up the wall the next. One moment it was levelling-up, and the next it was funnelling money into the shires—from Brexit opportunities to Brexit disaster. One day they had an industrial strategy, the next they ripped it up. They were for net zero, then against it. They could not even cancel HS2 properly. In 14 years they have had more positions than the Kama Sutra. It is no wonder they are completely knackered.

Sarah Russell (Congleton) (Lab): My constituency has a fantastic group of volunteers and sponsors for Congleton Pride, but they have had to show extraordinary resilience after multiple attacks on their banners for Pride month and our major Pride event. I know that the Leader of the House will want to thank all the volunteers and sponsors who have provided new banners and put more banners in more locations. I thank very much the volunteers for persevering and the police for their involvement in this matter, and I thank the members of the community who support Pride. I encourage as many people as possible to come to the Pride event in Congleton town centre on Saturday 19 July from 10 am. Please can we have a debate in Government time about how we can support the LGBTQ+ community?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important matter. I am really sorry to hear that banners relating to the Congleton Pride have been vandalised in such a way; that is completely unacceptable. I am sure that on 19 July the whole community will want to come out and support the LGBT community in Congleton, because that is exactly what they should be doing. As she knows, the Government are committed to supporting the community and to taking steps to tackle homophobic hate crime.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Marie Goldman (Chelmsford) (LD): Several of my Chelmsford constituents have contacted me about the lack of local NHS dentistry services. One constituent told me an all too familiar story: waiting list for NHS patients are either too long or closed, so he has had to rely on private dentistry for routine check-ups. Now, he cannot afford crucial dental care because it would cost hundreds of pounds that he does not have.

That is a concern not only for patients but for dentists. One Chelmsford dentist recently wrote to me detailing the need for the Government to urgently fix the failed contract that he works under, to ensure that providers are funded to carry out NHS services and take on more patients. As with all healthcare, we know that the longer it takes to treat a problem, the more serious and expensive it can become.

The Minister for Care has said that critical negotiations are taking place between the Department of Health and the Treasury, so will the Leader of the House encourage her Treasury colleagues to prioritise that, to allow the Department to renegotiate the dental contract as soon as possible, as Liberal Democrats have been calling for?

[Marie Goldman]

Will she also ensure that a statement is made to the House to provide an update on the progress of the renegotiation?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Member for raising that important matter. I am sure that as constituency MPs we all know how important it is for people to have access to NHS dental care and dental appointments. She is right to highlight how many dental deserts there still are; that is the legacy that we have inherited. We are committed to providing more NHS dentist appointments. That is a key part of our NHS 10-year plan, which the Secretary of State will soon be setting out. That does mean looking at issues relating to the contract and how that care is provided. I will ensure that in addition to the statement being given today, the House is kept fully updated on these matters.

Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): Last week at a council meeting, when medical dispensation was being sought for Labour councillor Carol Hyatt in the Merry Hill ward of my constituency so that she could undergo cancer treatment, a Reform UK councillor said that was not fair on taxpayers. Will the Leader of the House first please join me in wishing Councillor Hyatt, who is an excellent councillor for her ward, a speedy recovery? Secondly, considering that one in two of us will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in our lives, will she please reassure the House that the Government will always support cancer sufferers at work?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear of that; that is totally unacceptable. I join my hon. Friend completely in wishing Carol Hyatt a speedy recovery. I hope that she gets all the support she needs. It is vital that we support people who have got cancer with all their work and care needs, and that is what the Government are all about.

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

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Unfortunately, the Leader of the House was not able to announce the business beyond Tuesday of the week after next, so I cannot announce what the business in the Chamber will be on Thursday 17 July. Indeed, she also did not announce what will happen in the final week before recess, and we are due to have the Sir David Amess summer pre-recess Adjournment debate on one of those days. It would be helpful to have an update on when we will have that debate.

In addition, we will have this business in Westminster Hall: next week, on Tuesday 8 July there will be a debate on alcohol and cancer, which is quite appropriate given the comments made by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton West (Warinder Juss). On Thursday 10 July there will be a debate on state support for victims of terrorism, followed by a debate on London's contribution to the national economy. On Tuesday 15 July, there will be a debate on special educational needs and disabilities provision in the south-east. On Thursday 17 July there will be a debate on the role of freedom of religion or belief in UK foreign policy, followed by a debate on the role of the RAF photographic reconnaissance unit during the second world war. On Tuesday 22 July, there will be a debate on Black Country Day.

Members who have been here for a while will know that I have been campaigning for more than 20 years for Stanmore station in my constituency to receive a lift or some form of step-free access. The good news a little while ago was that Queensbury and Canons Park stations are now on the list to have step-free access. I immediately wrote to the commissioner of Transport for London to say, "What about Stanmore station?" I have received a reply this week, which may interest you, Mr Speaker, and others.

The definition of step-free access

"means lifts, ramps and level surfaces so you don't have to use stairs or escalators, and can avoid the step and gap onto our trains, buses and boats".

However, the reply went on to say that Stanmore station is classified as having step-free access, despite the fact that it says quite clearly,

"Station entry and exit requires a 110m journey via the station car park, including steep ramps."

TfL forgets to say that this is the access to the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital in Stanmore and that a Paralympian is unable to get up that slope unaided.

I have been in correspondence with the Chair of the Transport Committee, the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), who agrees that we need an updated definition. The Secretary of State for Transport is a former deputy Mayor of London for transport, so may we have a statement from her on what we will do about ensuring that there is proper step-free access and a proper definition of it?

Lucy Powell: May I thank the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee for announcing some of the forthcoming business? I can assure him that we will be in conversation very soon about the business on the following Thursday and ahead of the recess. I know how important it is to this House and to him as the Chair of the Committee that we have the Sir David Amess pre-summer recess debate, and the whole House would expect that we have that at the appropriate moment. Hopefully, we can have positive conversations about that coming up.

The hon. Member is right to raise issues about step-free access—I have heard him do that many times before—particularly at Stanmore station and others in his constituency. He will know that those stations are a matter for TfL, but Ministers talk to TfL about such matters on an ongoing basis. I can assure him that the Secretary of State for Transport is personally very committed to ensuring that all our stations become step-free, with access to all eventually. It is a big job, because over half the stations across the country do not currently have that. It is important not just for those with disabilities, but for those with buggies and young children, those who carry lots of luggage and all sorts of other people to ensure that our transport network is truly accessible.

Mr Speaker: To help everybody, let me say that my intention is to call everyone, so let us help each other by speeding through. As a good example, I call Andy MacNae.

Andy MacNae (Rossendale and Darwen) (Lab): Every day in my constituency, we are faced with poorly organised and overrunning street works clogging up our roads. A lane rental scheme through which companies pay for

the time the works take would reduce such delays on our busiest roads. However, I remain frustrated that, so far, Lancashire county council has refused to introduce one. I welcomed the announcement last year by the Secretary of State for Transport that the authority for lane rental schemes would be devolved to regional mayors. However, it was notably absent from the English Devolution White Paper, so I am concerned that it may fall by the wayside. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate in Government time on this important subject?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is always a good candidate to call early, because he asks good questions about his constituency. He is absolutely right that poorly managed roadworks are a blight on our communities; I hear about that many times in these sessions. We are giving local areas more powers in that regard and are doubling fines and applying charges of up to £10,000 a day for utility works that overrun. He can be assured that the devolution Bill will be coming before this House imminently.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): As I am sure you, Mr Speaker, and the Leader of the House know, the number of children who have been killed in the war on Gaza now runs into the many thousands. Similar numbers of children have been mutilated and injured, and a large number of them require specialist medical treatment. As I hope she knows, countries across the west have responded by bringing those children who cannot get the treatment that they need in Gaza to their country for treatment. Shamefully, the UK has not done so, admitting only two children so far. The Home Secretary has inexplicably refused many applications to come here, despite the fact that Project Pure Hope has raised all the money required for the children's transport, treatment and maintenance. May we please have a statement, so that MPs can understand why the numbers are so small, why applications have been refused, and what the Government will do to increase the number? If we cannot have a statement, may we at least have a meeting between the relevant Minister and a cross-party delegation of MPs to discuss what more can be done to help these children in dire need?

Lucy Powell: I thank the right hon. Member for raising this important issue. As he says, the situation in Gaza—the suffering, the killing, the lack of aid and support—is totally intolerable and unacceptable, and needs to be brought to an end. That is what this Government have focused on doing in all their efforts in the middle east. We once again hold some hope of that ceasefire happening. He raises an important point about children who need hospital care and treatment. I will gladly arrange for a Minister to meet him and a delegation of others to talk about how the UK Government can play our part.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): We all know that Morecambe and Lunesdale is the most beautiful constituency in the country, and the village of Dent is particularly beautiful. Unfortunately, 40% of homes there are now second homes or short-term holiday lets. Can we have a debate in Government time on the impact of short-term lets on rural housing availability, and on how regulatory reform might help?

Lucy Powell: I can confirm that my hon. Friend's constituency is indeed beautiful, having recently visited with her, as well as for a family holiday. She is absolutely right that the proliferation of holiday lets is becoming a real challenge for tourist hotspots like hers. This Government are taking steps. We have some measures in the Renters' Rights Bill, but further conversations will be taken forward, and I am sure that we will work with her and others on that.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): On Tuesday, a written statement was published at 12 noon that announced that three hours later, the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme and Afghan relocations and assistance policy were to close with immediate effect. That comes six weeks after an assurance that the scheme would continue for the present, so that we could keep the promises made to the people of Afghanistan. Can we have a statement in this place, so that we can properly understand the reasons for the decision being made so quickly; how we are communicating with Afghans in hiding, often in third countries like Pakistan; and what will happen to those applications still in the system?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry that the hon. Member did not feel that we were forthcoming enough on that matter, and I will ensure that she gets an update on it. We constantly keep these schemes under review, and we have to take into account a whole range of issues when considering whether to close or extend them. Those decisions and conversations are ongoing, but I will ensure that she gets an update.

Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab): The Bumble Bees rugby union football club, based at the Bradford and Bingley sports club in my constituency, is England's first mixed ability contact rugby union. It was founded in 2009 by a determined young man with cerebral palsy and learning difficulties. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the Bumble Bees following their bronze cup win at the international mixed ability rugby tournament in Spain last month? They played six games in just five days in temperatures of up to 35°. Will she also join me in congratulating Tessa Lightowler, who carried the GB flag at the open Europe Down's syndrome championship in Prague this week and will be competing in the shotput competition? Perhaps we could make time for a debate to celebrate the contribution of disabled and learning disabled athletes.

Lucy Powell: I absolutely join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Bumble Bees rugby club in her constituency, and Tessa Lightowler on carrying the GB flag in the recent championships. I am sure the whole House will join in congratulating all our disabled athletes on the contribution they make, and in recognising the importance of their being able to do so.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): The rigged Government consultation on Islamophobia is overseen by supposedly independent people who have already declared their support for a definition that will kill free speech in this country. An invitation to participate in the consultation was sent only to hand-picked organisations, the identities of which the Government refuse to disclose. One of them appears to be the Muslim Council of Britain, which is supposedly subject to a Government policy of non-engagement. Which organisations were

[Nick Timothy]

invited to take part in the consultation? Do they include the Muslim Council of Britain? May we have an oral statement, to provide some badly needed transparency?

Lucy Powell: It is really important that we tackle Islamophobia in this country. It has been on the rise in recent years, and it is one of the biggest issues raised with me as a constituency MP. We are considering how best to tackle it and define the issues. As ever, all Government consultations are open and transparent, and all the findings will be published and brought to the House in due course.

Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): May I place on the record my sadness at the loss of Diogo Jota and his brother Andre? I know it will be felt across my city of Liverpool. My thoughts and prayers are with his wife and three young children.

The six-week statutory maximum for the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation is being ignored. Under the direction of the late Lord Prescott and the previous Labour Government, this rule was enforced, and while I welcome our Government's commitment to building social homes, we need short to medium-term interventions to address the crisis now. We cannot wait for the social homes to be built. Will the Leader of the House enable a debate to take place in Government time on the 165,000 children languishing in temporary accommodation?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend, a Liverpool MP, for mentioning the tragic loss of Diogo Jota in that terrible car accident.

My hon. Friend is a champion of children who live in temporary accommodation and highlights the blight it casts on their lives. We absolutely have to tackle the very high number of children living in temporary accommodation, and she is right to raise some of the ways we can do that, but I am sure she would agree that the best way is to provide people with a long-term stable home. That is why we are committed to the biggest social housing programme in a generation.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Those of us who have been involved in the mishandled transition of post offices from directly managed branches to franchises, as has happened in Bexhill, have seen how poorly the Post Office has responded to local businesses that want to run those branches and the MPs who support them. Will the Leader of the House agree with me, on the record, that it really matters when businesses like the Post Office pay lip service to MPs' views but ignore us on matters of substance?

Lucy Powell: I agree absolutely. I have seen at first hand as a constituency MP what happens when we lose a Crown post office and have instead a franchised service that does not match the one it is replacing. It is vital that MPs are able to play their role as champions of their local communities and the services they receive, including post offices. Post Office Ltd should pay more heed to them.

Dave Robertson (Lichfield) (Lab): Barely a week goes by when my email inbox does not swell with people getting in touch about one particular issue. Whether

from Lichfield, Burntwood or the villages of Longdon, Streethy, Handsacre, Hill Ridware, Armitage and Abbots Bromley, residents are writing to me electronically with complaints about poor service from Royal Mail. They tell me that days go by without deliveries, but when I write to Royal Mail, I am told there is no problem; deliveries are going out six days a week. That just does not chime with the experience of my constituents. Staff at Lichfield delivery office tell me that they are not being offered overtime, and as a result, they are failing to meet the universal service obligation, and face pressure to prioritise higher-value deliveries, like parcels. Royal Mail still tells me that there is no issue. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made to this House on how the Government are ensuring that Royal Mail meets the universal service obligation?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue, which many of my constituents raise with me as well. I recently did an unannounced visit to one of my sorting offices to meet staff there, and I saw at first hand that staff morale is low, and people feel unable to provide the service that they are there to deliver. I encourage him to continue to raise that issue directly with Royal Mail. He has other opportunities to raise it in the House, perhaps with the Select Committee and its Chair, and I am sure it would make a very popular topic for debate.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): The city of Perth is still recovering from a devastating fire, which unfortunately resulted in loss of life. Residents were evacuated, and people were unable to access their properties. Last week, together with local MSP John Swinney, I hosted a meeting with affected residents and businesses, and we found that support from insurance companies is nothing other than a lottery. Can we have a debate about what people can rightly expect from insurance companies in such emergencies, and can we look at insurance companies being obliged to offer support to all customers who are unable to access their properties?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear of the incident in the hon. Member's constituency, and I am sure his constituents are very grateful for the leadership he has shown in tackling the after-effects of it. He is right to raise the challenge of insurance companies. We need to make sure that there are rights of recourse for customers and consumers, and that insurance companies are offering the service we need them to offer, because it is vital that people can rely on insurance.

Leigh Ingham (Stafford) (Lab): I did not expect to bring this up today, but I have recently learned that tomorrow in my constituency of Stafford, Eccleshall and the villages, teaching assistants will be on strike because they are subject to fire and rehire practices. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is imperative that the other place passes the Employment Rights Bill, so that we can end this draconian practice once and for all?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear that fire and rehire is still happening across the country, particularly in relation to teaching assistants. That is why I am so pleased and proud that we introduced the Employment

Rights Bill. It has gone through this House and is now making its way through the House of Lords. I am sure it will receive Royal Assent by the autumn, and we can end fire and rehire for good.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I would like to make the Leader of the House aware of the mayhem, disruption and chaos taking place in Romford at the Gallows Corner flyover junction of the A12 and A127, which has been closed for refurbishment by Transport for London and the Mayor of London. Despite the junction being closed for over a week, there is no sign that any works have actually begun, and it is causing unacceptable delays to local businesses throughout Essex and the whole of east London. This is simply unacceptable, and there is now talk of the project going on until September and beyond. Would the Leader of the House be good enough to ask the Secretary of State for Transport, who used to be deputy mayor for transport in London, to get on to her friend the Mayor of London, and TfL, and ask them to make an urgent statement, end the disruption in my constituency and get on with the job?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear about the frustration that roadworks are causing in the hon. Member's constituency. I am sure that we have all had that experience of seeing roadwork signs but no work happening, just all the disruption instead. I shall certainly raise that with Ministers for him. As he rightly says, this is a matter for Transport for London, and I am sure it has heard his question, but I will ensure he gets a response.

Louise Jones (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): Many of my constituents who live in park homes have been in touch. They have worked really hard all their lives, and they love and value living in these communities. They are responsible for the upkeep of these homes, which are not holiday homes—these are their homes—and for upgrading their properties where they choose to. However, if they wish to sell these homes, they are subject to a 10% charge on the sale of the property, due to the owner of the site. That seems unfair. What will the Government do to fix this problem?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for once again raising the issue of park home commission fees, because it has been raised many times in business questions. I am sure that, if hon. Members across the House were to put together, it would make a topic for a very well-attended Backbench Business debate. This Government recognise the challenges of park homes—including, often, people's inability to sell properties and the feeling that they were, in some cases, mis-sold. We will set out plans in due course and I will ensure that the House is updated.

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): City regions in the UK are set to benefit from £15 billion of investment in transport infrastructure, while Cornwall got nothing. Meanwhile, my constituency does not have a single mainline train station, and the closest station, Bodmin Parkway, has no disabled access. Now we hear that our vital shared prosperity funding is set to end all together. Can we please have a debate in Government time on fairer funding for those regions, like Cornwall, that are being left out and left behind?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to say that I do not accept that characterisation. While the spending review did set out additional funds for metro mayor areas, it also set out considerable additional support to rural and other areas; I can update the hon. Gentleman on some of that. In addition, the Bus Services (No. 2) Bill, which is currently going through Parliament, will give local areas the ability to offer more affordable, more reliable buses in constituencies like his. We have capped the bus fare at £3, which I am sure will make a big impact in his constituency, and we are determined to make sure that transport is accessible and there for all, whatever community they live in.

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Ind): We owe our veterans and service personnel a great debt, and we eternally thank them for their service to and sacrifice for this country—particularly in proud regiment towns like Burnley, Padiham and Brierfield. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking Healthier Heroes, Andy, Rio and the powerful community of support they have built for veterans and their families across the constituency for hosting their Armed Forces Day festival and celebration recently at Towneley Park? With the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment parading their freedom of the borough through Burnley for the first time in 12 years on Tuesday, will she also join me in welcoming them home?

Lucy Powell: I absolutely join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to all those who recognised and contributed to Armed Forces Day in his constituency. At last week's questions we heard many such accounts from across the country, and it always warms my heart to hear about them; I thank him for bringing that to us.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): In 2023, Twycross zoo and I secured £19.9 million from the levelling-up fund. I am pleased to report that, when I visited a couple of weeks ago, spades were in the ground for the global conservation centre. I thank Hinckley & Bosworth borough council, Dr Rebecca Biddle and the chief executive officer Craig Dunkerley. The centre is very important because it will not only bring jobs and tourism, but, most importantly, it will train the conservationists of the next generation. Can we have a debate on why a centre like this is so important in teaching the next generation how to protect endangered species, particularly orangutans, which this centre will focus on?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing that issue to the House. Twycross zoo sounds like a fabulous location, not only bringing tourists and visitors to his constituency—how important that is—but, as he says, providing research, teaching and education so that we can all value the contribution of conservation and ensure that we protect species and habitats into the next generations.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): My constituent Katherine has given 25 years of service as a civil servant, but she has been experiencing difficulties in resolving discrepancies with her pension forecast—an issue that the National Audit Office recently highlighted as a failure with the civil service pension scheme. Will the Leader of the House help me to raise the matter with the relevant Minister so that people like Katherine can receive accurate and timely information?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear about Katherine's case and I shall certainly raise it with Ministers. My hon. Friend raises a broader point that needs addressing.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): Will the Leader of the House ensure that before the summer recess there is either a statement or a debate in Government time on Sudan? She will know that it is the worst humanitarian crisis ongoing in the world: tens of thousands of people killed, millions displaced and millions facing hunger every day, particularly in the Darfur region. It is stated to be the Government's No. 1 foreign policy priority beyond Gaza and Ukraine, and of course the UK is the penholder at the United Nations. It is vital that the issue is urgently debated in this House.

Lucy Powell: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The Government recognise that the situation in Sudan at the moment is one of the worst in the world, which is why we are providing so much aid to Sudan. We have announced lifesaving funding for over 650,000 Sudanese people and the Foreign Secretary was keen to make Sudan one of his first visits when he came into office. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have updated the House a number of times through statements, but I take on board what he says and I will ensure that hon. Members are kept updated as things go forward.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): People living only a few miles apart in Greater Manchester are being offered varying numbers of IVF cycles. In my Stockport constituency, only two IVF cycles are offered, whereas in Tameside it is three. NHS Greater Manchester is consulting on plans to reduce the offer across all boroughs in Greater Manchester to only one free cycle. Although I welcome steps to increase equality in this area, the first IVF cycle is often unsuccessful, and this proposal would disproportionately disadvantage those in Stockport and across Greater Manchester who are on lower incomes and cannot afford to pay for further cycles. Will the Leader of the House allow a debate in Government time on equal and fair access to IVF?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is right that equal and fair access to IVF is incredibly important. We all know someone who has been affected, and how important it is for people who want to have children and start a family to have access to free and fair IVF treatment. I am sorry to hear about the proposals in Greater Manchester—as an MP in Greater Manchester, I will look into that for myself. These are issues for local health commissioning bodies, but I will ensure that Ministers look into it and we update the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. To ensure everybody gets a fair chance of getting in, questions and answers must be shorter.

James MacCleary (Lewes) (LD): As my East Sussex neighbour, Madam Deputy Speaker, you are likely to be familiar with the issue that I want to raise. In Polegate in my constituency, there is a growing parking crisis. Local businesses and residents are suffering because of antisocial parking—often pavement parking—and a lack of effective enforcement. Will the Government make time for a debate on the impact of antisocial parking in

towns like Polegate, and what more can the Government do to support effective enforcement in order to promote and support our high street businesses?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear about the pavement parking and parking problems in Polegate. Pavement parking can cause real problems, especially for wheelchair users and others. Local authorities have the powers to tackle the issue, but we constantly keep it under review. I know lots of us have received many emails about the issue in recent weeks.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): I recently spent the day with the amazing volunteer team at the Bread and Butter Thing at the Fair Green pub in Thorne, helping to distribute surplus food to local residents in need. Does the Leader of the House agree that charities, like the Bread and Butter Thing, and the volunteers who dedicate their time are the true heroes of our communities? Will she also join me in thanking the supermarkets and businesses that donate surplus food to be turned into nutritious, affordable bags of shopping for those families who really need that help?

Lucy Powell: I join my hon. Friend in thanking those at the Bread and Butter Thing for all the work that they do in tackling food poverty in his constituency. I am sorry that food poverty is still such a blight on many of our communities, but the work that supermarkets and others do—donating food so that it does not go to waste and can help to tackle these issues—is really important.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Can we have a debate to recognise volunteers and fundraisers who support the work of hospices and help people living with cancer? I recently met the team at the Lavender Touch in Galashiels who have been supporting people across the Scottish Borders for over 20 years, funding and providing therapeutic treatment to bring relief to those in need. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking them for everything that they do?

Lucy Powell: Absolutely. I join the hon. Gentleman in thanking all those at the Lavender Touch, and at all the other hospices across his constituency and the country, for all that they do in people's hour of most need. I think that most of us would not be able to do that job, so we thank them greatly for doing it.

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): Yesterday, three organisations were proscribed. Two were neo-Nazi and ethnonationalist groups, and the other was Palestine Action—an organisation with unacceptable and often criminal tactics. This House was given a binary choice of voting for or against proscribing all three groups, although many hold substantial concerns about the proportionality of proscribing Palestine Action. Will the Leader of the House clarify what can be done when motions to approve statutory instruments insufficiently capture the views of Members?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue, which was discussed in the debate yesterday by many colleagues. As the Minister set out, there is a clear precedent for the approach taken yesterday—it happened in 2001, for example, when the motion bundled together

20 other militant groups alongside al-Qaeda. I know the strength of feeling on this issue, but I assure my hon. Friend that the Home Secretary must reasonably believe that any such organisation is concerned in terrorism in any form, and we do not take these decisions lightly. I want to be clear that the proscription of Palestine Action is not aimed at banning all protests that support Palestine by any means. There are many ways in which people can continue to express their support for Palestine without becoming a member of that organisation.

Tom Gordon (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): Freedom Performing Arts, a dance school in Knaresborough, is currently representing England at the dance world cup in Spain. It had to raise £30,000 from the local community, businesses and parents to get there, and it still faces a funding shortfall. Will the Leader of the House join me in wishing Amy and the entire team the best of luck and make time for a Government debate on support for grassroots dance and performing groups? They not only represent our country internationally, but bring such huge social and community benefits.

Lucy Powell: I will absolutely join the hon. Gentleman in supporting Amy and all those involved in Freedom Performing Arts. My daughter is heavily involved in her local dance group, but we want all children to have access to performing arts, music and the arts more generally. That is what our curriculum review will do and what the work of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is doing in supporting grassroots communities. We want to see this access for all, not just for a few who can afford it.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): On Saturday, we mark the 80th anniversary of the greatest reforming Labour Government: the Attlee Government, which brought in the welfare state. I have to say I am so disappointed that the Government are pressing ahead with the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill—or should I call it the universal credit Bill, in the light of the fact that assessments for the health element will depend on the outcome of the Timms review? It seems therefore that we cannot press ahead with the Bill, not least if the Government have not learned the importance of co-production with disabled people. None of the deaf and disabled people's organisations want this Bill to go ahead, yet they still have not been consulted.

Lucy Powell: As I said previously, the Bill is now considerably narrower in scope. It does protect the incomes of those who currently receive universal health support. We are absolutely committed, through the Timms review, to the principles of co-production, which is why we are now removing from the Bill all references to the personal independence payment going forward. Co-production will mean co-production, and I hope it will mean some consensus around those issues. That is why we are taking forward the Committee stage of this much narrower and shorter Bill next week before we undertake the Timms review.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I wish to raise the deeply concerning situation facing the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan, where violent attacks have intensified in recent weeks. I met some representatives last night. The destruction of places of worship, the

desecration of graves and continued arrests under blasphemy laws reflect a broader pattern of state-enabled persecution and social marginalisation. Will the Leader of the House please request that the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs updates the House on the Foreign Office's assessment of the deteriorating human rights situation for Ahmadis in Pakistan? What steps has the Foreign Secretary taken to engage with Pakistan authorities and international partners to ensure the protection of religious minorities, uphold freedom of religion or belief, and press for accountability and legal reform?

Lucy Powell: As ever, the hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly serious issue. He will know that we continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to fully investigate incidents of violence, prosecute those responsible, and provide justice to victims and their families. As a Government, we are committed to defending freedom of religion and belief for all, wherever those issues exist.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the Change Grow Live charity, which helps people to overcome alcohol and drug addiction and recently opened a new recovery hub at its central Rugby office? I have seen for myself its holistic approach, from professional medical support to art sessions and the impressive ambassador programme run by former service users, which gives people dignity and hope. Does the Leader of the House agree that it would be good if we could debate the contribution made by such charities?

Lucy Powell: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating and thanking all the volunteers who engage in the Change Grow Live initiative in his constituency. We all know the effect that the blight of alcoholism has on families, children and those who are alcoholics, and how vital it is that people get support early and consistently. Getting that kind of support into communities to prevent alcoholism from developing in the first place is what our plan for the NHS and for this country is all about.

Phil Brickell (Bolton West) (Lab): Joanne, a constituent of mine, has been badly affected by a botched botox treatment she underwent to help her scoliosis pain, which sadly has left her almost paralysed. The doctor who carried out the procedure did not have the correct licence to practise at the time; had only done a one-day course on botox treatment; used cosmetic, rather than medical, botox; and had previously been struck off by the General Medical Council. Given the increased amount of botox in use, will the Leader of the House commit to setting aside Government time for a debate on improving the regulation of such procedures?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear what happened to Joanne. This issue is raised with me regularly during these sessions; people's lives are being put at risk by poor regulation and the poor training of many people in the cosmetic sector. We will soon bring forward and publish proposals in response to the consultation on the licensing of non-surgical and surgical cosmetic procedures in England.

Tracy Gilbert (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I am sure many hon. Members have received a number of emails in relation to e-bikes. E-bikes are a great way to

[Tracy Gilbert]

help people switch to active travel, and they keep many of my constituents fit and healthy and able to get from A to B. However, several constituents have raised concerns about the increased number of home-modified e-bikes, and about the difficulty of importing parts from the European Union and ensuring that sellers of e-bikes are reputable. Will the Leader of the House schedule a debate in Government time on e-bikes, so that we can ensure that the regulations are correct and that our constituents are able to use e-bikes safely?

Lucy Powell: The nuisance caused by e-bikes, and their regulation and safety, is of concern to Members across the House. We have taken steps and are looking into these issues further, and I will ensure that my hon. Friend and the rest of the House are kept updated.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Chris Vince.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I was not expecting to be called quite so soon, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you can probably imagine.

Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Jo Doyle, the new headteacher of Sir Frederick Gibberd college in Harlow, on her recent appointment? As the Leader of the House knows, the school has suffered a number of issues. It was forced to close down after being open for only four years because of the modular construction that was used, with students taught being in portacabins and—at one point—even in marquees. Despite that, mainly due to the hard work of the teachers, the school has continued to thrive and its young people have been very successful. I am looking forward to working with Jo and her team to ensure that it continues to thrive.

Lucy Powell: Maybe my hon. Friend is becoming one of Madam Deputy Speaker's new favourites—rightly so. I congratulate Jo Doyle and all of those at Sir Frederick Gibberd college on the fantastic work they have done to turn the school around and provide such a quality education to young people in Harlow.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): Residents in Burniston are waiting anxiously to see whether North Yorkshire council will approve Europa Oil and Gas's application to undertake small-scale fracking on the edge of the North York Moors national park. The technique, known as a proppant squeeze, is not currently included in the moratorium on fracking, but my constituents are understandably impatient to see it included in a future ban. Will the Leader of the House find Government time for a debate on fracking?

Lucy Powell: As my hon. Friend knows, and as she rightly points out, this Government are committed to banning fracking for good. That is what many Members want to see. We are keeping under review the regulation of proppant squeezes, which she describes, because those are not bound by the fracking regulations, and I will ensure that she and the House are updated.

Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): Can the Leader of the House assist me? I am concerned by the decline in clinical academics, who are

crucial to the training of our future health workforce. To which Department must I address this matter? The Department of Health and Social Care defers to the Department for Education, and the Department for Education defers to the Department of Health and Social Care. How can we resolve this? May we please have a debate in Government time on the future of clinical academics and medical research?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises an important issue, which is vital to the future workforce of the NHS and ensuring that we have the research and innovation that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will shortly be outlining in the statement on the 10-year NHS plan. I think the Department for Education would be responsible for this area, but I am happy to raise it with both. It is an issue I have raised on behalf of my constituents, too, so I will certainly help my hon. Friend out with that.

Mark Swards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): The TV Harrison football ground in my constituency is a historic part of Wortley. It is known as Wortley's Wembley, and Leeds United legends such as David Batty and Paul Reaney used to train and play on it. However, after being abandoned over recent decades, it was at risk of being lost forever. After a six-year campaign by local residents, I am pleased to say that the ground has been saved. For my part, I have spent three of those years working with the owners and residents to get a new owner for the site. I am pleased to announce that that new owner is Leeds United. I am incredibly pleased that that football club has chosen to invest in our constituency and, in addition, will restore the ground to its former glory. Will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to everyone involved in this campaign and to Leeds United? Will she grant a debate in Government time on the need for football clubs to invest in their communities?

Lucy Powell: I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on his leadership on this issue and on getting Wortley's Wembley—what a great title—back into use. I thank Leeds United and all those in the local community who have been involved, because I know just how important this project will be for his community. What a great achievement in his first year as a new Member of Parliament to get it off the ground.

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): Charlie Rogers was a unique chronicler of my community. He was a friend of L. S. Lowry and the pitman painter Norman Cornish, and his paintings and illustrations of working-class life in central Gateshead and central Newcastle are incredibly powerful and deserve a wider audience. My constituent, Brian Rankin, is hoping to bring his work to a wider audience with this fantastic collection "Pursued by Bulldozers", which it will be possible to view next week. Will the Leader of the House provide Government time for a debate on the art and culture of Gateshead, which we are incredibly proud of?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend has given a great advert for the remarkable work of Charlie Rogers and the upcoming exhibition, "Pursued by Bulldozers". I am sure that his advert will encourage many people to come and look at it.

Michelle Welsh (Sherwood Forest) (Lab): Pubs are at the heart of many communities across the country, and that is certainly the case in Nottinghamshire. What makes them special is their unique, traditional character and their close ties to everyone who lives in the community, which is very much true of the Horse & Groom pub in Linby. However, many pubs face financial pressures and are at risk of being taken over by larger companies and losing their charm and unique identity. Does the Leader of the House agree that more should be done to protect local pubs, such as the fabulous Horse & Groom in Linby?

Lucy Powell: I completely agree with my hon. Friend that the thousands and thousands of pubs across the country, including the Horse & Groom, are vital to our communities. We support them as a Government, and we support the hospitality sector. How we use pubs has changed over time, but we need to support them going forward.

Sojan Joseph (Ashford) (Lab): My constituents in Ashford constantly contact me about strengthening animal welfare legislation. One of the issues they are particularly concerned about is the use of snares, which are imperfect and indiscriminate traps that regularly cause unnecessary suffering and harm to animals. Not only do they hurt the animals they are set to catch; other animals and pets are caught, injured and sometimes killed by them. Can the Leader of the House find time for us to debate bringing an end to the use of these cruel and unnecessary traps?

Lucy Powell: This Government are committed to introducing the most ambitious programme for animal welfare in a generation, and that includes addressing the use of snare traps, as my hon. Friend describes. I will ensure that he and the whole House are kept updated.

Jon Pearce (High Peak) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Explore Buxton, based in my constituency of High Peak, which was named the best local tourism platform at this year's SME midlands enterprise awards? Buxton is an extraordinary spa town surrounded by the beautiful Peak district—if anyone has not been, I very much recommend coming to see the most beautiful constituency in the country. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate in Government time on how we can support tourism in all parts of the country, and particularly in our market towns?

Lucy Powell: There is always a great competition in these sessions for the most beautiful constituency, but I can confirm that Buxton and many other parts of my hon. Friend's constituency are indeed beautiful and well worth a visit. I join him in congratulating Explore Buxton, and encourage those who want to have a lovely day out to go to Buxton.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): Rochdale is the historic birthplace of the co-op movement, so it is fitting that we will host the UK Co-op Congress 2025 this weekend. There is an impressive array of speakers, including Steve Coogan, Patrick Grant, my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes), and the Leader of the House herself. As we celebrate the International Year of Co-operatives, will she join me in paying tribute to representatives of the Co-operative

Union of Palestine, whom I met in Ramallah earlier this year, for all their heroic work in keeping communities together—against the odds—in the west bank and Gaza?

Lucy Powell: I am really looking forward to coming to my hon. Friend's constituency tomorrow to speak at the Co-op Congress. I am not sure whether the attraction is me or Steve Coogan—I am pretty sure it is Steve Coogan. I join my hon. Friend in thanking co-operatives for their work, including the one in the west bank and Gaza that he describes. It just shows that when we come together and work in a mutual way, we can really tackle some of the big problems that the world faces.

Kevin McKenna (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Lab): Given the welcome news in today's new 10-year plan for health that the NHS app will be upgraded and be central to the way that patients take control of their own healthcare, can the Leader of the House please advise me how I can best use parliamentary time to challenge the scourge of mobile notspots in my constituency, particularly in villages like Iwade?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: if we want to have a digital NHS and digital services that people can access, we need to make sure that we have the infrastructure, the broadband and the mobile data capability to match our ambition. There are lots of opportunities for him to raise this issue in the House, but I will ensure that a Minister takes up his cause after today.

Sarah Edwards (Tamworth) (Lab): One hundred and twenty-one of my constituents in Tamworth are members of the British Coal staff superannuation scheme, and they have been in touch with me. They ask that their investment reserve be released and used to boost their pensions, just as the Government did with the mineworkers' pension scheme. That would make a massive difference to former mining communities like Tamworth, and improve their living standards in retirement. May I ask the Leader of the House for a Government statement before the summer recess on the timeline for the release of the BCSSS investment reserve?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that I have just announced that the Second Reading of the Pension Schemes Bill will take place next week. There has been a great deal of discussion of these issues when putting together that piece of legislation, because it is vital that constituents like hers are able to get the value that they need from their pension schemes going forward.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the importance of post offices to communities up and down the country, particularly those where there are no banks and where other facilities are in short supply. I hope she shares my concern that the post office in Drumchapel, in my Glasgow West constituency, is being threatened with closure. Will she allow a debate in Government time on the merits of post offices and their importance to local communities across the land?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is not the first Member today to raise the issue of her constituency's post office services, which are vital. Post offices provide a huge

[Lucy Powell]

range of services, many of which have now gone from our communities and high streets, including access to cash and banking services. I am sorry to hear of the proposed closure of the post office in her constituency. I join her in putting pressure on Post Office Ltd to look at these issues and make sure it takes on board the local MP's concerns.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): As a lifelong trade unionist, I will be proud to stand with my constituents in Paisley and Renfrewshire South this weekend as we have our annual Sma' Shot Day, which is our annual celebration of the historic victory of local weavers in their trade dispute with the Paisley mill bosses. This week, our Labour Government are building on their legacy with the introduction of our parental leave review and of the timescales for the implementation of our Employment Rights Bill. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating everyone involved in our annual Sma' Shot celebrations and in paying tribute to the work being done to advance workers' rights?

Lucy Powell: I only learned of the Sma' Shot Day celebrations last week, and I was really proud and pleased to hear about them. I am also proud of the work this Labour Government are doing to build on the legacy of the generations of those who campaigned for workers' rights with our Employment Rights Bill and our parental leave review.

Mr James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): My team and I recently helped a woman in my constituency to divorce her abusive partner and reclaim her home by pressing for her to have access to legal aid. However, because of delays and errors by her legal aid solicitors, who failed to grasp the complexity and risk involved, she remains exposed to harm. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on access to specialist legal aid for domestic abuse survivors as part of the Government's crucial mission to halve violence against women and girls and to protect others in her position?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear about my hon. Friend's constituent's experience, especially at the point in her life of leaving someone abusing her at home. I know the Safeguarding Minister is focused on these matters, and I will ensure that she updates him.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): Falmouth, a densely populated area on a peninsula, lost its swimming pool in 2022, when the Conservative council allowed the contractors to close it for financial reasons, and schools in Falmouth are struggling to arrange swimming lessons elsewhere. Tregony school football pitch needs resurfacing. Can the Leader of the House confirm that the fund for grassroots sports and major events will cover projects from the scale of Falmouth's pool down to Tregony's football pitch, and will she consider holding a debate in Government time on Government support for grassroots sport?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear that my hon. Friend's leisure centre swimming pool has closed. This Government have not only put additional resources into such grassroots sports facilities but given local government one of the

biggest settlements it has had in many years. I will ensure that a Minister talks to her about the availability of such funds for her constituents.

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): The Leader of the House rightly celebrates the one-year anniversary of this Government, with all the great work started on the NHS, transport and new homes. She will be aware that a one-year anniversary is a paper anniversary, and on the subject of paper, would she consider granting a debate in Government time on the amount of paperwork required for residents to exercise the right to manage on new build estates in areas such as Dartford and around the country, so they can properly exercise control over the services provided to them?

Lucy Powell: That was a good little segue there. I know the right to manage is of real concern to constituents, such as my hon. Friend's, who live in leasehold properties. A few weeks ago, Ministers brought forward measures from the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024, but there is further to go in implementing the measures in that Act, and we will also bring forward a draft leasehold reform Bill in due course.

Emma Foody (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): I recently visited Concordia leisure centre in Cramlington, and as well as seeing the leisure facilities, I heard at first hand about the services it offers, such as SEND swimming lessons, supported internships and social prescribing services. Local sports and community facilities are the bedrock of many communities in bringing people together, so can we have a debate on recognising the true assets that these facilities are, and how my Assets of Community Value (Sports Facilities) Bill would strengthen their protection?

Lucy Powell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward her Bill, which highlights the value that sports facilities such as Concordia leisure centre bring to our communities. They should be valued and, as a Government, we do value them. We are bringing forward measures so that communities can keep them in their control.

Torcuil Crichton (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): We have experienced some cruel heat in this Chamber this week, but in Na h-Eileanan an Iar schools have already broken for the summer. Before they left for their holidays, the P5 pupils of Stornoway primary gave me a lesson, in Gaelic and in English, on their anti-bullying strategy. Does the Leader of the House agree that the values of Stornoway primary's anti-bullying strategy, driven by coibhneas—kindness—and urram—respect—are those that senior Members of this House should take to heart in exchanges across our Dispatch Box?

Lucy Powell: Absolutely. The anti-bullying strategy in the schools in my hon. Friend's constituency sounds like a bit of training that many of us should go on.

Jen Craft (Thurrock) (Lab): A couple of weeks ago, I held a meeting in my constituency with the new owner of the State cinema in Grays town centre. This is a wonderful art deco building that has been closed for the best part of my life. I have never, unfortunately, set foot in it, despite turning 40 a couple of weeks ago and despite being born, bred and living in that place my

whole life. There is hope, finally, for the State cinema that it might once again be somewhere that people in the town centre can view with pride and visit, bringing their children and grandchildren. However, there are a number of other derelict buildings in my constituency: the Jack O'Lantern pub in Ockendon, the Calcutta Club in Tilbury, the Bricklayers Arms in Grays—I could go on. Will the Leader of the House allow for a debate in Government time on how we tackle the blight of derelict buildings in our town centres?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear about the cinema in her constituency and the blight of other derelict buildings. My hon. Friend will know that we have a manifesto commitment to replace the community right to bid with a strengthened right to buy when it comes to community assets. I can let her know that the proposals are coming forward very, very soon.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): Meur ras, Kaderyer. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Because of Cornish national minority status, Cornwall will not and cannot ever join a mayoral combined authority unless the Deputy Prime Minister imposes it on us. There is a worrying trend across Government in industrial policy, transport, housing and health, which suggests that the only way to access the highest levels of devolution is through a mayoral combined authority. Before the Government bring forward an English devolution Bill that discriminates against the people of Cornwall, will the Leader of the House use her northern English charms to encourage the Minister for Local Government and English Devolution, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton (Jim McMahon) to meet me and Cornish colleagues to discuss this issue?

Lucy Powell: I know these issues are very much a concern for my hon. Friend and Cornish colleagues, who rightly defend their right to choose and have a say on the local government and possible mayoral arrangements in their area. I will ensure that he gets a meeting from the Minister. I reassure him that the devolution Bill we are bringing forward is about enabling powers, not imposing powers. We need to see communities wanting the types of arrangements they are going to choose.

Jessica Toale (Bournemouth West) (Lab): On Monday, around 300,000 people visited Bournemouth beach, many from out of area. The vast majority were there to enjoy the good weather and our fabulous beach, but others came with the explicit aim to start fights and cause general disorder which resulted in three of our police officers being assaulted. It is completely unacceptable that people treat our town with such flagrant disrespect. It has caused great worry in the local community and I know that ours is not the only coastal community that feels dismayed at the additional pressure put on our police forces during the summer months, having to police vastly increased numbers of visitors without the people or the money to do so. Will the Leader of the House pass on my concern to the Home Secretary and consider time to debate how we can adequately address the issue of additional pressures, including looking again at the policing funding formula?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear about the incidents in my hon. Friend's constituency. The hot weather brings with it great opportunities for coastal communities like

hers, but I recognise that when it brings antisocial behaviour, that can be a real problem. I will certainly pass on her calls to the Home Secretary, but I assure my hon. Friend that we are giving the police the powers that they need to tackle these issues, as well as the funding to carry them out.

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): If the Leader of the House likes piña colodas and getting caught in the rain, may I suggest that she looks no further than the Piña Colada Festival in Northwich on 16 August? This event, in honour of Northwich-born Rupert Holmes's song "Escape"—or, as he describes it, the song from which there is no escape—adds around half a million pounds to the local economy, and is now one of the most important events for the hospitality sector in Mid Cheshire. Could the Leader of the House arrange for a debate in Government time on the role of such events in town centre regeneration? Should she wish to conduct some empirical research prior to any debate, perhaps she would like to visit Northwich on the 16th.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Yes—with me joining her, no doubt.

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that lovely invitation. I think the Health Secretary, who is in his place, owes me a drink, so he might want to come with me to Northwich to have a little taste of a piña colada. I encourage Members from across the House to have a cocktail in Northwich very soon.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): Responsibly.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on the growing number of empty shops in town centres? In Dudley, the Conservative-hiked parking charges, current poor transport links and antisocial behaviour as well as the rise of online shopping are driving businesses away, damaging our local economy and community life. Town centres are vital spaces where people can meet each other; they foster a sense of belonging and pride, and they need to be revitalised.

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is doing a great job championing Dudley, which she represents. She is absolutely right: town centre regeneration, which has many different facets to it, needs a holistic approach and real leadership. Local areas need the powers, resources and policies to ensure that we can regenerate town centres such as Dudley, as this Government are committed to doing.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): Like most of us in this House, I am incredibly proud of the rich mix of communities that I represent. It was an absolute privilege last week to attend a meeting at the Faizan-e-Madina mosque alongside representatives from our cathedral, our chief of police, our fire services, the mosques and other faith and community leaders to discuss the implementation of our city-wide Islamophobia statement, which came from a motion against Islamophobia put forward by Councillor Jamil and—unlike some debates in this House—received cross-party support. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Councillor Jamil and Mr Choudhuri on their leadership on this important issue, and will she ensure that the Ministry of

[Andrew Pakes]

Housing, Communities and Local Government continues to support communities such as mine as we develop important cross-community initiatives?

Lucy Powell: I am pleased to hear of the leadership that councillors in my hon. Friend's constituency have brought to this matter. He is absolutely right: Islamophobia is a scourge across our society. We must do more to work together to stamp it out.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): For the final question, I call Paul Davies.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Paul Davies (Colne Valley) (Lab): It is always good to be last, isn't it? Last week, I had the pleasure of hosting Greenhead college, alongside my Kirklees colleagues, where we had some excellent discussions on a range of important topics, including the state of youth services. Under the previous Tory Governments, between 2010 and 2024, these services suffered a devastating 73% funding cut. Although £45 million has now been found and pledged and new strategies have been introduced, there remain inconsistencies. Does the Leader of the House agree that youth services are vital, and will the Government make a statement on their future?

Lucy Powell: Well, my hon. Friend is certainly one of my favourite MPs, even if he is not one of yours, Madam Deputy Speaker—last but certainly not least. He is absolutely right: youth services are critical to our communities. We are producing a bold, new national youth strategy, which will be coming to this House soon. I look forward to him contributing to it.

NHS 10-Year Plan

11.59 am

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall make a statement to the House on “Fit for the Future”, the Government's 10-year health plan for England.

There are moments in our national story when our choices define who we are. In 1948, the Attlee Government made a choice founded on fairness: that everyone in our country deserves to receive the care they need, not just the care they can afford. It enshrined in law, and in the service itself, our collective conviction that healthcare is not a privilege to be bought and sold, but a right to be cherished and protected.

Now it falls to our generation to make the same choice: to rebuild our national health service, and to protect in this century what Attlee's Government built for the last. That is the driving mission of our 10-year plan.

In September, Lord Darzi provided the diagnosis: the NHS was broken by 14 years of Conservative under-investment, and by their catastrophic top-down reorganisation. In the past year, Labour has put the NHS on the road to recovery. We promised 2 million extra appointments; we have delivered more than 4 million. We promised 1,000 new GPs on the frontline; we have recruited 1,900. We have taken almost a quarter of a million people off waiting lists, cutting them to their lowest level in two years. And we have launched an independent commission, chaired by Baroness Casey, to build a national consensus around a new national care service to meet the needs of older and disabled people into the 21st century.

Today, the Prime Minister has set out our prescription to get the NHS back on its feet and make it fit for the future. Our plan will deliver three big shifts. The first is from hospital to community. We will turn our national health service into a neighbourhood health service. The principle is simple: care should happen as locally as it can—digitally by default, in a patient's home if possible, in a neighbourhood health centre when needed, and in a hospital where necessary.

We will put neighbourhood health centres in every community, so people can see a GP, nurse, physio, care worker, and therapist, and they can get a test, scan or treatment for minor injuries, all under one roof. The NHS will be organised around patients, rather than patients having to organise their lives around the NHS. It will be easier and faster to see a GP. We will train thousands more, end the 8 am scramble, provide same-day consultations, and bring back the family doctor. If you are someone with multiple conditions and complex needs, the NHS will co-create a personal care plan, so your care is done with you, not to you.

Pharmacies will play an expanded role in the neighbourhood health service. They will manage long-term conditions, treat conditions such as obesity and high blood pressure, screen for disease and vaccinate against it. We will also reform the dental contract, to get more dentists doing NHS work, rebuilding NHS dentistry.

Over the course of this plan, the majority of the 135 million out-patient appointments done each year will be moved out of hospitals. The funding will follow, so a greater share of NHS investment is spent in primary and community care.

The second shift is from analogue to digital. No longer will NHS staff have to enter seven passwords to login to their computers, or spend hours writing notes and entering data. Our plan will liberate frontline staff from the parts of the job that they hate, so they can focus on the job that they love—caring for patients. For the first time ever, patients will be given real control over a single, secure and authoritative account of their data. The single patient record will mean that NHS staff can see medical records and know a patient's medical history, so they can provide them with the best possible care.

Wearable technology will feed in real-time health data, so patients' health can be monitored while they stay in the comfort of their own home, with clinicians reaching out at the first signs of deterioration. The NHS app will become the front door to the health service, delivering power to the patient. You will be able to: book and rearrange appointments for you, your children or a loved one you care for; get instant advice from an AI doctor in your pocket; leave feedback on your care and see what feedback other patients have left; choose where you are treated; book appointments in urgent care so you do not wait for hours; and refer yourself to a specialist where clinically appropriate. Of course, patients can already do all that, but only if they can afford private healthcare. With Labour's plan, every patient will receive a first-class service—whatever their background and whatever they earn.

The third shift is from sickness to prevention. Working with the food industry, we will make the healthy choice the easy choice to cut calories. We will roll out obesity jabs on the NHS. We will get Britain moving with our new NHS points scheme, and we will update school foods standards so that kids are fed healthy, nutritious meals. We will tackle the mental health crisis with support in every school to catch problems early, 24/7 support with virtual therapists for those with moderate need, and dedicated emergency departments for patients for when they reach crisis point.

The science is on our side. The revolution in artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data offers a golden opportunity to deliver better care at better value. New innovator passports and reform of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency will see medicines and technology rapidly adopted. Robotic surgery will become the norm in certain procedures, so patients recover from surgery at home rather than in hospital beds. The NHS will usher in a new age of medicine, leapfrogging disease so that we are predicting and preventing, rather than just diagnosing and treating. It is therefore the ambition of the plan to provide a genomic test for every newborn baby by 2035. Thanks to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, this plan is backed by an extra £29 billion a year by the end of the spending review period, as well as the biggest capital investment in the history of the NHS.

Alongside investment comes reform. This plan slashes unnecessary bureaucracy and devolves power and resource to the frontline. It abolishes more than 200 bodies, because listening to patients, guaranteeing safety and protecting whistleblowers is core business for the NHS and should never have been outsourced. The plan commits to publishing league tables to rank providers. We will intervene to turn around failing providers, and we will reinvent the foundation trust model in a new system of

earned autonomy. Pay will be tied to performance, so that excellence is recognised and failure has consequences. Tariffs will be reduced to boost productivity. Block contracts will end, with funding tied to outcomes. The plan gives power to the patient, so hospitals are financially rewarded for better service. It closes health inequalities by investing more in working-class communities, and it establishes a national investigation into maternity and neonatal services to deliver the truth, justice and improvement that bereaved families deserve.

I am sometimes told that NHS staff are resistant to change. On the contrary, they are crying out for it. They suffer the moral injury of seeing their patients treated in unfit conditions. They are ones driving innovation on the frontline, so their fingerprints are all over this plan. The public are desperate for change too. Each of us has our own story about the NHS and the difference it made to our lives. We also know the consequences of failure. To succeed, we need to defeat the cynicism that says that nothing ever changes.

We know that the change in our plan is possible because it is already happening. We have toured the length and breadth of the country and scouted the world for the best examples of reform. If Australia can effectively serve communities living in the outback, we can surely meet the needs of rural England. If community health teams can go door to door to prevent illness in Brazil, we can certainly do the same in Bradford. We know that we can build the neighbourhood health service, because teams in Cornwall, Camden, Northumbria, and Stratford—where I was with the Prime Minister and Chancellor this morning—are already showing us how to do it. We will take the best of the NHS to the rest of the NHS. We will apply to best examples of innovation from around the world to benefit people here at home. Above all else, we will give power to the patient. This plan fulfils Nye Bevan's commitment in 1948 to put a megaphone to the mouth of every patient. It will restore the founding promise of the NHS to be there for us when we need it.

Of course, we know that there are those on the right who are willing us to fail. They will exploit the crisis in the NHS in order to dismantle it. The hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) and his cronies argue that universal healthcare could be afforded in the 20th century but not in the 21st. Labour rejects their declinist pessimism and so do the public. But that is the choice—it is change or bust, and we choose change.

We know that the British people are counting on us. It falls to us to ensure that the NHS not only survives but thrives, and we will not let our country down. Of course, if we succeed, we will be able to say with pride that will echo down the decades of the 21st century that we were the generation who built an NHS fit for the future and a fairer Britain where everyone lives well for longer. I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

12.11 pm

Edward Argar (Melton and Syston) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his typical courtesy in providing advance sight not only of his statement but of his plan. I am grateful, and others on the Government Front

[Edward Argar]

Bench might learn a thing or two from him. I am pleased to see the plan published. This Secretary of State is a rare thing these days: one whose announcements do tend to survive largely intact for more than a week. In the case of the plan, it is vital that it does stick.

The Secretary of State is not known to be short on ambition, and to be fair that is reflected in his plan; it is ambitious. I believe that his long-term goals are right and that the reforms he has set out build on the reforms that the Conservatives set out and carried out. The desire to shift care from hospital to community, to better use technology and to move to prevention is not new at all, but it remains vital.

The NHS undoubtedly needs reform, not just more cash—it is not fiscally sustainable in the long term to have 38% of day-to-day Government spending going on the NHS—so we need to focus on outcomes, not just inputs. But the plan, while welcome, is still sketchy on some of the details of delivery and how it will be paid for without the funds that the Secretary of State mentioned being eaten by pay rises and by inflation, as well as how that shift will be staffed. Greater use of the app is right, and builds on the amazing work done on the app by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay) when he was Secretary of State. Greater use of technology and of genomics is right, and the Secretary of State's big five tech bets are largely right, but, as he knows, tech alone will not deliver this; people will, so a workforce plan that is clearly aligned with his strategy is vital.

Neighbourhood health centres are one of the measures at the heart of the Secretary of State's plan. The concept is an interesting one, but it does throw up a number of questions that I hope he can answer in the spirit in which they are asked. Will the providers of those new centres be NHS public sector organisations, private sector organisations or a mixture? How will the centres fit with GP provision and other services without duplication or fishing in the same pool for staff? What assessment has he made of the cost of new buildings and technology to go in them? How many centres does he envisage, and by when? Crucially, how will he ensure that a public-private partnership model will avoid the downsides of the Blair-Brown private finance initiative model?

I ask those questions from a desire not to see this fail but to succeed, because it is in all our interests that the Secretary of State does succeed, but that will take time. Given that, on page 71 of his plan he talks about the need for “immediate opportunities” to be seized. Although there will be others, may I take the opportunity to suggest just one? He should deliver on the pre-election commitment for fracture liaison services to be delivered in all communities, as campaigned for by the Royal Osteoporosis Society, *The Mail on Sunday*, the *Express* and many others. That policy would deliver savings within the comprehensive spending review period. Similarly, Melton Mowbray in my constituency has a fantastic community hospital—there will be many up and down the country—and I hope that such hospitals will be a part of delivering more services in the community.

On maternity care, I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to a national investigation into maternity scandals, but I hope that will not stop him from delivering on the work done by the hon. Member for

Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and Theo Clarke, which included measures that can be implemented now to help improve maternity safety.

On systems reform, may I offer the Secretary of State a couple of words of caution? One is on folding the Health Services Safety Investigations Body into the Care Quality Commission, even as a discrete entity within it. HSSIB is not a regulator and is not designed as such, and it is important that those distinctions are not blurred in making that change. Similarly, may I urge him to be wary of further moving integrated care boards to larger geographies—they are at risk of becoming again the old regional health authorities—as that will move them further away from the local communities they serve and the entities providing social care in those communities with whom they must interact?

That brings me finally to a significant question hanging over the plan. Unless we move faster to adjust to the challenges of social care and put it on a sustainable footing, these reforms risk failing to seize the genuine opportunity presented. In the move from cross-party talks to an independent commission, we risk losing that opportunity. Crucially, I ask the Secretary of State again to consider bringing forward the end date of that commission so that we can go further and faster on social care.

I have often said to the Secretary of State that where he is wrong we will rightly hold him to account and challenge him, but where he is right we will offer constructive support. The plan, by and large, does say the right things. We must shift to outcomes and not focus continually on inputs, and we must do that through real and genuine reform. The challenges he faces will be in the detail, much of which is still to be confirmed, and crucially for the Government, in the actual delivery. He should not underestimate those challenges. I will work with him to improve the plan where it needs it, but I will support him where he pledges and brings genuine reform to our healthcare system. His plan will have a key test: will patients see the difference, and when will they see the difference? In all that we do, it is vital, as we reform our NHS, that patients are at the heart of our deliberations and our plans.

Wes Streeting: I thank the shadow Secretary of State for his constructive approach to what does need to be a successful plan for the next decade, to get our NHS back on its feet, to make it fit for the future and to make sure we improve the health of the nation. Aside from the lines that he was no doubt given to trot out at the beginning—he almost said them with conviction—we know that we can count on him to be rather more serious and sensible than the display we saw from the Opposition yesterday.

I turn to the shadow Secretary of State's points. He was right to say that investment needs to go alongside reform. That is why the spending review only a matter of weeks ago set out the Chancellor's commitment to the NHS and NHS reform. The Government are providing a £29 billion real-terms increase—a £53 billion cash increase—in annual NHS day-to-day spending by 2028-29. That funding will support the first steps towards delivering the reforms, the service improvements and the new technology set out in the plan.

But investment alone is not enough. One of the reasons we are paying more and more for worse and poorer outcomes is that we have the wrong care in the

wrong place at the wrong time. Contrary to what we read in some newspaper columns—on the radio this morning I heard the hon. Member for Clacton once again attacking the NHS's equitable principles and funding model—the problem is not the model of funding; it is the model of care. That is why the shift to neighbourhood health is essential for delivering better outcomes for patients and better value for taxpayers.

The technology coming down the track, and indeed the technology we already have, will drive the big productivity gains in the system that have eluded us. In recent years, the previous Government invested in more staff, but they put all those staff in hospitals to work in an undercapitalised NHS. If there are more inputs but not the enablers to deliver the service, we do not see the responding improvements in output and impact. That drives poorer productivity, poorer value for money and poor outcomes for patients, and that is the approach that we are changing.

If, for example, we roll out, as we will, ambient AI to all GPs, and we make sure that in their interactions with patients we liberate them from being glued to the screen, filling out the forms and drafting the letters, because that is all done automatically before the GP spends a few moments checking over to make sure it is right—if we can just save 90 seconds in every GP appointment—we will save the equivalent time of 2,000 more GPs. That is how we get more bang for the buck, that is how we drive productivity improvements and that is how we deliver better care and better value.

That is why the previous Government's workforce plan was not right. It assumed that the NHS just needed growth at the same rates and in the same way as always. In fact, so implausible were the assumptions in that plan that if we had continued with the rate of growth that they had set out, by the end of the century 100% of our entire country would be working in the NHS. I know we love the NHS and we love the people who work in it, but I do not think that everyone in our country can or should be working in the national health service. To reassure the right hon. Gentleman, we will, this autumn, set out a new workforce plan that aligns with this 10-year plan.

The shadow Secretary of State asked about neighbourhood health centres. We aim to go for 250 to 300 new neighbourhood health centres by the end of this plan and 40 to 50 over the course of this Parliament. They will be NHS providers and we will have a combination of new builds and the refurbishment and rejuvenation of underutilised existing estate, both in the NHS and in the public sector. Therefore, the cost of each neighbourhood health centre will vary, from the low millions to around £20 million, depending on whether it is an upgrade, a refurb and expansion or a new build.

Given the undercapitalisation of the NHS that we inherited, even the record investment from public sources that the Chancellor has provided will not be enough to deal with the capital backlog. That is why, as set out in the Government's infrastructure plan, with care and caution, and keeping in mind the mistakes that were made by the private finance initiative, we are looking at alternative private sources of investment to make sure that we can go further and faster on capital improvement, particularly in the neighbourhood health service.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me to commit again to fracture liaison services. Those services have a demonstrable impact on keeping people well and providing

both better outcomes for patients and better value for taxpayers. That is why we want to see them rolled out across the country.

On maternity, I welcome his support for the investigation. NHS England is in the third year of the three-year plan put in place by the previous Government and we have sought to support that progress and not to interfere. Yet as we have seen, even with the most recent CQC report into the trust in Nottingham, we have so much more to do and an entire change in approach and culture is needed, let alone a change in practice and behaviour. I am committed to working with all parliamentary party groups across this House and to making sure that the expertise and insight that we have right across these Benches, on both sides of the Chamber, help us to drive maternity improvements.

He asked about us rolling HSSIB into the CQC. Let me provide him with this reassurance. HSSIB has been a really effective body, but we cannot justify the duplication of back-office functions and the inefficiency that comes with that. However, the CQC, when we came into office, was in such a dire state that we had to replace the leadership and we have in place an improvement plan. The House therefore has my assurance that we will not roll HSSIB into the Care Quality Commission until we are assured that the CQC is back to the standards that we expect for it to perform its core duties today, let alone the work it will do with HSSIB housed within the CQC.

On ICBs, I will not measure success through the number of bodies in the NHS; I think that has led us to where we are. However, I am committed to making sure that as we devolve more power, more responsibility and more resource closer to the frontline, to system leaders and to provider leaders, we also make sure that we have in place democratic accountability, so that Members of Parliament, local councils and metro mayors can influence and shape healthcare where they live.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about social care. We are not waiting for Casey. The spending review gave an additional £4 billion to social care. We are delivering the biggest expansion of carer's allowance since the 1970s and a significant increase in the disabled facilities grant. The Deputy Prime Minister and I will also shortly set out how we will deliver the first every fair pay agreements for the care workforce, building real social care progression.

On neighbourhood health, social care has to be part of it. In the context of this plan, social care features because it has a role to play on admission avoidance and speeding up delayed discharges. However, we know that social care is important in its own right and that is why it is important that it has its own commission.

Finally, the shadow Secretary of State asked about whether people will see and feel these improvements. We know on the Government Benches that we will be judged by results and by whether people can feel the change that we are delivering. All I would say to people watching our proceedings today is this: in our first year, we promised 2 million more appointments to cut waiting lists—we doubled that; we promised to deliver 1,000 more GPs—we have almost doubled that; and we promised that people would see the NHS moving in the right direction—waiting lists are at the lowest point for two years. We know that there is more to do, but I hope that the progress people have seen under this Labour

[*Wes Streeting*]

Government reassures them that, when it comes to our national health service, if anything, we under-promise and over-deliver. We know that people will see and feel the change. I say respectfully, given the shadow Secretary of State's constructive tone, that that will be the difference between a Labour Government and a Conservative one.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I call the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee.

Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham Erdington) (Lab): As the acting Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, I am delighted that the 10-year plan was finally launched today. I thank the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care for presenting it to the House.

The plan represents a major opportunity for constructive reform of the health and social care system, and I am delighted that the Secretary of State will come to the Committee on 14 July to be scrutinised on it. Many organisations have waited patiently for the 10-year plan to be published. Will the Secretary of State explain how the plan will help restore the promise of a first-class service in the NHS?

Wes Streeting: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and for the leadership she is showing to the Select Committee while the substantive Chair, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), is off on mat leave. What a delight it was to see the Committee Chair on the Terrace this week with her new baby. That was really delightful and we wish her well.

One of the exciting things for me about today's launch is just how widespread the support has been from across a range of different organisations that we will need to work with to deliver the plan. Whether it is the royal colleges and the trade unions, the organisations that represent patients, the wide range of healthcare charities or, crucially, frontline staff, everyone is up for this change and everyone is desperate for it to succeed.

We will not get everything right and we will make mistakes along the way. We will listen and always learn and reflect. We know in the Government that we cannot do this without effective leadership from Ministers, but nor can Government do this alone. It is now our responsibility to mobilise the more than 1.5 million people who work in the NHS, the more than 1.5 million people who work in social care and our whole country behind a national mission to get our NHS back on its feet, to make sure it is fit for the future and to make sure, fundamentally, that we attack the injustices that lead to ill health, so that we have a fairer Britain where everyone lives well for longer.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of the plan this morning. After years of Conservative failure, a plan for the future of the NHS is welcome and Liberal Democrats support the Secretary of State in his vision to shift the NHS to a community-focused, preventive service. However, I seek his reassurance on some questions.

In the 143 pages of the 10-year plan, there is only a passing reference to social care. Everyone knows that we cannot fix the NHS without fixing social care. With so many people unable to return home from hospital to get the care they need, solving the crisis in social care is a huge part of moving care out of hospital and into the community. Will the Secretary of State bring forward the Casey review, so that it reports in full this year, and reinstate the cross-party talks, so that consensus can be reached on the future of care?

I welcome the idea of a neighbourhood health centre, but how does that interact with the plan for GPs? The 10-year plan implies that GP contracts will encourage them to cover a huge geographic area of 50,000 people. In North Shropshire, that would be two or three market towns combined and would span dozens of miles. Can the Secretary of State reassure me that there will still be a physical health centre, accessible to all, and that in areas with little public transport in particular, people will be able to access care when they need it?

Finally, the plan hinges on the shift to digital solutions, and that is not without risk. The use of the NHS app is critical to what happens. How will the Secretary of State ensure that those without a smartphone—because they cannot afford one, do not feel confident using one or simply do not have adequate broadband or internet—can access the NHS? Many elderly and disabled people in particular who are digitally excluded will feel worried by today's announcement.

Wes Streeting: I welcome the Liberal Democrat support for the plan, and the constructive way in which Liberal Democrats have sought to work with us since the general election in pursuit of better health and social care services. I understand the point the hon. Member makes on social care. I will not repeat at length the points I made to the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Melton and Syston (Edward Argar), but I hope the House is reassured by the action we are already taking on social care, whether through greater funding, the expansion of the carer's allowance, increasing the disabled facilities grant, the fair pay agreements, and ensuring a partnership with social care to deliver better neighbourhood health services.

Given what we have said about the importance of data, digital connections and better systems, I should say that in some parts of the country, the social care system is ahead of the NHS; it makes better use of data, and joins up systems in a more effective and efficient way. The NHS can learn lots from social care, as well as the other way round. I will take on board the representations of the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Front Benchers on speeding up the Casey commission—that is duly noted.

I absolutely reassure the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) on the point that she raises about neighbourhood health centres. One of the reasons we want to devolve so much power in the NHS is that I genuinely think that the closer decisions are made to the communities they serve, the better the outcomes and the provision. A one-size-fits-all approach to neighbourhood care simply will not work. My constituency is on the London-Essex border, and there are three hospitals within a 15-to-20 minute drive of where I live. In many rural towns, coastal communities and villages across the country, there is not even one hospital within that distance. In fact, people are driving huge distances

across the country to get to a hospital. On our priority of rolling out neighbourhood health centres, I want to reassure Members on both sides of the House that we will start with the areas of greatest inequality and need, and communities where people have to travel far to their nearest hospital, so that people can genuinely receive care closer to home and, indeed, at home. Technology can play a big role in that.

I understand the cynicism about digital roll-out. Government IT projects do not have a great reputation historically; let us be clear about that. We are learning from past mistakes and ensuring that we have the right experts in the room to help us. So much of that is about the digital clinical leadership helping to marry the best scientific and technological minds in our country to the best clinical and scientific experience to ensure that we get this absolutely right. We cannot afford to fail or be left behind. The tragedy in the country today is that there are so many brilliant innovators in life sciences and med tech who are designing and making things here in Britain, but when it comes to scaling up, they are shipping out, because the NHS has been a poor partner and a poor customer. We will change that; we will create more in Britain, and ensure that it is rolled out right across the country. Staff will be liberated from the drudgery and toil of unnecessary bureaucracy and admin that can be automated, and patients will have more ease, convenience, choice and control at their fingertips. This revolution is happening, and it is crucial that no one is left behind.

I take seriously the point the hon. Member made about the digitally disconnected, and there are two responses to that. First, people like me who book via the touch of a button free up telephone lines, get out of the way of reception desks, and free up more capacity for face-to-face and telephone appointments. I believe strongly in horses for courses, and in patient choice. Those patients who want to pick up the phone or who want to be seen face to face must be given that choice and control, and we will give it to them.

Secondly, working with the Science, Innovation and Technology Secretary, we will deal with the fundamental problem of digital disconnection in our country. I knocked on the door of one of my party members when I was canvassing down her street because I had heard she was ill. She opened the door, and I asked if she was okay and if she needed anything from the shops. She looked me up and down as if I had just said the most ridiculous thing and said, "Oh no, dear. Thank you very much, but I do my shopping online with my iPad." We should not assume that because people are older, they are naturally digitally disconnected. They are some of the most tech-savvy people, and we have to ensure that those skills are enjoyed by all, in keeping with the NHS's principle of ensuring that healthcare is available universally to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): Order. Some 60 Members wish to participate. Clearly, the statement will likely impact every constituency in the country, so I understand why so many hon. Members wish to question the Secretary of State. It is our intention to try to call everybody, but there is important business later

that has to be reached. May I urge brevity on all Members, and short answers on the Secretary of State? Health Committee member Jen Craft will now set an example.

Jen Craft (Thurrock) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The heart, soul and lifeblood of our NHS are the people who work in it. I doubt there is anyone in this House who does not owe a personal debt of gratitude to a health care worker. Can the Secretary of State reassure me that the fingerprints of NHS workers are all over this 10-year plan, and that it has been designed and produced with all their valuable inputs?

Wes Streeting: I certainly can give my hon. Friend that reassurance. We launched the biggest consultation since the NHS began. We had over 270,000 contributions, 250,000 thousand responses and almost 2 million visits to the [change.nhs.uk](https://www.change.nhs.uk) website, so I can absolutely give people the assurance that staff and patients' fingerprints are all over the plan. That is why we have such a rich plan, in which people can have confidence.

Sir Jeremy Hunt (Godalming and Ash) (Con): There is much to welcome in today's plan, particularly the proposal to bring back family doctors, which I tried to do but frankly did not succeed in doing when I was Secretary of State, so we all wish him well with that, but does he agree that as we seek to transform out-of-hospital care, it is vital that we do not take our eye off the ball and allow another Mid Staffs inside hospitals? Does he also agree that it is essential that the CQC gives overall ratings and calls a spade a spade when it comes to the quality of care in hospitals, so that we know whether the care delivered by hospitals in our constituencies is outstanding or good, and if not—if it requires improvement or is inadequate—that action can be taken, and lives can be saved?

Wes Streeting: I strongly agree with my predecessor on that. It is important that the CQC's reports and judgments can be understood by the public and the people responsible for carrying out the improvements that it recommends. Via the NHS app, we will have much more transparency for patients about the range of providers, the quality of services and the views of other patients. That will give patients the freedom to choose, in a more data-driven way, where and when they are treated. There is also the importance of data-driven face-to-face inspections by experts. We can also have early warning systems that would alert people who hold his office and mine that something is going seriously wrong, so that we can intervene before more lives are lost unnecessarily.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Select Committee member Josh Fenton-Glynn.

Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab): The shifts announced today, from analogue to digital, and from hospital to community, are exactly the shifts that will make the NHS stable for the future. Will the Secretary of State elaborate on the "analogue to digital" point? A practice manager in Calder Valley recently said to me, "It's all very well looking at artificial intelligence, but it takes us half an hour to turn on a computer." What more will he do to ensure that we improve the NHS digital offer for everyone working in the health service?

Wes Streeting: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. On whether people feel cautious optimism or quiet scepticism based on the experience that he describes, I have heard the same thing so many times. “I love AI, genomics and machine learning—yep, great. But can you just give me the basic technology that works?” Well, I can confirm that in 2026-27 we will make sure that we create a single log-on for staff. I am not holding my breath for that to be the front-page splash tomorrow, but that one thing, as well as saving loads of staff time, will give them confidence that genuine change is coming.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): As always, the Secretary of State makes a good fist of an impossible job, but I think we all know in our heart of hearts that this model, which takes 38% of public funding, is unsustainable in the long term. He mentions the Australian outback; I have been a voice in the wilderness, urging him to replicate the excellent Australian system, which is a mix of public and private. I will not do that again now, but may I ask him to at least look at Australia’s pharmaceutical benefits scheme, which ensures national procurement of medicines, so that people who have a medical card there get their medicines cheaper than people here?

Wes Streeting: I am always willing to search the world for ways to spend taxpayers’ money more effectively, and the right hon. Gentleman makes some good arguments on making sure that we get a good deal on medicines pricing, and on using the real procurement power of the single payer model—but therein lies the answer to the other part of his challenge. It is the single payer model, created in 1948, that makes the NHS ideally placed to get much better value in procurement, and to harness and lead the revolution in AI, machine learning, genomics and big data, in a way that many insurance-based systems struggle with. I assure him that if there were a better way of funding the NHS, I would have the political courage to make the argument, but we looked at other systems of funding and concluded that that is really not the problem. It is not the model of funding; it is the model of care, and that is what we are going to sort out.

Alex McIntyre (Gloucester) (Lab): When I knock on doors in my Gloucester constituency, I hear time and again about the importance of tackling the 8 am scramble for a GP appointment, and the difficulty many of my constituents faced under the Conservative Government getting the care they needed. Will my right hon. Friend explain how Labour’s 10-year plan for health will deliver on the Government’s mission to get treatment out of hospitals and into the community, so that every one of my constituents can get the care they need in the community in which they live?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question; he is such a strong voice for the people of Gloucester. We are already delivering improvements in general practice, with 1,900 more GPs employed on the frontline, £900 million more for general practice, and the first contract agreed with GPs for quite some years. We are working in genuine partnership with GPs, who will be at the centre of the neighbourhood health service and of neighbourhood health centres. I am determined to ensure that we do things with our friends in general practice, not to them. Where things are working, I have no interest in going in like a bull in a china shop and

imposing top-down change unnecessarily; we learned that lesson from Lord Lansley. I am confident that we have a plan that GPs will relish and embrace, and that they will feel reassured that the future of general practice is bright. After years of campaigning for a Government to rebuild general practice, they finally have a Government who are on their side.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement on his plan. I note the comments on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, but the Scottish Medicines Consortium is the envy of the other three nations. I would like to offer him an early win. There is a drug, Enhertu, for the treatment of women with secondary breast cancer; it prolongs life. It is available in Scotland and in 20 other nations. Will he review the situation in England under this plan?

Wes Streeting: We work closely with NICE to make sure that we consider, in an evidence-based way, the case for prescribing new medicines. We want patients to have access to the latest treatments and technology, and we work with the pharmaceutical industry to get as many medicines as possible to patients. We definitely need growth in this area.

I have a counter-offer for the hon. Gentleman. I notice that the Scottish Government are now on their fifth health plan; none of the others has worked. We are always willing to help, and I will put a copy of the plan in the post to my Scottish counterpart, but I will not hold out much hope. In England and Wales, where a Labour Government are in place, waiting lists are falling; in Scotland, waiting lists are rising, and we have heard astonishing admissions of failure from Ministers whose party has been in power for almost 20 years. It is very clear: Scotland needs an alternative. Scotland’s NHS needs an alternative: Scottish Labour.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend’s statement. Yesterday was one year to the day since I completed my radiotherapy treatment for prostate cancer. I was very lucky—my cancer was caught at stage 3 and was treatable—but I had to ask my GP for the prostate-specific antigen test that got me my treatment. I know my right hon. Friend has that said he wants to see a national screening programme aimed particularly at black men over 45, one in four of whom will get prostate cancer, people like me who have a family history of prostate cancer, and men over the age of 50. Will he ensure that we have a national screening programme as part of the 10-year plan?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of screening, and it is brilliant to see him fighting fit. That is exactly the sort of outcome that we want from effective diagnosis and treatment. He is also right to highlight the racial inequalities in this area. It cannot be right in this decade of the 21st century that black men are twice as likely as white men to die of prostate cancer. The national cancer plan will come out later this year, and the screening committee is looking at the case he makes. He will find at the centre of the 10-year plan a commitment not just to diagnose earlier and treat faster, but to tackle the gross health inequalities that blight our society in a way that is simply not tolerable in the 21st century.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the NHS 10-year plan include an assisted dying scheme? If the present private Member's Bill runs out of time at the end of this parliamentary Session, and thus falls, will the Secretary of State reintroduce the legislation as a Government Bill in the next parliamentary Session?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that question—[*Laughter.*] Given that the Bill is still passing through Parliament, assisted dying is not referred to in this 10-year-plan, but I assure both this House and the other place that regardless of different views among Ministers and across the House, we will abide by the law of the land. We will abide by the will of this House and the other place. If the Bill times out in the other place, I have no doubt that someone else will bring it back. I suspect it will not be a Government Bill.

It is important that we have the debate and that we scrutinise the legislation well. I am proud of the way the House has conducted the debate. My hon. Friend the Minister for Care, who is not in his place now, along with the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Sarah Sackman), have done an exemplary job in supporting people on both sides of the debate to give the Bill the detailed scrutiny that it had here and that it will no doubt have in the other place. That is a credit to this House.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Let me say to the Secretary of State: well done. This is a really ambitious and excellent programme.

On the subject of cancer care, in the past few years we have both had good experiences of the NHS at its best, but it is important to improve services by getting the NHS to work with universities and the voluntary sector in local cancer alliances. Will he look at what I think is an unintended consequence of that? If a local cancer alliance is funded by an NHS trust, its funding continues; if it is funded by an ICB, as the South Yorkshire cancer alliance is, its funding will be cut in line with the rest of the ICB's budget. That is not fair. Whether an alliance suffers cuts depends on which organisation funds it. Will he see if he can rectify that?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. Given his expertise, it means a lot. I am especially grateful to the GPs in his constituency with whom he and I spent time; that experience really had an impact on my thinking about neighbourhood health.

On cancer, I am happy to look at the issue he raises with the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Ashley Dalton). We want to get this right. Cancer alliances have played a valuable role, and we want to see that approach to joined-up working between research, diagnostics and treatment go from strength to strength, so I will happily pick that up.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): In the constructive spirit that has characterised much of this discussion, I welcome much of what the Secretary of State has announced today: bringing care closer to people in their homes, investing more in prevention—it is all good stuff. But there seems to be a missed opportunity here. In the 143 pages of this document, there is virtually

no mention of social care. Lord Darzi told us last year that we cannot fix the NHS without fixing social care. Six months ago today, the Secretary of State promised cross-party talks and urgent work on the Casey commission, but the commission is delayed and the cross-party talks have never materialised. Will the Secretary of State please treat the care crisis with the urgency it deserves and bring forward that work, so that we can build the necessary cross-party consensus to fix the care crisis?

Wes Streeting: First, I thank the hon. Member for the Green party's support for so much of the 10-year plan. She is right to highlight the importance of social care to resolving the NHS crisis. Let me reassure her that we are acting urgently as we await the first report of the Casey commission. The Chancellor did that with the Budget and the spending review, providing £4 billion more of investment. We have done that with the biggest increase in carer's allowance since the 1970s, and with the disabled facilities grant, which does not just mean more ramps and home adaptations but more freedom, more dignity and more independence for disabled people. The Deputy Prime Minister and I will shortly set out how we will deliver fair pay agreements, and social care will absolutely be part of the neighbourhood health team. I hope that that reassures the hon. Member.

Let me also reassure parties across the House that we will wait for the Casey commission to launch. I would like to be able to proceed with the actions we will be taking in this Parliament and, crucially, with the long-term plan for social care in a cross-party way, to build that genuine national consensus—I would be delighted to achieve that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I call the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for this really ambitious and bold plan to make sure our NHS is fit for the future. He will be aware that Professor Ian Abbs, the chief executive of St Thomas' hospital in my constituency, will step down later this year. I want to thank him for his dedication and compassion in leading St Thomas', especially during the covid crisis, when the hospital cared for so many patients, including the then Prime Minister in his crucial hour.

The Secretary of State may be aware that Royal College of Nursing analysis shows that by 2029, 11,000 nurses may have left the profession after working less than 10 years in the service. Nurses cite exhaustion, mental health and stress as their reasons for leaving the profession. Can he give us an update on how we will ensure we have a workforce that is fit, so that we can achieve our ambitious 10-year plan for the NHS?

Wes Streeting: I am so grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. I pay tribute to Professor Ian Abbs. He is an outstanding NHS leader, and we have loved working with him. As with many people of his calibre moving on from their positions of leadership in the NHS, it is a bit like the Hotel California—you can check out any time you like, but you can never leave. We will not let him drift off into a quiet retirement; we are determined to make use of his expertise.

[*Wes Streeting*]

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the importance of nursing. Nurses and midwives will play an increasingly important role in neighbourhood health. They are central to our shift to a modern, digital NHS. They are clinical leaders in their own right. Following the 10-year health plan, the chief nursing officer for England will work with the professions to develop a strategy that will make nursing and midwifery modern careers of choice, to address the decline in applications. As I have set out this week, we are looking forward to working closely with the Royal College of Nursing and Unison—of which, I should say, I am a member—to make sure that the status, the conditions and the impact of nursing on our NHS go from strength to strength, because nurses are the backbone of the NHS. We would not have a national health service without them.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I join others in welcoming much of the Secretary of State's plan, but I want to return to the question of the Health Services Safety Investigations Body, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Melton and Syston (Edward Argar) referred. I welcome the tone of the Secretary of State's response to that part of my right hon. Friend's questions, but will he agree to meet those of us from the Select Committee—a cross-party group of people—who campaigned over many years to bring this body, which is still in its infancy, into existence before making any further decisions on it?

As my right hon. Friend says, HSSIB is not a regulator, and to put it in with a regulator will create confusion about what it is. If he were Secretary of State for Transport, he would never dream of putting the air accidents investigation branch into the Civil Aviation Authority, because they have completely different and separate functions. That needs to be understood across the health service, and it is obviously not well understood at the moment.

Wes Streeting: I welcome the hon. Member's constructive approach. Of course, we are happy to receive representations on HSSIB. I would just like to outline the problem we are trying to solve, which is that the patient safety landscape is increasingly cluttered. We have far too many bodies trying to do the same thing, cutting across each other, and for frontline staff and leaders on the receiving end of those many and often competing instructions, it can actually make things less safe rather than more safe. I really value the expertise in the Health Services Safety Investigations Body. We do not want to see that expertise lost, nor do we want to move it into the CQC prematurely, before the CQC is ready to receive it. I hope that that reassures him, but we are happy to have that conversation.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my right hon. Friend, his Ministers and officials on putting together a vision for the NHS for the next 10 years. It will optimise how we live, but it is also really important that we can palliate how we die. Could he set out how he will ensure that we do not have a postcode lottery for specialist palliative care services, so that we can palliate well for everybody across our country? Will he meet with the leaders of the independent commission on palliative and end-of-life care to ensure that we get this right really quickly and for the future?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. We want a society where everyone receives high-quality, compassionate care from diagnosis through to end of life. Palliative and end-of-life care services will have a big role to play in our shift out of hospitals and into the community, the emphasis on personalisation for patients and their families, and the joining up between primary and community care services. I would be delighted to hear more from the commission. It is really important that we get this right. Regardless of where people stood on the debate about assisted dying, the one thing that united everyone across the House was a belief that palliative care needs to be so much better than it is today, and that is what we will work on together.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): There is much that unites us in this House about the excellence in this 10-year plan—in particular the fact that the NHS needs reform and that, of course, healthcare should always be free at the point of delivery. But brilliant frontline staff, doctors and nurses say to me that the issue is the bureaucracy and the unnecessary processes and procedures, including in social care. Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that the senior management of the NHS are absolutely determined to reduce the bureaucracy, in particular around technology and the delays caused by GDPR?

Wes Streeting: The NHS leadership are absolutely determined to work with us to reduce waste, inefficiency and bureaucracy. We have in Sir Jim Mackey an outstanding chief executive of the NHS, and he and his team are working closely with Ministers to make sure we achieve that goal.

As for the funding model, I just do not know where the Reform party stands from one day of the week to the next. I heard the leader of the hon. Member's party on the radio this morning doing the dance of the seven veils. He is normally very good at being a straight-talking politician—that is how he likes to present himself—but I cannot follow what the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) thinks about this issue. Does he support a taxpayer-funded universal NHS free at the point of use? [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] I do not think he does. Does he support the European-style insurance system? I think he probably does—it is the only European thing he has ever supported, by the way. We are in no doubt: the NHS needs reform, but it needs the Reform party like a hole in the head.

Mr James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): I commend not only my right hon. Friend and his team on today's 10-year plan but also the leadership and Budget of our right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who made today and the next 10 years of our NHS possible. For too long, the NHS has been stuck in crisis mode. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will remember taking an important call while in my constituency, and he will know that life expectancy in Bury North can vary by seven years in wards just one mile apart. In East ward, Redvales and Moorside, where he took that call, child poverty rates now reach 42%. Can I ask him to ensure that those wards get a healthy share of the new funding for working-class communities, so that we can start to close the health gaps and give every child the chance of a long, healthy life?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; it was on a snowy day of campaigning for him in Bury North that I received the phone call that would change my life, giving me my kidney cancer diagnosis. Despite that fact, I have since been back to Bury North; I am not saying that it was his bad luck—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ashley Dalton): It was not causation.

Wes Streeting: It was coincidence rather than causation, as my hon. Friend the cancer Minister says—although, given both our experiences, we will rethink our visit schedule to Bury.

On a serious note, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Frith) is absolutely right to make the link between poverty, particularly child poverty, and ill health. The last Labour Government lifted 400,000 children out of poverty; I am so proud to think that when in the first year of this Labour Government we chose to extend free school meals to half a million children from low-income families, with that one measure on one day we lifted 100,000 children out of poverty. That is the difference Labour Governments make, and that is how we will deliver not just an NHS fit for the future, but a fairer, more equal, more just society.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): I look forward to studying the detail of this plan, but I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to neighbourhood health centres and likewise his commitment in a previous answer to rural communities. May I therefore offer him a golden opportunity? He will have heard me over many years in this House call for funding to build a new health centre in the village of Long Crendon, which lost its GP practice during the pandemic. They have the land, they have the planning permission and it will cost less than his lower number of £200 million to build. Will he convert words to delivery and commit to Long Crendon?

Wes Streeting: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support with the plan, which I am sure is in no way connected to the fact that he wants some money out of us for that neighbourhood health centre. I will take his question as the first bid we have had from those on the Opposition Benches, and I look forward to receiving those representations from him.

Sojan Joseph (Ashford) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know how important improving mental health support is to me. I hope that what the 10-year plan says about access to mental health provision will help to address the long waiting times for mental health services that the Government inherited. I particularly welcome what he said about using the NHS app for patients to self-refer for various treatments. I hope that that will cover talking therapies as well. Does he share my belief that opening up access to talking therapies in that way will enable more people to get that effective treatment at the right time, so that they can better manage their condition?

Wes Streeting: I thank my hon. Friend for his service to our country and our NHS. We are so lucky to have his expertise in the House. I am really proud that this Government will deliver mental health support in every primary and secondary school in the country and

neighbourhood mental health services in every community. We will also ensure that people who are in mental health crisis do not end up in busy, noisy, overwhelming A&E departments, but will instead go to new mental health emergency departments, which we aim to roll out across 50% of type 1 A&E departments—either co-located or, if not, certainly nearby. I look forward to working with him on that.

My hon. Friend is quite right to emphasise the importance of talking therapies. That is how we not only help people to achieve their best when they are young and in education, but ensure that people are supported to stay in the world of work or to find work. We know there is a demonstrable link between mental health and wellbeing, good work and good outcomes. That is very relevant this week.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): I welcome the Secretary of State's 10-year plan. In October, in response to my Westminster Hall debate on the national cancer plan, the Government committed to publishing one later this year. I am confident that that will happen in the autumn, and the wider cancer community is equally enthusiastic. However, the 10-year plan announced today makes only a brief mention of the national cancer plan. Can the Secretary of State confirm that improved diagnosis, improved screening for at-risk groups, improved treatment outcomes, concentration on rare cancers and cancers in young people, better and continued workforce planning, more support and funding for research, better relationships with drug companies and much more will be part of the national cancer plan?

Wes Streeting: I thought for a moment there that the hon. Gentleman, having called for the plan, was going to write it. I can reassure him that he has covered all the right areas; I am delighted that he is as enthusiastic as we and the whole cancer community are about the plan. We deliberately did not go into specific conditions in the 10-year plan for health, because otherwise it would have turned into a Christmas tree, with every condition group trying to attach its bauble to it, but it is really important that this 10-year plan creates the rising tide that lifts all ships—including, as he notes, not just common conditions, but the rare ones too.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State on bringing forward a bold and ambitious plan for our national health service. We know that by 2050 there will be up to 4 million people living with sight loss, so we also need eye healthcare that is fit for the future. Can my right hon. Friend tell me that his plan will end the postcode lottery, join up primary and secondary care, tackle the challenges with the workforce and provide a proper high-quality sight loss eye care pathway and investment in research and innovation, so that we can end avoidable sight loss once and for all?

Wes Streeting: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her consistent campaigning on this issue, which has done so much to keep it on the national agenda. We will support more eye care services being delivered in the community, helping to create capacity within secondary eye care services too. Patients can be assured that optometrists have the training to manage a wide range of eye conditions safely in the community. We will also support improved IT connectivity between primary and secondary care,

[*Wes Streeting*]

which has been shown to improve the referral and triage of patients, and enable the better use of technology to support local services.

Of course, there are still challenges: ophthalmology is one of the largest out-patient specialties, representing 8% of the total NHS waiting list, and the Royal College of Ophthalmologists workforce census found that 76% of units do not have enough consultants to meet demand. We will address those issues; we are working across both the public and the independent sectors to ensure that people receive the care they need, when they need it. A lot has been done but, as my hon. Friend says, there is so much more to do.

Liz Jarvis (Eastleigh) (LD): I welcome this plan. As the Secretary of State is aware, my constituents Charlotte and James Bassett have been fighting for answers since the death of their baby daughter Norah in 2019. What assurances can he give my constituents that any recommendations by the national maternity and neonatal taskforce will be implemented quickly?

Wes Streeting: I thank the hon. Member for the outstanding way she has represented her constituents since she arrived in this House—not only on this issue, but on many others. I reassure her that we will work with families in a spirit of co-production to ensure that we identify what has gone wrong, so that families receive truth and accountability for failures and the reassurance of knowing that improvements will be made so that other families do not have to suffer in the way that they have. Things have gone so badly wrong, but I am confident that, with the approach we are setting out, we will be able to make rapid improvements, and I will keep the House regularly informed.

Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for this wonderful statement, delivering on a commitment that we made together at the Richardson community hospital in Barnard Castle two years ago to move services back into the community. I want to ask him about the use of bank staff in the NHS: not only is it a massive waste of money, but it has created a situation where only one in five of this year's midwifery graduates feels confident of getting a job. On behalf of Mrs Rushworth, who is one of those, her friends, and nurses and midwives in the north-east who have contacted me about this issue, what will the Secretary of State do to ensure that those who have given 2,300 hours of unpaid labour to the NHS and are graduating with tens of thousands of pounds of debt can get a job?

Wes Streeting: I remember that visit to Barnard Castle—unlike visits by some people from Westminster, I was not there to get my eyes tested and my visit was perfectly within the rules. My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of neighbourhood health, which is in the plan, and of reducing the cost of agency spend in the NHS. I want staff to feel that they are part a team and for there to be more flexible working, so that people do not feel that they have to resort to agency work to receive flexibility. I am proud that within our first year we have saved a billion pounds in agency expenditure, getting better outcomes for patients and better value for taxpayers.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Carr-Hill formula has not been updated since its introduction in 2004: the staff market forces factor is based on earnings data from 1999 and the population density data that is used is the rurality adjustment from 2001, but the population of Huntingdonshire has increased by 30,000 since that time. I know that the Department has not conducted an impact assessment on the benefit of updating the formula, but the Secretary of State has announced that he will do so and that there will be sharp focus on money following need. Given that Huntingdon is a quickly growing region, where thousands more homes are set to be built in the next 10 years, will he clarify for my constituents that the formula will be updated and that GP surgeries in Huntingdon will receive a fairer allocation of the global sum funding?

Wes Streeting: I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that we are reforming the Carr-Hill formula and ensuring that funding is based on need. I am delighted to be working closely with the British Medical Association's general practitioners committee on the reforms that we are making in this and other areas of general practice.

Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): I welcome this brilliant plan. I particularly love the double helix that is featured on the front cover, because genetic discoveries have the greatest promise of all. If we all knew a little bit more about our health, we might all look after it a little bit better. Does the Secretary of State agree that the single patient record, with easy patient access, will be transformative?

Wes Streeting: Given my hon. Friend's expertise, I am delighted that he has welcomed the plan so enthusiastically. I wholeheartedly agree with what he said. I give him 10 out of 10 for his product placement of the 10-year plan and, in particular, his remarks on the design of the front cover, which I will pass on to the team.

Martin Wrigley (Newton Abbot) (LD): Having secured a Westminster Hall debate on the issue, I am delighted to hear the Secretary of State reconfirm that the Carr-Hill formula will be revised and changed. I am also delighted with the ambition of the new plan, and I think it is very good in an awful lot of ways. Will the Secretary of State remember that GP surgeries are businesses? To correctly plan, they need confirmation and positive indications of where their funding will go over a multi-year period. If that is always in the front of his head, then all will go well. I have scanned the plan and read about the new choice charter, the Care Quality Commission and the National Quality Board. However, I am concerned that the ICBs are becoming more powerful and unaccountable to local neighbourhoods. The regulators are good and will keep them systemically accountable, but we are missing Healthwatch. I am disturbed that Healthwatch has been cancelled as the patient advocate, giving the patient's voice in local areas. Will the Secretary of State reassure us that there will be some way of getting individual advocacy, as well as regulation?

Wes Streeting: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the plan. Success has many masters, and I thank him for putting the Carr-Hill formula on the parliamentary

agenda through his debate. I can reassure him about a few things. First, what the Chancellor has done in the spending review gives us the advantage of medium-term certainty, so the NHS will now be in the business of medium-term planning with the system, which enables it to make better use of the money that is allocated. Secondly, we are ending Healthwatch—I express my thanks to the people who have worked in Healthwatch for many years—but we are giving power directly to the patients. Alongside that, we are looking at what we can do to strengthen democratic accountability from elected representatives, to ensure that the patient voice and interests are protected.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): As an NHS physiotherapist, I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's statement and the ambition set out in the 10-year plan. In Dudley, we are already seeing the positive changes of a Labour Government in bringing down waiting lists. With renewed focus on community care, will my right hon. Friend commit to empowering allied health professionals to lead the neighbourhood health centres, building on the successful model that we have seen in Suffolk and North East Essex? Does he agree that we need more healthcare on the high streets?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and it is brilliant to have her expertise represented on the Government Benches. She is right about the importance of physiotherapy, not just for improved and better-quality recovery, but for admission avoidance. I want physios and other allied health professionals to be at the heart of the neighbourhood health service, and I know that she will hold us to account to ensure we deliver.

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): I also welcome the statement and the 10-year plan, and I offer my full support for most of the elements. Staying focused on the positive, I hope to be permitted to raise three points.

First, Dewsbury and Batley is unfortunately one of the many constituencies with dental deserts. Dewsbury West, a ward with over 20,000 residents, has no dentist, so how will the 10-year plan and the Government address that for my constituents?

Secondly, I fully support the plans to move healthcare into communities. In Dewsbury, we have a local hospital in the heart of the community that, with the right investment, could serve many more. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government will build on what we have, rather than fragment it?

Finally, Dewsbury and Batley is home to a wonderfully diverse community, but has some of the most deprived neighbourhoods, with the associated healthcare inequalities. Will the Secretary of State agree to visit my constituency so he can hear from my constituents and healthcare professionals, and ensure that their challenges are addressed?

Wes Streeting: In that constructive spirit, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that those things are contained in the 10-year plan for health. These changes are only possible because people voted Labour and because we have a Labour Government. In that spirit, he can be assured that in the run-up to the next general election, I will be pounding the streets of Dewsbury.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I call Warinder Juss—not here.

Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend, his team and the amazing NHS staff on over-delivering on Labour's promises, and for this amazing, ambitious 10-year plan that will ensure the NHS is fit for the future. I particularly welcome the "My Carer" feature on the NHS app that will allow family and unpaid carers to communicate with the care team for a loved one. Will my right hon. Friend explain how this plan will deliver benefits for disabled people and their carers?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question: I can tell that she has already read a lot of the plan, not least because she had such a heavy role in shaping it, bringing her expertise to bear as we were deliberating. I also thank her constituents in Shipley, who took part in the engagement and consultation that she did locally; I hope they feel that their fingerprints are on this plan. She talks about the "My Carer" feature of the NHS app, which will make an enormous difference. I hope that the people who tend to be heavier users of health services feel that they have more power, choice, agency and control. That has to be true not just for people with physical disabilities, but people with learning disabilities. We have to ensure that the NHS is genuinely there for everyone, and that everyone has agency, voice, personalisation, power and control—that is what this plan will deliver.

Tom Gordon (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): I welcome the 10-year plan; its focus on prevention is right. I notice that there are a number of references to diabetes in the plan, but none to type 1 diabetes. We already have simple blood tests for biomarkers that identify people who are likely to develop type 1 diabetes, and immunotherapy, which can delay onset, is being assessed for NHS use. All the components of a national screening system are already there, so we have the opportunity to change how people are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes and the potential to eliminate life-threatening diabetic ketoacidosis, which can be how people present in hospital and find out that they have got type 1 diabetes. Will the Secretary of State clarify if the references to diabetes screening will be pertinent in relation to type 1 diabetes in specific? Will he meet me and the all-party parliamentary group for diabetes to learn from Italian lawmakers about their national type 1 diabetes screening programme?

Wes Streeting: I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that we will be delivering on type 1 diabetes, as well as type 2 diabetes. He is right about the breakthroughs in science that allow us to predict and diagnose faster. Through its emphasis on technology, the plan will deliver wearables that will enable people to track their blood sugar levels in real time and enable insulin to be deployed at precisely the right time, in precisely the right amount, to provide stability, certainty and peace of mind. That will not only be important for adults with type 1 diabetes, but for parents who worry about their children. When they send them off to school or to play with friends, they will have the peace of mind that they can monitor their condition, and be reassured that they will be alerted if something does not look right. That is the

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peace of mind that everyone deserves and that is what this plan will deliver. I am sure the relevant Minister will be delighted to meet the APPG.

Jon Pearce (High Peak) (Lab): I very much thank the Secretary of State for his statement and the NHS 10-year plan. As someone who represents one of those rural constituencies without an acute hospital, I very much welcome the plan to move from hospitals into communities. The Conservatives broke their promise to deliver a health hub for Buxton in my constituency, and a plan is ready to go. Will the Secretary of State meet with me to discuss the opportunities for that plan to deliver for my local constituents?

Wes Streeting: As soon as my hon. Friend got to his feet, I knew exactly where the question was going. I was delighted to spend time campaigning for him in his constituency, and I know that the focus on neighbourhood health will be particularly welcome to people living in rural communities just like his. I would be delighted to meet with him to discuss his proposal, not least because he will hound me relentlessly if I say anything other than yes.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In a week that has been quite difficult, it is a real joy to have some good news in the Chamber in the 10-year plan. I thank the Secretary of State very much for that statement and for the positive fashion in which it was delivered. He says that it will deliver a health plan for all, but I have a quick question in relation to care in the community. Patients are taking up beds in hospitals who cannot get home, because the care in the community is not there. There are those who want to go to their homes, but the staff are not there to look after them. As the Secretary of State will know, I always try to do things in a positive fashion. When it comes to finding and training people, will he consider training through schools and colleges for specific roles in care in the community and encourage pupils from a young age to see those as careers that they wish to be part of? I know the Secretary of State will do this, but will he share all that good news with the Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Wes Streeting: I can absolutely give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. We will ensure that we are delivering that intermediate care in the community through not just the NHS, but our partners in social care. I have a really good relationship with Mike Nesbitt, my counterpart in Northern Ireland, so I am happy to share our learnings there. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to emphasise the importance of ensuring that it is not just the sons and daughters of doctors, but more working-class people from backgrounds such as mine who get to go into medicine. That is exactly what this plan will deliver.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): It is thanks to the Secretary of State and, indeed, our Chancellor that we already anticipate a £10 million state-of-the-art health hub in Thanet, which is opening this autumn. That will have a community diagnostic centre, expanded GP services, podiatry, cardiac and respiratory teams, MRIs and support for mental health. That is exactly what this 10-year plan is about. I welcome that introduction,

especially in a growing community such as Thanet, but what considerations has the Secretary of State given to Chris Whitty's report into health in coastal communities in the 10-year plan? Coastal communities in particular suffer from high levels of poor health and underperform in terms of services.

Wes Streeting: I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that Chris Whitty's work as chief medical officer had a big bearing on our thinking about how we meet the needs of rural and coastal communities and tackle health inequalities. His analysis is clear: we need people not just living longer, but living well for longer. We need to push illness much later into old age so that people can live life to the full until the very end. That must apply to everyone, not just the privileged few. My hon. Friend's constituents will really benefit from this plan as well as the new facilities coming later this year.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): I really welcome this 10-year plan, especially the shift from hospital to community. I am excited by the digital transformation, and I hope it works in the broadband blackspots of South Devon. I will ask the Secretary of State about the shift from sickness to prevention. Will he tell the House what conversations he has had with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Treasury about ringfenced funding for leisure centres, swimming pools, outdoor education centres, safe cycle routes and footpaths? We can do so much more to promote and embed healthy lifestyles, particularly in our children and young people, but it will take investment. We need to spend to save. Is that part of the 10-year plan?

Wes Streeting: I really welcome that support, and that is an absolutely great question. On the point about connectivity, I will ensure that the Science Secretary receives those representations and dons his skinny jeans and flip-flops and comes down to improve connectivity for her community—he is committed to doing that for people right across the country. The hon. Lady is absolutely right: we have to ensure that people in every part of the country have access to all those things that make life worth living, such as grassroots sport, culture, leisure, recreation, clean air, parks and open spaces. She has my assurance that, working with the Deputy Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, we will bring those opportunities to everyone, not just the wealthiest areas or big cities.

Sally Jameson (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Health Secretary outline how the 10-year plan will quickly deliver on the Government's aim to go from an analogue to a digital service? That is important to Doncaster hospital, which is still on paper records. Will he also ensure that the deaf community is considered and that BSL and easy-read materials are woven into any digital roll-out?

Wes Streeting: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. The great opportunity for technology is that we can design in accessibility; I had a great meeting here with some of my constituents who suffer from hearing loss. We have a great opportunity for the NHS to once again be the great social leveller, providing quality care to everyone, whatever their background, and personalised care that meets their needs. We need to

have better digital connectivity and AI-enabled hospitals. My hon. Friend's constituents will know how hard she bangs the drum here for investment in her local hospital, and that is very much on my mind.

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and his previous answer on dentistry, but I will push him a little further. My constituency, along with all of Oxfordshire, is an NHS dental desert. Having met with dental providers, they say that the key to changing that is reforming the NHS dental contract. I note that the 10-year plan includes a commitment to doing that, but no timescales are provided. Can the Secretary of State enlighten the House?

Wes Streeting: Yes, I certainly can. The proposals we are consulting on represent an important step towards the fundamental reform to the dental contract that we committed to in our manifesto, and that will begin this year. There are no perfect payment models. Careful consideration needs to be given to any potential changes in a complex dental system so that we deliver genuine improvements for patients and the profession, but we are committed to working with the British Dental Association. The Minister for Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberafan Maesteg (Stephen Kinnock), is working hard to fix the mess left by the previous Government.

Kevin McKenna (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Lab): On behalf of the small and often oppressed community of health policy geeks, I thank the Secretary of State for giving us a Christmas present in July—I will be pressing Ctrl+F through it all weekend. I also really thank him and his team for threading through this plan a real commitment to the quality of work for the NHS workforce. I can see already some really strong, concrete suggestions for how we can make the working lives of people in the NHS better. Most importantly of all, people in Sittingbourne and Sheppey are really glad to see that the idea of a neighbourhood health service is well fleshed out. Again, with a health policy geek hat on, we know it is the funding and the funding models that really matter, so I really commend the review of the funding formula, particularly towards rural and coastal communities. How will the Secretary of State ensure that with this new funding formula, he and his team at the centre will keep a tight grip on what happens at ICB and other levels closer to the ground to ensure that that funding gets to the areas with the most need?

Wes Streeting: I am so grateful to my hon. Friend for his support; as he implies, he brings so much expertise to this place. As we embark in this brave new world of devolution of power, resources and control, we keep a close eye on outcomes. I am counting on local communities, Members of Parliament, mayors, councils and local authorities also to ensure that we have democratic accountability and oversight to ensure the resources we provide are spent to the best effect and have a real impact. I pay tribute to the policy geeks of the world in health and social care for their contribution to this 10-year plan. Health geeks of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): Order. Some 20 Members are still seeking to ask questions, and we have an important debate to follow. The questions are getting longer, and so, I fear, Minister, are the answers. Can I urge brevity again, please?

Jas Athwal (Ilford South) (Lab): I also thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for a bold and ambitious plan. Over the past few months, I have had the privilege of connecting with some really inspiring people across my constituency, such as Jagdeep Aujla. His Dopamine Warriors boxing club, which the Secretary of State visited some weeks ago, sets a powerful example. Jagdeep's boxing club offers a safe, empowering space for people living with Parkinson's to connect with each other, maintain their fitness, and slow the progression of the condition. Will my right hon. Friend outline how the Government's 10-year health plan will support the shift from hospital to community, so that more support is available on people's doorsteps, particularly organisations such as the Dopamine Warriors?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour for his question. He is right that I recently had the joy of visiting Jagdeep and the Dopamine Warriors in my constituency—they do brilliant work, which underscores why we have to work in partnership with community groups and the voluntary sector. They provide great support for patient groups and their families in a way that would not be nearly so good even if the NHS tried to provide it, so I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend that that partnership will be at the heart of the 10-year plan. I also note that he is campaigning for an upgrade to the A&E at Queen's hospital in Romford. As he knows, I am not empowered to make that decision, but my hon. Friend the Minister for Secondary Care will have heard that case.

Matthew Patrick (Wirral West) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State, because with this NHS plan, ambition is back. That ambition matters to my constituents, who for too many years have seen a health service in decline. I brought many of those constituents to a community meeting so that their experience and expertise could be shared and fed straight into this plan. Could the Secretary of State set out how this plan gives power to patients and puts them back in the driving seat?

Wes Streeting: I thank my hon. Friend and his constituents for the feedback from that event, which I received and is reflected in this plan. There is much in the plan about power to the patient—more ease, convenience, choice and control, not just through the app but through a number of mechanisms, including new patient power payments that will give patients real bite if they are receiving poor-quality care. That is thanks to my hon. Friend and his constituents.

Sarah Russell (Congleton) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the 10-year plan. Moving quickly on the dentistry contract is extremely important to my constituents, but I want to raise the fact that, at the moment, parents in my constituency are frightened. They are frightened about how long it takes them to get diagnoses for their children, particularly in relation to neurodiversity; about the lack of support once they do get those diagnoses;

[Sarah Russell]

and about the lack of child and adolescent mental health services. They are also frightened that their neurodiverse children are being removed from those services on the basis that autism is apparently regarded by some people in our local services as inherently anxiety-creating and therefore children with that diagnosis do not need mental health support. Can the Secretary of State tell me how my constituents will benefit from this plan when it comes to the support children need with their health?

Wes Streeting: I thank my hon. Friend and her constituents. She held—I think—four events across her community to feed into this plan, and we really valued that feedback. I hope people feel that their fingerprints are on this plan. It sets out our ambition to make this the healthiest generation of children who ever lived, whether that is through better access to mental health support and services, recognising the importance of meeting neurodiverse need, or the focus on physical activity, good diet, nutrition and access to sport, media and culture for everyone, especially children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. I hope the plan reflects the ambition we heard from my hon. Friend's constituents.

Leigh Ingham (Stafford) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State and his entire team on their hard work—this document is outstanding, and I look forward to implementing it across Stafford, Eccleshall and the villages. My constituents participated in three consultation events to feed into this project, so it is really important that patient voices are all over it. A specific concern that came through was that 450 systems are used in Stafford hospital for digitisation and patient records, and they do not talk to each other, which is leading to discrepancies in patient care. Can the Secretary of State give me more information about how the improvement in digitisation will improve patient care on the frontline?

Wes Streeting: I thank my hon. Friend for her support, and her constituents for giving up their time to take part in those events, which fed directly into the plan. I hope they see their input reflected in the results. She is quite right that we need to fix those basic systems and make sure that people across different parts of the NHS are able to interface and join up care around the patient. The capital and tech investment ringfenced by the Chancellor will have a really big impact, and I hope my hon. Friend's patients and NHS staff will begin to feel that impact.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): I put on record my thanks to the Secretary of State for his statement today, and to the Chancellor for the financial and economic work she has put in. Labour Members know that governing well is a team sport, and it is when people in government work together that we succeed best for the people we seek to serve.

Despite the best efforts of important surgeries such as Thistlemoor in my constituency, too many parts of Peterborough are left out as a result of two challenges. The first is the postcode lottery; too many things seem to happen in other parts of our county, and we know that working-class communities are too often left behind. The second challenge is that the NHS is just too complex.

Even when we have services in the community, people struggle to know which bit to access—is it the pharmacist, the GP surgery, or the hospital? Can the Secretary of State confirm that the 10-year plan will seek to simplify the system, and to put patients in the driving seat and bureaucracy in the bin?

Wes Streeting: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that reassurance. It is about time that we design care around the patient, rather than ask the patient to do the running around on behalf of the NHS. That will be a big shift in practice and culture. Of course, as my hon. Friend says, it is only thanks to the decisions taken by the Chancellor that we are able to match the reform and ambition of this plan with the investment we need. That is why I was delighted to be joined not just by the Prime Minister, but by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor this morning in Stratford to kick off the 10-year plan—not least because she is the one who pays the bills, and we are very grateful to her for it.

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): One of the issues with the health service that my constituents most often ask me about is the struggle to get basic appointments. That is leading people to the hospital, which is unable to cope with the sheer numbers, and in a populous, fast-growing borough, that is creating unsustainable pressure. As such, I welcome my right hon. Friend's remarks about the move from hospital to community. Does he agree that getting primary care right is at the centre of getting the NHS right, and can he assure my constituents that they will get what they want: appointments when they need them, as they need them, in their local community?

Wes Streeting: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend—I know his constituency well, and he has been a powerful voice for his constituents since he arrived in this place. He is absolutely right that we need good general practice and accessible neighbourhood health services that are available to everyone, especially in areas of high need and health inequalities, as we see in the London borough of Newham. I hope his constituents really feel the impact of this plan as we roll it out during this Parliament and across the next decade.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State mentioned community health teams in Cornwall taking services directly to people, even in their homes. I am so pleased with the focus on how to deliver healthcare in sparsely populated rural and coastal areas. Can the Secretary of State confirm that this focus will run through the 10-year plan, so that across the country people can access care as equally as possible at local level—and specialist services such as robotic surgery and mental health emergency hubs—no matter where they live?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have been delighted to spend time with her in her constituency to make sure that this Government understand the needs of every part of the country and different types of community. We need to ensure that, when we think about health services, the pitch we have in our mind's eye is meeting the needs not just of big cities or large towns, but of rural and coastal communities that have been left behind for too long. I hope that my hon.

Friend's constituents will really feel the benefit of the innovation that is at the heart of this 10-year plan, and of the focus on community services and neighbourhood health. From what they have seen so far, they can trust that if we do not deliver for them, my hon. Friend will be the first to tell us.

Dr Lauren Sullivan (Gravesham) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement today. I welcome the move to community delivery, greater accountability of providers and ICBs, and power to the patients. As a research scientist—I declare an interest as an unpaid visiting researcher at the Francis Crick Institute—I welcome the recognition of the need for scientists and diagnostics to get ahead of disease. What conversations has the Secretary of State had, and what actions has he taken, with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and other regulatory bodies in relation to the amazing new technologies, devices and drugs and how we can get them into the NHS faster?

Wes Streeting: We are so lucky to have my hon. Friend's scientific expertise on our Benches, and we are also lucky that, despite being elected, she is doing research on behalf of the country in her spare time—goodness knows where she finds it. We welcome her public service. We need to see investment in new medicines and technology as an investment rather than a cost. That is how we deliver better care, better value for taxpayers and better outcomes, and it is how we close health inequalities. This is the most exciting revolution taking place in the world, and it is happening right here in England. We have got to make sure that the NHS benefits from it.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): This weekend will mark the 77th anniversary of the national health service, and I take this opportunity to thank all NHS staff at Stepping Hill hospital in Stockport. I pay tribute to the work of the British Dental Association, because week in, week out, Members from all parts of the House receive correspondence on NHS dentistry and the lack of it. I take this opportunity to invite the Secretary of State to visit Stockport. I know that he comes to Bury often, so when he is up in Greater Manchester, will he join me in Stockport to speak to patients, parents and frontline dental staff about the crisis?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of dental services, and I hope that his constituents begin to feel the benefit. I also know he is leading the charge on the campaign for Stepping Hill hospital. He regularly raises it with me and other Ministers, and I would be delighted to try to visit his constituency as soon as my diary allows.

Sarah Edwards (Tamworth) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for this welcome news. The Sir Robert Peel centre, part of the University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS trust, is now running at full throttle, with a range of diagnostic services and treatment options. I congratulate the trust and the Minister on opening that community diagnostic centre, which, as part of the NHS 10-year plan, will transform lives and access to speedy healthcare. Will he celebrate this hospital's transformation to unlock more than 1,000 treatments a week in Tamworth and the villages?

Wes Streeting: I am so grateful to my hon. Friend for that question, as it gives me the chance to say an enormous thank you to everyone involved. I hope that people are beginning to feel the benefits and will see the change that comes from having a great Labour MP and a Labour Government who deliver the change that our country desperately needs.

Louise Jones (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): My constituents raise issues with accessing the NHS, particularly local GPs and primary services, at every chance they have. I welcome the bold, big ambition of this 10-year health strategy. Can the Secretary of State outline how it will make a big difference in our small towns and villages?

Wes Streeting: Neighbourhood health cannot just be about large towns and cities. It has to meet the needs of every community, and the approach we are taking, with care closer to home or, indeed, in the home will benefit everyone, but it will disproportionately benefit people such as those in my hon. Friend's constituency. That is the benefit of having a great Labour MP like her and a Labour Government delivering results.

David Burton-Sampson (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and the 10-year plan, which I welcome. I am already seeing the benefits of this Government's commitment to reforming the NHS in my constituency, with a second linear accelerator radiotherapy machine coming to Southend hospital and investment in four of my GP surgeries, with new space being developed for more appointments. As he knows, however, I care greatly about men's mental health. How does this 10-year plan begin to address the challenges we face in that area?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted with the work that my hon. Friend is doing to assist us with the development of a new men's health strategy, including a focus on men's mental health, which he has raised so powerfully on more than one occasion in this House. I hope he will be pleased with the results. By working closely with him, voluntary sector organisations and the NHS, we will make sure we get it right.

Jess Asato (Lowestoft) (Lab): I hugely welcome the NHS 10-year plan, and its recognition that victims of domestic abuse are more likely to experience worse NHS access and worse outcomes, and will die younger. Domestic abuse costs the NHS £2.3 billion a year. Will the Secretary of State agree to work with Standing Together and other domestic abuse charities to ensure that the NHS treats domestic abuse as the public health emergency that it is?

Wes Streeting: I am so grateful to my hon. Friend for that question, and for the expertise she brings to the House on this issue. She is absolutely right: it is the NHS's responsibility to meet the needs of everyone, whatever their background and whatever the circumstances of their requirement for access to the NHS. That is so often where eyes first spot the telltale signs of violence against women and girls and domestic abuse. It is not the job of the Home Office to tackle this issue; it is the job of all of us across Government. She has my assurance

[Wes Streeting]

that I will work closely with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to make sure that the NHS plays its part in keeping women and girls safe, alive and well.

Alex Baker (Aldershot) (Lab): I warmly welcome the Government's 10-year plan. It is a proud day to sit on these Benches. I also welcome the Government's commitment to rebuilding Frimley Park hospital in my community in wave 1 of the new hospitals programme. The brilliant staff there, who are currently working in a hospital riddled with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, deserve that more than anyone. Can the Secretary of State help me out by bringing to life what healthcare will look like for people in my community of Aldershot, Farnborough, Blackwater, Hawley and Yateley over the next decade as a result of this plan?

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question, and to her constituents for taking part in her local engagement event. This plan will ensure that more people receive the right care in the right place at the right time. It will deliver more neighbourhood health services under one roof, and more choice, convenience, power and control over healthcare. It will deliver access and support at the touch of a button, and personalised care. We are completely changing how we deliver healthcare in this century and meeting the needs of everyone. Thinking particularly about her constituency, we are making sure that we are supporting our armed forces, veterans and their families, so that they receive great outcomes, thanks to a great Labour MP in Aldershot and a Labour Government who deliver. I know that she will hold our feet to the fire to make sure that we deliver.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Health Secretary for his statement, and I promise not to lobby him too much on the potential move of the UK Health Security Agency to Harlow, although perhaps I should also lobby for a neighbourhood health centre. Instead, can I ask him to set out how the 10-year plan will ensure a shift from sickness to prevention? Medical professionals in my local hospital, the Princess Alexandra, emphasised that issue when I met them recently.

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is right that we need to not just treat sickness, but prevent illness. That was a strong message that we got from the public. He will see lots of good stuff on prevention in the plan, and I know that he will welcome it. On the location of the UK Health Security Agency, he may have inadvertently misled the House: he said he did not want to lobby me too much, but that is absolutely not true; he will not leave me alone on this issue. He lobbies me every single day. I can assure him we will make a decision on that issue shortly.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I am sure that the hon. Member for Harlow will wish to correct the record.

Matt Turmaine (Watford) (Lab): I welcome the 10-year plan, and I thank the Secretary of State for giving my constituents in Watford the opportunity to feed into it through the consultation. Does he agree that the Tories accepted decline in the NHS as inevitable, but it takes a Labour Government to get the NHS back on its feet?

Wes Streeting: Absolutely, and the people of Watford can see the difference a Labour Government can make, thanks to their sending a Labour MP to the House. They saw what happened when they sent a Tory, and they cannot send a Liberal Democrat to this place and trust them to deliver. They need a Labour Government to deliver Labour change. I am delighted that my hon. Friend is here, and we are making a real difference together. Thanks to the engagement events he held with his constituents in Watford, their ideas are reflected in this plan. That is thanks to their hard work and his advocacy.

Lewis Atkinson (Sunderland Central) (Lab): It falls on each Labour Government to reform and renew the NHS in the service of patients, and that includes mental health patients; from my consultations, I know that they are a key priority for the people of Sunderland Central. I welcome the plan's emphasis on empowering patients by providing them with information and choice through the NHS app, including on waiting times, but the Secretary of State will know that information about mental health waiting times is often poor, as are the waiting times themselves. In the 10-year plan, will he commit to making sure that empowerment applies equally to people seeking mental health services and those seeking physical health services?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We in this place are so lucky to have his expertise and his leadership of the Back-Bench health and social care committee of the parliamentary Labour party. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, and I am concerned that we do not give enough profile to paediatric waits and mental health waits. With more transparency, information and access, we will be able to demonstrate improvements over the course of this Parliament and the next decade.

Michelle Welsh (Sherwood Forest) (Lab): Families affected by failing maternity services were ignored for far too long, and we have a system of accountability that is broken. I am pleased that the Secretary of State's plan has a strong focus on patient outcomes and experiences, and that maternity care will be at the forefront. I am also pleased to see that the single patient records will be rolled out in maternity services first. It is vital that women feel heard and seen throughout their pregnancy journey, and that crucial information no longer falls through the cracks of numerous systems that do not sync up.

I express my heartfelt thanks to the Secretary of State for really listening, for speaking to families across the country, and for coming to Nottinghamshire twice. I can honestly say that his reaction moved me. Not only was he listening; he cares and is determined that things will change, and they will. As chair of the APPG on maternity, and as a harmed mother, I thank him. Can he tell me a bit more about how maternity services will be incorporated into his plan for a neighbourhood health service?

Wes Streeting: I am so grateful to my hon. Friend for all the work she does as chair of the all-party parliamentary group, for the personal and professional experience that she brings to this House, and for the wisdom, advice and insight that she has offered to help me make better decisions. I am absolutely determined to work with

families, especially those who have suffered such grave injustice at the hands of the NHS. It is a wonderful institution, but sometimes when it fails, it fails spectacularly. The culture of denial and cover-up cannot be allowed to persist, and I will work with my hon. Friend to make sure that we end it.

On neighbourhood health, it is so important that we engage with families early, especially where they may be at greater risk of complicated pregnancy or harm, because we know this is an area of grotesque health inequalities. After birth, it is really important that we have strong health visiting, and care in the community and the home that does not just consider the interests of the baby, but asks questions of the mother. How is she feeling? How is she recovering? Is her partner coping? We have to look at the whole family, and I am sure we will get it right. I am determined to get this right, and it will be in no small part thanks to my hon. Friend's leadership and support.

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for both his statement and the 10-year plan. I am delighted that residents in Dartford were able to play a full part in shaping its priorities through our consultation meeting in February. They will be really pleased to see not only the additional GP appointments, but the pressure being taken off their local hospital, Darent Valley, through the provision of better and more community services. The hospital was designed with a much smaller community in mind and is now suffering the consequences. Can the Secretary of State give me an idea of the pace of the roll-out of neighbourhood health centres? We could certainly do with one in Dartford.

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question—representation duly received. I reassure him that one of the ways we will ease the pressure valve on our hospitals is by doing more neighbourhood health. That helps to drive admission avoidance, speed up delayed discharges, and get much more effective flow of patients through hospitals. That is our commitment. We aim to roll out 40 to 50 neighbourhood health centres over the course of this Parliament, and if we can go faster, we will. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend, as a strong representative for Dartford, will make more representations to us shortly.

Kevin Bonavia (Stevenage) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State and everyone involved in creating this well-designed and excellent 10-year plan. There is so much good stuff in it, but I particularly like the approach of shifting treatment from hospitals to neighbourhoods and homes. Many of my constituents in Stevenage have been taken to Lister hospital when they do not want or need to be there, but we have an alternative. The Minister for Social Care and my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Andrew Lewin) recently joined me on a visit to the Hertfordshire community NHS trust's "hospital at home" service. Is that something that the Secretary of State and the health team are determined to roll out?

Wes Streeting: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. The change will mean that people in Stevenage start to feel real improvements in their ability to access the NHS. Of course, that is in no small part thanks to this country's amazing life sciences sector, which has its beating heart in Stevenage.

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend, his team and NHS staff, who have put this plan together so that the NHS does not just survive but thrives. Last weekend, I met a family in Winsford who, that morning, had received a bill of £180,000 for their mother's care. The daughter said to me, "Andrew, I don't know how I can possibly pay this." The previous Government failed to get a grip on the issue. The plans that the Secretary of State has set out to increase carer's allowance and the disabled facilities grant will make a big difference, as will the introduction of fair pay agreements across the adult social care sector. Can he confirm that he will do everything he can to accelerate and implement the outcome of Baroness Casey's cross-party commission, so that the issue is resolved once and for all?

Wes Streeting: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. It is precisely because of examples of the sort that he has shared with the House that we have to get this right, so that we relieve families of such catastrophic care costs. Just as the NHS replaced fear with high-quality care for all, we have to alleviate the fear of families who require care, because the situation that he describes blights too many families across our country.

Mark Sowards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): May I briefly commend the Health Secretary for his comments on the morning media about events in this place yesterday? Empathy is in short supply in politics, and we could do with a bit more of it.

I really welcome the 10-year health plan, and specifically the focus on outcomes and the transformation of the NHS into a neighbourhood health service, complete with health centres. The plan states the criterion for deciding the first locations of these health centres: they will be the areas with the greatest need. Will the Health Secretary expand on that criterion, and perhaps tell me what I need to do to get a health centre for Leeds South West and Morley?

Wes Streeting: I knew exactly where that question was going, because my hon. Friend has been such a strong champion of his constituency since he arrived in this place. I am committed to rolling out neighbourhood health across the country, and to making sure that we particularly benefit the communities with the greatest need that are the most poorly served. This is in no small part possible thanks to the leadership of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the wise decisions that she has taken. Not only have we delivered investment in the NHS, but interest rates have fallen four times, wages are finally rising at a higher rate than the cost of living, and we have the fastest-growing economy in the G7. That is the leadership that we need from the Chancellor, and it is here to stay.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): Finally, and with thanks for his patience, I call Richard Baker.

Richard Baker (Glenrothes and Mid Fife) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker—persistence pays off.

Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will report regularly to this House on progress against this excellent plan? I hope that will help us to evidence the

[Richard Baker]

case for investment in community health facilities in Scotland, which have long been promised but not been delivered by the SNP, including the much-needed new health centre in Lochgelly in my constituency.

Wes Streeting: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. I just feel so sorry for him, because he comes here to stand up for his constituents, knowing full well that while they have a Labour Government who are delivering the biggest increase in investment to the devolved Administrations since devolution began, the SNP, which has been in government for almost two decades, is squandering the money and the opportunity. People will not get change in his constituency, or across the rest of Scotland, if they face more of the same from the SNP. Scotland needs an alternative, and Scotland's NHS needs an alternative. That alternative is Scottish Labour and the leadership of Anas Sarwar and Jackie Baillie, and it cannot come soon enough.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): May I thank the Secretary of State for answering in excess of 65 questions, and the shadow Secretary of State for being in attendance throughout the entire proceedings?

British Film and High-end Television

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): We now come to the Select Committee statement on behalf of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Dame Caroline Dinenage will speak for up to 10 minutes, during which time no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of her statement, I shall call Members to ask questions on the subject of the statement. These should be brief questions, not full speeches. I emphasise that questions should be directed to the Select Committee Chair, not the relevant Government Minister. However, Front Benchers may take part in questioning.

1.59 pm

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for making time for this statement.

In April, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, which I am very honoured to chair, published its report on British film and high-end television, and this sector is absolutely thriving. We have world-class facilities at Pinewood and Leavesden, where the inward investment means films that could be made anywhere are being made here in the UK. The development of Crown Works Studios in Sunderland ensures not just that film making is happening in London and the south-east, but that the money is spreading out to our regions, where we have enormous talents. On our screens, there are fantastic shows such as “Adolescence”, “Doctor Who” and “Rivals”—something for everybody—sharing British stories around the world. In cinemas, British talent and locations in movies such as “The Salt Path” and “The Ballad of Wallis Island”, which I am told is fantastic, are making such an impact. However, this is a fragile industry. It has done so much to rebound from the difficulties of the covid pandemic, but the US strikes in 2023 showed us just how reliant the UK industry is on inward investment and how vulnerable it is. We cannot take this success for granted. It was hard-earned and it must be protected.

Our inquiry was launched in the summer of 2023. It came 20 years after the last major Committee inquiry report on the state of British film, which with the willingness of successive Governments and huge engagement from the sector, has shaped policies for the last two decades. However, it was in need of an update, so our Select Committee heard from film makers, cinemas, industry bodies and those working on skills in the sector. The previous Government acknowledged some of the issues we had begun to raise about low-budget British film and VFX—visual effects—tax credits, but last year's general election left the inquiry on a cliffhanger, with many in the industry desperate for a sequel. We did not want to leave audiences disappointed, so with a new look Committee of excellent new members, we have brought back the inquiry on the crisis in British high-end TV, the benefits and challenges of artificial intelligence, and the work of the British Film Institute and the Government.

Our report made 35 recommendations to the Government and the BFI. I will not test your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker, by going through them all, but based on evidence from across the industry, we proposed a comprehensive

plan to support inward investment, champion British content and independent film making, drive up skills, support people to stay in the sector, help our cinemas and protect our incredible screen heritage. Admittedly, some of these recommendations were really bold. We supported the calls of eminent creators such as the fantastic producer and director Peter Kosminsky for a levy on streamer subscriptions to help fund British content. Other recommendations were comparatively small but important, such as inviting the Government to review the effectiveness of their incentives for the sector, or working with the BFI for a screen heritage strategy.

In the meantime, the Government have published their creative industries sector plan, which happily made film and TV a priority as one of their first frontier sectors. They have given a welcome uplift to the UK global screen fund, which our Committee recommended. They have also announced a new capital fund for the National Film and Television School, which will contribute some, if not all, of the skills we need. Madam Deputy Speaker, if like me you have been to the cinema recently, you will have seen the trailers for the summer blockbusters coming up, and been a bit frustrated that the best bits have all been shown in the trailers, and that is where we are with the Government response. The areas where the Government agreed with the Committee and have taken decisive action were the only new announcements in the sector plan. On everything else, the Creative Industries Minister, who cannot be here for this statement, is at risk of being the villain. He might be called the Government's very own Dr No.

In the time I have left, I will go through where we think the Government have got it wrong. They simply do not share our ambition for this sector, and have not acknowledged the real anxieties those in sector have expressed and the support they have asked for. The Government agree with our Committee that we must ensure the resilience of domestic production and protect our domestic workforce, but they do not seem to have the answers on how to do so. They have failed to recognise the value of research and development in the creative arts, and that it should be treated in the same way as R&D for science and technology. They have ignored the concerns raised by film makers about access to the enterprise investment scheme and the seed enterprise investment scheme. They have ignored our proposals for a print and advertising tax relief, which would drive investment in our cinemas and independent films. They have refused to require a regional breakdown of production spending, which would help the Government ensure that the benefits of these tax credits are shared right across the UK, and we have phenomenal skills and great stories to tell around the UK.

The Government's welcome extra funding for the UK global screen fund is tempered by a refusal to engage with industry calls to rejoin Creative Europe. On skills, they have ruled out statutory reporting on spending in the sector, despite the unwillingness of some big players in the industry to be open and transparent about what they are giving back. There is hope that the growth and skills levy will be more suitable for the creative industries—the apprenticeship levy currently is not working—but there is very little new information, and I know the sector is concerned that the Treasury may weaken the proposals for a levy that works for the sector. The Government's proposal for a freelance champion is good as far as it goes, but it is very light on detail and a

long way from the freelancers' commissioner that we have repeatedly asked for. Although the debate on AI and copyright has moved on somewhat from our ping-pong on the Data (Use and Access) Bill, the Government have rejected or ignored a raft of proposals that would have protected the intellectual property and the moral rights of our creative artists.

I know Ministers care deeply about our creative industries, and the Government have made a commitment to them with the sector plan, but I am concerned that while they call British film and TV a frontier sector, so many of our recommendations, based on really clear and compelling evidence from the sector, have just been dismissed or ignored. There is a question whether the Department for Culture, Media and Sport thinks our recommendations are wrong, or it just does not have the clout with the Treasury to make them happen.

I know the Minister cannot be here, but I also know how he loves a cultural pun, so in the hope that he will be watching this back, it would be a shame not to take this opportunity to say that we had great expectations for the Government's response but, rather than offering us the full monty, we were left brassed off. The Minister will be before our Committee next week for a brief encounter to discuss the creative industries sector plan. We are not rivals; we want to work with the Government in the line of duty to get the most for this sector. There is some time for them to add a little sense and sensibility, or perhaps some atonement. If so, rather than being wicked, the Minister could end up as British film's local hero. I commend this statement to the House.

Lewis Atkinson (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for her statement and her Committee for its work on this important area. I also thank her for mentioning the Crown Works Studios site, which is in my constituency, so she will understand why I am such a proud champion of our regional film and screen industries. The Select Committee's inquiry recommended some regional elements to tax incentives, and—understandably, I think—the Government response says that those will be considered at fiscal events. Does she agree that there is a very strong case for a specific regional element of tax incentives for the film and screen industry, given its current concentration in the south-east despite the potential for growth in areas such as Sunderland and the north-east?

Dame Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Gentleman makes such an important point. We have remarkable skills around the UK, but when we go into sixth forms in any of our constituencies and speak to the young people there, we find few who are considering a career in film and TV. Yet if we look at the things they are studying, we see that the film and TV industry has a demand for all of them. Carpenters, hairdressers, accountants, technicians, engineers and computer designers would all have a place—a job—in the industry, yet the young people may not think of it. We need to ensure that the opportunities for British film and high-end TV are understood and nurtured in every corner of our country, because we have the ideas, the skills and the phenomenal track record, and the Government must do everything they can to harness those and make sure we are benefiting from them.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her report and her wonderful statement, as well as on all the work that

[John Lamont]

has gone into the report behind the scenes. Public service broadcasters are struggling to compete with the massive budgets set by streamers, so what more can be done to ensure we see high-quality British drama and comedy on terrestrial television?

Dame Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. This is one of the big questions underlining our whole inquiry. The cost of making content has risen so much, it is pricing so many of our British PSBs out of the market. We heard from Peter Kosminsky, the director of “Wolf Hall”, that it simply could not be made today and that “The Mirror and the Light” was only made because some of the key people on it worked for free. We cannot carry on like that. We need our British stories to be heard around the world. We have seen some fantastic streamers making great content, such as “Black Doves” and “One Day” which do tell British stories, but our PSBs do them better than ever and we need to ensure they are getting the right funding. We have made some quite radical recommendations, such as expanding access to tax credits and a levy on streamers, which was particularly contentious. We will continue to push for some of those recommendations. The Minister is appearing in front of us next week and we will keep asking him these questions, because we need to protect our PSBs and ensure they are telling our great British stories for years to come.

Tom Gordon (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): Earlier this year, “Tinsel Town” was filmed in Knaresborough. The benefit of seeing the film industry come to my constituency was clearly apparent from the get go. It has given a real buzz and excitement to the local community. I would like to see more on the regional investment side. Channel 4 is headquartered in Leeds just down the road from Harrogate. Will the hon. Lady elaborate on how we would be best set to monitor and regulate to see the benefit of TV and film studios in our regions?

Dame Caroline Dinenage: One thing we were asking for was for streamers in particular to be feeding back on how much of their money they are spending on skills and the regional impact of the investment they are making. We know that it can make such a difference to a local area, as the hon. Gentleman says. When something is filmed in one of his towns or cities, it shines a fantastic light and puts that place in focus. It also tells stories that resonate completely with our residents and inspire an entire new generation to work on those stories but also to create them in future.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her statement and on the report she has produced. To succeed, great British films also need a good audience. Will my hon. Friend tell us what she thinks of the Government’s support for local and regional cinemas?

Dame Caroline Dinenage: That is a really important question. The Committee made a recommendation based on the conversation we had, supported by the Film Distributors’ Association, for a tax relief for print and advertising of films. The Government have not responded

to that, but it is really important. If we are to support British films to be made, and the Government have brought forward tax credits for independent British films with a lower budget, we still need audiences to know that they are out there for them to be supported to get into our local cinemas. Local cinemas have suffered as well, particularly during the pandemic. We need them to be able to stay open. They are vital parts of our local community. This whole ecosystem depends on having cinemas that are flourishing and functioning, and British stories being told in our cinemas. Helping the print and advertising aspect of that story really is very important. We were very disappointed that the Government did not accept that recommendation.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the ingenuity of her statement. I am tempted to ask her if she is offering a prize to the first person to identify all the film titles she smuggled into it. Could she perhaps enlarge a bit on one of the more disappointing responses, as negative as it was, from the Government to which she referred? That is the recommendation that the Government should at least conduct research into the possibility of a statutory deposit scheme for the moving image, which I assume is a bit like having a copyright library for films in which every film gets deposited. Although I appreciate the limits on capacity of the BFI, would researching such a possible scheme not be a positive move to the advantage of posterity?

Dame Caroline Dinenage: My right hon. Friend represents the New Forest, which, with its great beauty, is a remarkable setting for so many of our British film and TV shows. He is absolutely right that the BFI does a remarkable job. The Select Committee visited its archives to see the collection of British film and TV content going back decades, right from the advent of film production, and to see the remarkable skills it has in being able to bring some of that really old film content back into use. This is part of our heritage. We need to do everything we can to ensure we are protecting it and investing in it, and ensuring that people have the skills to look after our film history in future, so we were really disappointed with that particular aspect of the Government’s response to our recommendations.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady and the Select Committee very much. We are quite excited about what we are doing in Northern Ireland, where the Assembly is promoting the film and TV sectors. They are all doing well, with jobs created and the economy boosted. On working together—we are not in competition with each other; we are trying to work in partnership—has she had the opportunity to speak to the relevant Minister, and perhaps the sector, in Northern Ireland to ascertain what they are doing, because I always believe that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland always works better together and that we can do the same in this sector?

Dame Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The Northern Ireland film and TV sectors have been hugely successful, notably for “Game of Thrones” and I think that “Line of Duty” was shot there, too. It has had phenomenal success, again based on remarkable skills. I have not had the opportunity to

speaking to the Northern Ireland Government, but I really would like to because, as he says, there is plenty of work for everyone. We have British stories that are there to be told in every single corner of the British Isles. We need to make sure we are promoting our British film and TV industries, so we can keep telling those stories.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for her statement. I think she failed to get “Bend it Like Beckham” into her list and my constituent Nick Manzi will be very disappointed in her for that.

Backbench Business

Women’s State Pension Age: Financial Redress

[Relevant documents: Oral evidence taken before the Work and Pensions Committee on 29 January, on DWP’s Annual Report and Accounts, HC 688; oral evidence taken before the Work and Pensions Committee on 22 January, on Pensioner Poverty: challenges and mitigations, HC 465; and written evidence from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman to the Work and Pensions Committee, on Pensioner Poverty: challenges and mitigations, reported to the House on 26 February, HC 465.]

2.17 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford) (Lab) [R]: I beg to move,

That this House notes the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman’s (PHSO) report on Women’s State Pension Age, HC 638, published in March 2024, which found that maladministration in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) communication about the Pensions Act 1995 resulted in complainants losing opportunities to make informed decisions about some things and to do some things differently, and diminished their sense of personal autonomy and financial control; further notes that there will likely be a significant number of women born in the 1950s who have suffered injustice because of maladministration in DWP’s communication about the Pensions Act 1995; and also notes that, given the scale of the impact of DWP’s maladministration, and the urgent need for a remedy, the PHSO took the rare but necessary step of asking Parliament to intervene, laying their report before Parliament under section 10(3) of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and asked Parliament to identify a mechanism for providing appropriate remedy for those who have suffered injustice.

Following last night’s horrific news, I just want to send my deepest condolences to the family of Diogo Jota and his brother, and to the city of Liverpool.

I would like to pay tribute to the thousands of fearless women who have been campaigning relentlessly to secure justice on this matter for decades now, and to remember all those women who have died waiting for justice. My personal thanks go to the campaign groups who have provided briefings to the all-party parliamentary group on state pension inequality for women, including CASPI, WASPI, WASPI 2018, CEDAWinLAW, Pension Partners 4 Justice, Pension United, WASPI Scotland and 1950s Women of Wales, as well as many individuals who have been in touch. My thanks also go to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate, and to numerous colleagues across the House who have been instrumental in campaigning for the women and in securing today’s debate.

As Lord Bryn Davies, co-chair of the APPG and a pensions expert, stated:

“The UK’s pension system was designed for men, by men. It systematically favoured men, with the result that they received higher state pensions and even higher private pensions. Hence, the gender pensions gap. The only feature that favoured women was that the National Insurance pension was paid to women from aged 60, whereas it was paid to men from aged 65.”

But in 2010, that single advantage was taken away, without consultation and without regard to the other factors that meant women of that era were worse off financially and ended up with worse pensions. That was bad enough. What was worse, though, is that they were not even told about it. Many women were left destitute; some even lost their homes.

[Rebecca Long Bailey]

These women were already disadvantaged and discriminated against. They began work in an era when it was legal to pay female workers less than men, and often stepped out of the workforce to raise families or look after loved ones because there was no wraparound care, losing out on not only paying stamps but paying into a private pension. Overnight, these disgraceful changes were dumped on them without their knowledge. Many had already handed in their notice at work, and in many cases they were forced to exist on meagre welfare benefits that left them living a hand-to-mouth existence.

Hundreds of women began to raise the alarm. When the previous Government failed to take action, they escalated their complaints to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, which began a lengthy investigation spanning years, although it chose to focus on a sample of only six cases. Its report, published in March last year, uncovered internal Department for Work and Pensions memos from 2005 showing that officials knew that considerable numbers of women were unaware of the planned changes. While many women feel that the report did not go far enough on suggested redress, and that it was too limited in the cases that it assessed, it confirmed what the women already knew: that they had suffered injustice, that the DWP was guilty of maladministration in failing to properly communicate changes, and that redress was duly owed.

When the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions responded to the report in December, there was genuine hope that the scandal would finally end—it was there, in black and white. Sadly, it did not, and women were left shocked and angry. While the Government agreed with the finding of maladministration and apologised, no redress would be forthcoming. Further, contrary to the ombudsman, they actually felt that the majority of women did know about changes to their pension age, based on Department for Work and Pensions research, and that sending the women letters would not have been effective, which I am sure most people would agree is bizarre. It is pretty effective when people receive a bill addressed to them through their door, or a letter about a hospital appointment. It is also pretty effective on the very rare but joyous occasion that His Majesty's Revenue and Customs gives people a tax rebate cheque. So, honestly, why would 1950s-born women have actively refused to open letters with their name on from the DWP? It makes no sense.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a powerful speech. What she says reflects some of the conversations I have had with WASPI women in my constituency about not only the distress this has caused them, but how so many of them simply did not receive the correspondence that they have been told they did receive over the years about the financial situation that was coming down the track. The hon. Lady pointed out that the PHSO report found maladministration, and that despite promising to address it in all their communications before the general election, the Government said that it was too burdensome to compensate on a flat scale. When that announcement was made, I asked the Secretary of State what else could be done to support these women, many of whom have really struggled as a result of this decision. I did not

receive a particularly forthcoming response, so I wonder whether the hon. Lady has had any more joy in finding out what the Government are going to do to support these women if they cannot bring forward the financial support on which so many of them have missed out.

Rebecca Long Bailey: The hon. Lady has been a formidable campaigner for these women. In answer to her question, no, I have not had any joyous information from the Government as of yet, which is why we are here today. I will outline why I think the Government's statement and response to the ombudsman's report was misinformed. While I understand the financial difficulties the Government face, options are available, and cost should never be a barrier to addressing injustice.

Many of the campaign groups are clear that the statistics used by Government to justify no redress are misquoted and misinformed, painting a picture that is completely at odds with the experiences of thousands of impacted women, as the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) has outlined, the ombudsman's findings and the results of independent research. Research by the Department for Work and Pensions in 2003 showed that only 43% of all women affected by the changes knew that their state pension age was changing. The research itself even comments that:

“This low figure provides cause for concern and shows that information about the increase in SPA is not reaching the group of individuals who arguably have the greatest need to be informed.”

Independent research, including a focus group study by Age UK from as late as 2011, has also found that many women believed that they were still going to retire with a state pension at 60.

Further, the ombudsman's report also focused on the continued failure of the DWP to recognise and respond to this research and feedback. Indeed, this point was flagged by the Work and Pensions Committee in 2013 and the National Audit Office in 2016, but the DWP still failed to take any meaningful action.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her leadership of this campaign. The situation is worse still than she paints it to be, for the ombudsman made clear that the “DWP has clearly indicated that it will refuse to comply”

with the ombudsman's recommendations, inviting Parliament to step in to resolve the matter. This is officialdom closing ranks, is it not?

Rebecca Long Bailey: The right hon. Gentleman has been a formidable campaigner for the women affected and an ally in the campaign in this House. He is correct. I will explain in a moment how unprecedented it is for a Government to reject the ombudsman's recommendations in this way, and how dangerous it is, in fact, for our democracy and for citizens' ability to hold their Governments to account.

I will turn back to the statistics that the Government relied on in their response to the ombudsman's report. Instead of the clear findings that I have outlined, the Government relied on abstract figures from research carried out in 2004 and 2006 by the Department for Work and Pensions, which suggested that 73% and 90%, respectively, of women born in the 1950s knew that their own state pension age was increasing, but that is not correct. I must flag this with the Minister for

clarity: the question asked in the surveys was crucial. It was, “Do you know that the broad state pension age is due to increase at some point in the future?”. It was not, “Do you know that your own state pension age is going to increase?”. It is wrong, in my view, to make the assertion that 73% and 90% of women knew that their state pension age was changing, because the facts prove that they simply did not.

Next, when an ombudsman makes recommendations to Government, as the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) has alluded to, the usual course of action is for the Government to accept them. Further, on this occasion, the ombudsman made the incredibly rare decision to lodge its report before Parliament, not before the Department for Work and Pensions, which it did because, based on its dealings with the DWP, it already feared and knew that the report would be ignored. It is clear that the ombudsman realised this was an important issue, and that it wanted Government to listen.

There have been only eight other occasions where the ombudsman has felt the need to put down a special report in this way, the first being in 1978. All resulted in the full implementation of the recommendations save one, the Earl report. In that case, the Environment Agency still complied with three out of the four recommendations, and on the fourth implemented an alternative compensation offer.

I cannot stress enough that the decision to reject the ombudsman's recommendations in full is unprecedented, and is, in fact, dangerous, as it sets a precedent that regardless of what an independent adjudicator recommends concerning state-level injustice, the Government can now ignore them. It strips away one of the only levers that citizens have to hold the Government of the time to account.

All the amazing campaign groups that we in this House work with are clear: this has been a state injustice. It has caused significant harm to these women, and while welcome, a limited Government apology is, without any material redress, not acceptable for a grave injustice that has driven so many into debt or poverty.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way and congratulate her on securing this debate today. She has been a very powerful advocate for the WASPI campaigners not just in England and Wales, but in Scotland, too, and that is recognised by them. Does she agree that over recent weeks we have seen that where there is a will, there is way? If her colleagues on the Labour Benches were to use their new-found power, perhaps we could find a way of getting the Government to right this historic and grievous wrong.

Rebecca Long Bailey: I thank the hon. Member for his suggestion. He is a fantastic campaigner for 1950s women in Scotland and has done an enormous amount of work in this House to support their cause.

As I said earlier, we all recognise the difficulties that the Government face. They inherited a difficult financial situation, but that is no excuse to deny these women justice. Financial options are available, some of which I shall outline, and some of which my colleagues will outline, too.

As well as refuting the findings of the ombudsman, the Government cite cost and administrative burdens as barriers, but it is important to stress that there have been other large-scale compensation schemes created in response to DWP maladministration. The Equitable Life Compensation Scheme is a key example.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady profoundly on securing this much-needed debate. Does she agree that it is shameful that Labour made personal pledges to WASPI women over social media as a vehicle to get elected, but then tossed aside those promises and turned its back on more than 7,000 women, including Gill in Tiverton and Helen in Bampton in my constituency, as well as those across the length and breadth of the country? Does she recognise, as I do, that 74% of the British public support fair compensation for WASPI women?

Rebecca Long Bailey: The hon. Lady has been a fantastic campaigner for her constituents during her time in this House. I say in response that this issue unites the House; we are all angry about the injustice that these women have faced, and we want the Government to take action. Spanning various Governments and various Administrations, these women have had to fight relentlessly just for what they are owed, and that is not acceptable. I have no doubt that there are numerous colleagues at Cabinet level who agree with the women's cause. They may be struggling to find options and answers, and that is what we are here today to provide. I hope that they are listened to and acted on, because injustice is injustice. If we are saying that victims of one injustice can be compensated by the Government, but that victims of another are not so deserving, we are travelling down a very dangerous path. There are options to cover the cost and ensure that there is no heavy administrative burden, and I will give a few of them.

The ombudsman's guidance on financial remedy sets out its suggestion at level four on the severity of injustice scale, and it estimates that such remedy would involve public spending of between £3.5 billion and £10.5 billion. Campaigners have suggested that an earlier stage—level five—was under consideration, and that would cost between £10 billion and £31 billion. In both cases, as Lord Bryn Davies of Brixton has highlighted, that recommendation and, indeed, any other scheme would not preclude tapering the amount paid, which would bring down costs considerably.

WASPI and its sister campaigns suggest a bell curve model. They have highlighted the fact that other large compensation schemes for DWP maladministration have been viable, and proposed that any financial remedy could allocate the most compensation to those who have had the shortest notice of the longest delay to their state pension age—in other words, supporting those most heavily impacted in a bell curve model. They state that redress must be speedy, simple and sensitive, and they want to avoid legal action. They have asked the Government to enter into talks to address this very issue.

The WASPI group proposes that this remedy could take the form of a one-off payment that fairly takes that into account, but that level four should not be a ceiling, given that not all circumstances are identical to the six sample claimants. WASPI Scotland has also highlighted how a scheme could be operated relatively easily, using

[Rebecca Long Bailey]

DWP records of dates of birth or national insurance prefixes, on either an opt-in or an opt-out basis. That information is readily available and would not require complex application systems or the processing of such applications.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): The hon. Lady is making an extremely powerful case about this long-standing injustice. As she has pointed out, the WASPI campaigners are making really constructive suggestions to resolve the matter, offering to reach out and sit around the table with the Government. Does she share my frustration that the Government are refusing to do so, effectively forcing a court process, which is just leading to longer and longer delays, when there is such a clear injustice and an unprecedented rejection of the PHSO's recommendation.

Rebecca Long Bailey: The hon. Lady is right. She, too, is a fantastic advocate for the women in her constituency. These women should not be forced to go through lengthy court battles, and the Government must recognise the cost of having to undertake those court battles versus the amount that they would actually pay through a redress scheme. Ultimately, the court is likely to find in favour of these women based on the facts that we have been presented with as parliamentarians. Indeed, CEDAWinLAW and 1950s Women of Wales both strongly support a mediation route towards redress, via an early neutral evaluation of groups' asks towards mediation with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions via mediators. More broadly, they raise concerns that discrimination needs to be factored into any redress mechanism, stating that the roll-out of state pension ages potentially conflicts with the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women—CEDAW—treaty, which the UK signed in 1981. As such, the Government should implement a temporary special measure to guarantee an adequate, non-discriminatory pension.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): One of the first constituents who came to me eight years ago was a WASPI woman. Does the hon. Lady agree that, after so many years, so much compromise and so much willingness to talk to the Government, one of the things that matters most to these women is not so much the amount of money but the actuality and significance of being compensated?

Rebecca Long Bailey: The hon. Lady is spot on. The women have suffered an injustice, and they have been ignored. They should not have had to fight for so long. The sad fact is that already so many women have died waiting to see justice. What will it take to fix this? Will it take an ITV drama to shine a light on what has happened before everybody gets angry enough to do something about it? I do not know the answer to that, but what I do know is that the facts are clear. Even the ombudsman's report sets that out, and the Government need to act urgently. The hon. Lady has been a fantastic campaigner in this House over the years, and I am sure the women are truly thankful for her support.

The 1950s Women of Wales propose, in line with CEDAWinLAW, that redress could be an initial lump sum to allow swift financial relief, with additional payments

over a five-year period. Even the previous Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee suggested a scheme. He wrote to the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to suggest that a rules-based scheme be considered. The letter describes a system where payments are adjusted within a range, based on the ombudsman's severity of injustice scale, to reflect the extent of change in the individual state pension age and the notice of the change the individual received. It would be quick to administer, he said, and inexpensive compared with a more bespoke scheme. He further suggested that there should also be flexibility for individuals to make a case for additional compensation for direct loss. And that Select Committee Chair is now a Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions! Who knew? Perhaps the Minister could sit down and have a cup of tea with himself to discuss the plans he had before he entered office.

Any scheme must be responsible and financially sustainable, so let us have a look at some options on that, too.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. Before Mr Shannon intervenes, may I respectfully ask the hon. Lady to consider truncating her speech a little, as a number of colleagues will want to speak this afternoon?

Jim Shannon: There are 77,000 WASPI women in Northern Ireland, 7,000 of them in Strangford. Does the hon. Lady appreciate their palpable anger about how they have been mistreated and about the injustice that they wish to see addressed? On behalf of those 7,000 constituents of mine, I seek the same thing as the hon. Lady and all of us in this Chamber today.

Rebecca Long Bailey: The hon. Gentleman is a powerful advocate for women in Northern Ireland. He is right: what has happened is wrong, plain and simple. We need to see action today. I promise I am coming to the end, Madam Deputy Speaker—I do not want to try your patience.

There are options to make sure that schemes are financially sustainable. WASPI has calculated that HM Treasury has saved a whopping £181 billion by increasing the state pension age alone. Other options include applying a 1% to 2% wealth tax on assets over £10 million, which would raise up to £22 billion a year, or equalising capital gains tax with income tax rates, which would raise £15.2 billion a year. Applying national insurance to investment income would raise £8.6 billion a year. Ending stealth subsidies on banks could raise up to £55 billion over the next five years—something even Gordon Brown has advocated.

Cost does not need to be, and should not be, a barrier to justice. In January the Deputy Ombudsman told the Work and Pensions Committee that the DWP at the time knew that the women did not know, and that they failed to act. He said:

“if you accept this maladministration and you accept people were affected by that maladministration, there is a conversation about how you factor cost into the need to do justice.”

The trauma, hardship, poverty and sheer stress that these women have been put through for a decade must make justice for them a matter of urgency.

I have a lot of time for the Minister. I call on him to get round the table with these women and to listen to them. I ask him to listen to the evidence, put considerations of financial redress for 1950s-born women who have suffered back on the table and allow full and adequate parliamentary scrutiny for any proposal, as the ombudsman intended.

2.42 pm

Tom Gordon (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): It is a pleasure to be called to speak so early in the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) on securing this debate. There is not much more that can be said, as she has put the case so eloquently, but there is one key point I want to get on the record: broadly speaking, as the hon. Lady eloquently said, this issue crosses the House and there is a broad understanding that there has been an injustice. For me, this is about fairness and what will happen going forward if people lose faith in organisations such as the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

Martin Wrigley (Newton Abbot) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) on securing this debate, and I thank her for her work. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is about trust in Government and a betrayal of trust for all of us who stood there with placards saying, "I support the WASPI women"? They should be following that up.

Tom Gordon: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. At a time when trust in Government and politicians is so low, it is imperative that we do all we can in this place to right that wrong.

To get an idea of the level of support across the House, I would like to see a vote in Parliament about whether we should have a fair compensation scheme. Whenever I speak to WASPI women in my constituency or elsewhere, the main thing they want is to be listened to. The key thread that resonates with all these women is that they feel completely sidelined and ignored. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) made the point earlier that parties of all persuasions have held placards and made promises and pledges—and the Liberal Democrats know all too well about the danger of making promises that cannot be delivered on. I would like all parties and all politicians to be held accountable for the promises that they failed to deliver on.

I represent a place that is broadly characterised as fairly affluent and wealthy, but there are real issues with poverty in Harrogate and Knaresborough, though it is often hidden. The hon. Member for Salford eloquently made the point that when WASPI women were growing up and working, they were already disadvantaged, and this is a further disadvantage. It is incumbent on us all to right that wrong.

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is an issue not only of justice, but of equality between men and women? If this Government are serious about tackling inequality at all levels, they must surely listen to the women in all our constituencies on this issue. I have been inundated with correspondence from constituents about this, and the Government must tackle it.

Tom Gordon: I completely agree. I do not intend to speak for much longer, so I will wrap up. For me, this represents a fundamental flaw in the system. It is a complete failure of the ombudsman if, after there has been maladministration, it cannot get us in this place to push for the change that it has outlined. That maladministration is not up for debate; it was a finding of the report. We hear harrowing stories from women who have lost houses, ended up in debt and faced horrendous situations as a result of something that they did not know about. This is about fixing that problem and righting that wrong.

2.46 pm

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): First, I thank the many women across Falkirk who have taken the time to campaign on this issue, and to discuss the injustice done to women affected by state pension age changes and the lack of notification about those changes. I am here on their behalf.

Both the ombudsman and the Secretary of State in her statement back in December were clear that there is an injustice in the way that women impacted by state pension age changes were notified. I invited WASPI women in Falkirk to meet me in December after the Secretary of State's statement, and what I took from that meeting is that if we in this place believed that there was no injustice, compensation would never have been paid, regardless of fiscal circumstances. If we recognise that there has been an injustice—as the Secretary of State and the ombudsman do—we are justified in expecting that we will deliver, in some form, the redress recommended in the ombudsman's findings.

On behalf of the WASPI women in Falkirk who raised and continue to raise these questions with me, I will use this opportunity to ask again some of the questions I have previously raised with the Minister. I would welcome him addressing them when he sums up. Why can the Government choose when to implement ombudsman recommendations, and when not to? Is the 90% awareness figure used by the Government derived from a study specific to women who have been impacted by the pension age changes, and is the decision based on cost or genuine disagreement with the findings of the ombudsman?

2.47 pm

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): It is often said in times of financial crisis that some institutions are too big to fail. Unfortunately, in this case it is a question of some campaigns being seen as being too big to succeed. I am quite sure that the real reason why the Department for Work and Pensions is so resistant to this cause is not that it does not recognise the justice of the WASPI women's cause, so eloquently set out by the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey), who has given excellent leadership on this cause through the all-party parliamentary group. Rather, behind the scenes—I do not know this, but I am sure that I am right—it is putting forward arguments along these lines: "There are so many of them; the bill will simply be too great. What's more, they're only going to get between £1,000 and £3,000 each, which won't be anything like full financial compensation, so what's the point in giving in to this demand?" I am quite sure that if the numbers were fewer and the overall bill was not so significant, we would not see this resistance to an obviously valid and viable cause.

Tom Gordon: Does the right hon. Member agree that we cannot put a price on justice?

Sir Julian Lewis: I do indeed. Of course, in any event, the women realise that they will not get anything like full compensation, but they want the symbolic acceptance and acknowledgement of the injustice that they have received. As we have heard from those on both sides of the House, this resistance puts at stake the credibility of the ombudsman system itself. Undermining that will have a knock-on effect: in many future cases, the bill for implementing an ombudsman's recommendations and findings will not be anything like as large, but people and institutions will be emboldened to defy the ombudsman.

One of the best short summaries of the case was put forward in a previous Labour manifesto, which said:

"a generation of women born in the 1950s have had their pension age changed without fair notification. This betrayal left millions of women with no time to make alternative plans—with sometimes devastating personal consequences.

Labour recognises this injustice, and will work with these women to design a system of recompense for the losses and insecurity they have suffered."

Admittedly, that was the 2019 manifesto, and Labour at that time was led by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), but that does not mean that the manifesto was wrong in what it said. It was absolutely right in its summary and its recognition that something must be done.

Indeed, when the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions was in opposition in the last Parliament, she was cautious in what she said about the ombudsman's report, but she did acknowledge the following:

"we will take time to give the report proper consideration too, and continue to listen respectfully to those involved, as we have done from the start."

She added:

"we won't be able to right every wrong overnight."

That would have been the basis for at least an attempt to give the symbolic redress and acknowledgement that I think most fair-minded people agree is due.

If the Government had come back and said, "We can't implement the ombudsman's recommendations in full at the moment, but we shall try and do it in stages, or over a period, or will at least go some way towards a symbolic acceptance of the wrong that has been done," I think most reasonable people would have understood the situation and have been willing to at least consider some sort of compromise.

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): Does the right hon. Member agree that this is an issue of not just policy, but dignity? These women's voices must be heard, and the Government have a responsibility to honour commitments made, to give fair treatment, and to ensure that something is done.

Sir Julian Lewis: Yes. In a way, the Government have fallen between two stools. The report, as we have heard, anticipated that the Government would be reluctant to the right the wrong done to so many people at once, but nevertheless the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman felt that justice required compensation to be paid. It knew that there would be this Government resistance, so it must have meant a lot to the ombudsman to still go down this highly unusual route of trying to present its report directly to Parliament, because it felt it would not get far by dealing with the Government directly.

One might have expected the Government to offer a scheme that fell some way short of the ombudsman's recommendation, but their outright rejection of any restitution at all is rather insulting to the women whose complaint was upheld by the ombudsman. As we have heard, despite the DWP claiming to accept the findings, and even apologising for its maladministration, it is not offering a penny in restitution, and is relying in its response on a deeply unconvincing polling exercise that supposedly found that nine out of 10 of the affected women knew in advance that their state pension age was going to change. If that was the case, why did so many of them carry on as if nothing was going to change at all? A few moments ago, the hon. Member for Falkirk (Euan Stainbank) asked about the nature of the sampling that was done; only some 200 women born in the 1950s were included in the sample of nearly 2,000 people surveyed, which led to that misleading result.

I know the Minister has a great deal of expertise and a strong track record on issues of this sort from his former career, before he came to this House. I therefore appeal to him to at least reach out the hand of negotiation and discussion; to accept the offer that reasonable people are making to the Government; and to sit down and talk to them, and not to let the whole thing go through the courts, which would lead to an adversarial deepening of hostility and, inevitably, a less desirable outcome for everyone concerned.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): With an immediate four-minute time limit, I call Brian Leishman.

2.55 pm

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) for bringing forward this debate, and for her contribution, which was excellent, as usual. It was quite the sight yesterday to see female parliamentarians don green, white and purple sashes in commemoration of 97 years since women won the vote. It seems unthinkable that women were denied political representation; but then again, women have been the victims of inequality for centuries. The pension inequality that women born in the 1950s suffer from shows that the political battle may have somewhat changed, but prejudice and unfairness still exist.

Some colleagues may feel somewhat uncomfortable with what I am about to say, but I believe that it needs to be said. Someone who supports campaigns on WASPI, nuclear test victims or the Hillsborough law while in opposition should, when they find themselves in a Front-Bench role in Government, do everything they can to deliver justice, as they said they would while holding a placard or a banner. Support and solidarity for people like the WASPI women is not transactional; solidarity is not a campaigning tool. I have campaigned for justice for WASPI women, and that is why I co-sponsored the ten-minute rule Bill for compensation in January.

For years, Governments have refused to deliver justice to WASPI women. That is wrong. Not delivering that justice seems like one of those "tough decisions" that politicians have to take, but the truth is that this was a choice, and it always seems to be working-class people who are on the wrong end of these choices. A Labour Government should make different choices, as highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford. Like many,

I believe that the Labour party is the vehicle for social, political and economic change. A year ago tomorrow, people voted for change—a change from austerity and its social consequences, and from a Government who denied fairness to victims of many scandals and injustices.

I want to mention the ladies from the Falkirk WASPI branch. We met in my constituency office. We sat; they spoke; and I listened to their legitimate anger about the Secretary of State's announcement last December. Their hurt today is as palpable as it was when we met in the new year. I urge the Government to do the right thing.

2.58 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion Preseli) (PC): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman). I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) on securing this debate, and on being such a champion of this cause for many years. Indeed, we have had to debate this injustice in this House for too many years, whether on these green Benches or in other Chambers on the estate. It is a point of great sorrow for me personally that one of my first speeches as a Member of Parliament back in 2017 was on this injustice, and little could I have imagined back then that I would be a little older, three elections down, and still having to debate the injustice that has befallen so many 1950s-born women.

The hon. Lady covered the entire injustice so eloquently that I only want to emphasise a few points. First, we are talking of a generation of women that I highly admire. They were women who suffered injustice and great disadvantages throughout their working lives. They were often not paid in line with their male colleagues. They were not entitled to the same opportunities when it came to private pensions, for example. That injustice itself is important to highlight because it bears relevance on what we are talking about.

We are of course aware of the challenges initiated by the two pension Acts that caused the change in the state pension age for 1950s-born women. After this injustice was brought to us, Members of Parliament from across the island of Great Britain and Northern Ireland asked many women in our constituencies to organise and to campaign. We asked them to diligently undertake the various processes that were available to them to right this wrong, and it all culminated in the ombudsman process. The ombudsman, as we have heard, found that there had been maladministration and an injustice and that far too many 1950s-born women have suffered as a consequence. It is therefore absolutely outrageous that we have a Government not only disregarding the recommendations in part or trying to water them down, but dismissing them outright. As other hon. and right hon. Members have eloquently said, this goes to the heart of our democracy and, indeed, faith in the administrations and institutions of the state to right these terrible wrongs.

I understand from representations made by the campaign groups in my constituency—both WASPI and the 1950s Women of Wales—that they are keen to seek this resolution to ensure some justice for them and their fellow 1950s-born women. They are being very pragmatic. They are willing to speak with and discuss the matter with the Government. I plead the Minister today to reconsider the opportunity that has been presented by these groups to discuss other ways of bringing a resolution forward, so that 1950s-born women can at long last have some justice. We should

not force them to go through the judicial review process and drag them through the courts. Far too many years have already been spent trying to right this wrong.

We cannot delay any further because estimates suggest that over 300,000 1950s-born women have already passed away since this injustice came to light. That is equivalent to one 1950s-born woman dying every 12 minutes. There is an opportunity here to get back round the table, and I urge the Minister and the Government to do so.

3.2 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): I want to put on the record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) for this campaign. Reference has been made to the manifesto in 2019. She and I wrote that section. We worked with WASPI and all the campaigns and with Lord Bryn Davies. We, in the modern language, “co-produced” a scheme at that point. We looked at how much these women had lost—how much they had been robbed—which was about £200 million, and they asked for 25% back, just a quarter. It was expensive—of course it was—but there was a window of opportunity because we said that we would borrow that and pay it out over a five-year period. At that point in time, interest rates were so low, and in fact some went into negative interest rates, that we could afford it. We have lost that window of opportunity, and I am angry that that happened. I am angry because I do not know any MP, exactly as has been said, who was not photographed behind a poster supporting the campaign. I pay tribute to the campaign. A lot of those ladies have been patronised over the years. It was a terrific campaign. In fact, it was so terrific that under this Government, it would most probably be proscribed, but there we are.

We all recognise now that there is an injustice—we all accept that. We all know that the DWP operated essentially a sexist policy; it admits that now. The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) said it is a matter of principle. I do not think it is a matter of principle; it is a matter of hard cash as well, because large numbers of people are still suffering poverty as a result of what has gone on. All I want is a fair settlement, and that is all they are asking for. They are not going away—well, some of them have, because they have died—and this campaign is not going away. We will not let it go away until we get justice for these women.

What the ombudsman has done is put the matter back to this House. We in this House should be demanding that this House determines the scheme itself and is allowed to vote on that scheme. A Budget is coming up in November. A number of us will not support that Budget unless there is something in it for these women. Why should we? Why should we let this go on for another year, while people suffer and the injustice goes unremedied?

I am angry about this. All the promises given over the years have been reneged on and dishonoured. That is not the way we should act as representatives of our communities. I want to be able to go back and say, “At least now the Government are going to offer you negotiations; then, they will report to the House and let the House determine the nature of the scheme.” I want that done within months, not allowed to drag on for years while people suffer in poverty, or lose their lives or their hope of compensation.

[John McDonnell]

Let us make this commitment today. To be honest, I do not expect the Minister to say much today, other than what has been regurgitated year after year, but let us, as an assembly, make that commitment today. Let us say that we will keep coming back over the coming months until we secure that commitment from the Government. I would like it to be a cross-party commitment which all the Front Benchers sign up to, so that we can have some confidence that it will be delivered. Like the WASPI women, I have had enough—enough of these debates, enough of promises not delivered, enough of watching the suffering that women in all our communities have had to endure because of this injustice and inequity.

3.6 pm

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) on securing this debate and on her tremendously eloquent speech, which removed much of what I had to say. In all honesty, though, eloquent speeches are just not going to cut it; they simply will not do the trick. We need action.

I note, with the exception of those present, the absence of so many Labour MPs who, as others have said, stood holding placards in support of the WASPI case. Where are they today? Do they not understand the sense of betrayal, the sense of breach of promise and the breakdown of trust? That is a problem that many of them will face in due course. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Tom Gordon) spoke of accountability. Well, there is accountability, and it will come at the next election, when people have a chance to pass their verdict.

I will not repeat many of the things the right hon. Lady said, but I do want to highlight a couple of points. The PHSO said:

“some women lost opportunities to make informed decisions about their finances.”

The ombudsman also said that Parliament should

“identify a mechanism for providing appropriate remedy for those who have suffered injustice”.

When the Budget was announced, there were great expectations that there would be something in it for the WASPI women. There was nothing—nothing—even though the DWP accepted the PHSO's findings and apologised not once, but twice. If someone takes my wallet and I discover that and I come to them, does anyone think an apology will suffice? No. I want my wallet back. That is the point: an apology just will not cut it.

A great number of women affected by this maladministration are my constituents and there are many thousands across Scotland. I participated in the debate on 17 March—in fact, I mentioned the WASPI women's case in my maiden speech. I believe the hon. Member for Salford spoke straight after me, and that the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) was also present. Many others have a much longer record than I do of campaigning on this issue.

I do not want to go on too long, because many of the points have already been made, but I want to highlight one last thing. The most distasteful aspect of this profound failure of the UK Government was the photograph of the current Secretary of State for Work and Pensions posing with WASPI campaigners, smiling and holding a sign pledging,

“I will work with WASPI to identify and deliver a fair solution for all women affected”.

That is, frankly, shameful.

There is one get-out—in fact, there are a number of ways in which this can be redressed, but here is one. My right hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) will tomorrow re-present his Women's State Pension Age (Ombudsman Report and Compensation Scheme) Bill. If Members have not signed that Bill in support of it, they have an opportunity tomorrow. We in the SNP understand the issues that are involved here. We will continue to support and speak out against this injustice. I thank Members for listening to me.

3.10 pm

Mary Glendon (Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) for securing this debate from the Backbench Business Committee, of which I am a member, and for her eloquent and informative speech.

Financial security is something we endeavour to secure for our families and for ourselves. Many 1950s-born women worked their whole lives with the goal of financial security in their mind's eye, only for it to be affected through no fault of their own. I will not rehearse the ombudsman's judgment, which stands as clear as day. We have heard those words time and again specifically because this has not been appropriately remedied.

What never fails to shock are the lived experiences. The testimonies of 1950s-born women are so important because the impact of their stories never diminishes. This is about real women. My constituent, Ann, is just one of the many 1950s-born women who will not accept that finding a remedy to the DWP's maladministration is

“neither fair nor feasible and would not represent good value for taxpayers.”

When Ann was 57, she applied for a pension forecast. Upon receiving it, Ann discovered that her retirement age was 66, rather than 60. Not long before that shocking news, she went from working five days a week to three. How was she to know that she had to work and plan for retirement over a further six years? She was never informed. Because she was now working part time, it was not possible for her to substantially increase her pension contributions. In 2020, at the age of 63, Ann was made redundant. She had to make her small redundancy payment last her until she retired three years later.

Life has been tough for these women. Events like the pandemic, when Ann lost her job, shook us all, but events where the state has made people's lives more difficult just because of the day they were born, have a particular degree of unfairness to them. Given the ombudsman's significant concerns that the DWP would fail to remedy the injustice, it deliberately laid its report before Parliament. When the Government announced their position in relation to the findings—incredibly, without recourse to Parliament—this reaffirmed the ombudsman's concerns, and sets a worrying precedent for the future.

We have high hopes for our Pensions Minister; his past life, dedicated to improving living standards, makes him well suited to the role he now holds. I truly hope that he will re-examine the Government's position on an issue that is so important to so many women who continue to fight for justice.

3.13 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The purpose of this place is, of course, to make laws, to amend them and sometimes, if we are in opposition, to stop laws being made. But it has another purpose: to hold those with power to account. We do that as individual constituency MPs all the time, taking up cases on behalf of constituents, but this case not only affects the WASPI women in my constituency; I take it up for all the WASPI women, inspired by the leadership of my friend, the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey), and others across the House.

It is unusual in this place for Government Members of Parliament and the official Opposition—Labour MPs and Conservatives—the Liberal Democrats, the SNP, the DUP and Plaid Cymru to all come together in common cause. That speaks volumes. It says that we recognise that these women were unjustly treated. But it is not just our recognition that counts; the ombudsman too recognised exactly that. When an ombudsman states that maladministration in DWP's communication about the Pensions Act 1995 resulted in the complainants losing "opportunities to make informed decisions about some things and to do some things differently",

and that that diminished their "sense of personal autonomy" and financial control—and that is just one of its findings; maladministration, inappropriate communications and the failure to deal with complaints punctuate the ombudsman's findings—for a Government not to respond to the ombudsman is frankly unacceptable.

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that taking this step to ignore the findings of an ombudsman sets a really dangerous precedent that could be exploited by private companies and by Departments?

Sir John Hayes: I do agree with that. It was a case powerfully made by the hon. Member for Salford that this case is very much about the relationship between the ombudsman and Government, and between this House and Government. That connection between independent scrutiny by the ombudsman and our ability as a House to hold the Government to account lies at the heart of this issue, and that is exactly what I was about to say.

This question is about the WASPI women, but it is also about something still more profound. I hope the Minister will recognise that, in the decisions he takes, he will set an important precedent—a precedent that will affect exactly those kinds of relationships.

I will reveal to the House what the Minister already knows: when this matter was considered by Ministers, a submission would have come forward from officials. I have no doubt at all that it would have offered several options. Option A might have been to satisfy the WASPI women in full; option B might have been to come to a partial settlement, which they perhaps would have accepted; option C would have been to do nothing. The Government chose—despite all the pledges in opposition by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Work and Pensions Secretary and the Prime Minister himself—to take that final option of doing nothing.

I find that very surprising. Knowing how reasonable the campaigners are, I suspect that, had a partial settlement been offered, they might well have met the Government

halfway. They might have understood that the cost was substantial and that they had to compromise to some degree—although let us just explode one myth: that all these women are privileged and advantaged. Many were not. Many, when they faced a longer period before they could retire, were in ill health. Many had caring responsibilities. Many were hard up. In campaigning for those women, mindful of those disadvantages, we are speaking for people who otherwise would be powerless. Minister, it is not too late to get this right. For the WASPI women have a just cause, and surely, in the name of decency as well as in the name of good democracy, justice must be done.

3.18 pm

Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): I fully understand that the Government decision announced in December last year was not about the changes to state pension age from 1995 onwards, but rather about how decisions made by the Department between 2005 and 2007 led to a 28-month delay in sending out letters to people affected by those changes. In March 2024, the PHSO's stage 2 and 3 reports found clear maladministration in the way the DWP communicated state pension age changes. That fact cannot be disputed. As a direct result, many women born in the 1950s were left with little or no time to make alternative plans and therefore suffered injustice. Again, that is clear and obvious, I would suggest, to all.

Figures from Age Scotland suggest that around 336,000 women were impacted in Scotland, and over 5,000 of those were in my West Dunbartonshire constituency—my WASPI women—including Elizabeth Daly, Elaine Newfeld and Maureen McGrath. I could list hundreds who have contacted me to share their personal stories, to help me understand that this is not just about figures or statistics. They include Liz, who cared for her desperately ill husband, her retirement plan wrecked and their lives destroyed by years of suffering, and Maureen, penalised because she retired at the age of 60 to care for her elderly mother, who lost out on accessing a full state retirement pension. All my WASPI women tell me that, at this stage, it is not about the level of need or the amount of compensation, but about justice.

The UK Government were right to recognise the injustice suffered by WASPI women in the statement to the House on 17 December, and to apologise for the maladministration that affected women across the UK. Of course, the steps set out by the Government to ensure this does not happen again are welcome, but we must learn the lessons and always set a clear timetable for notice of any future state pension age changes. However, an apology is not enough. I urge my Government colleagues to look again at the ombudsman's report and all its recommendations.

Ignoring key elements of the report, by refusing to comply with its instructions and refusing to set up a compensation scheme for maladministration, not only undermines its role and function, but is unprecedented and sets us on a very dangerous path. For any Government to reject the recommendations of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman is extremely rare. Between 2018 and 2021, the PHSO made a total of 811 compensation recommendations—only one was not complied with and 99.9% were accepted. Therefore this is highly unusual and, in my opinion, corrosive.

[Douglas McAllister]

To conclude, I suggest that we should avoid unnecessary court action. Let us get around the table with the WASPI women and avoid years of court battles, similar to other scandals over the past few decades. Let us urgently review and explore what schemes this Government can consider, and offer financial redress to the 1950s women who deserve justice and to be properly compensated for past Government maladministration.

3.22 pm

Liz Jarvis (Eastleigh) (LD): I rise to speak on behalf of the 5,180 women in my constituency of Eastleigh who are impacted by state pension age inequality, and the thousands of women across the country who were victims of Department for Work and Pensions maladministration. As I said in the debate in Westminster Hall in March:

“We know that the Government are facing incredibly difficult challenges, but ignoring the voices of thousands of women is a huge mistake. This issue is not going to go away.”—[*Official Report*, 17 March 2025; Vol. 764, c. 11WH.]

My constituent, Chrissy, received her state-pension six years later than she was expecting. She told me:

“Those lost years weren’t just numbers — they were years of struggle, uncertainty, and hardship. The silence from the government is a cruel erasure of our lives. The government says it’s too expensive to compensate us. But it was never too expensive for us—yet we had to live with the cost and the hardship every single day”.

Many of the women in my constituency who were impacted were left with very little to live on, blindsided by the sudden loss of income. They were forced to return to work in low-paid jobs to get by and, in some cases, had to use food banks. The toll on their lives, and those of their families, should not be underestimated. These women spent decades working, raising families and often taking on unpaid care-giving roles. Many continue to shoulder caring responsibilities today. The way that they have been treated by successive Governments is nothing short of disgraceful.

My constituents’ stories are echoed across the country. The WASPI campaign estimates that 3.8 million women have been affected—women who have been treated appallingly, and feel that they do not matter and are invisible. I urge the Government to stop gaslighting them and start listening—really listening—to the pain, injustice and betrayal they have endured. The refusal to provide compensation not only is morally indefensible, but sets a dangerous precedent, as the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) said. If Departments can accept maladministration yet ignore the ombudsman’s remedy, the entire purpose of independent oversight collapses.

Today I call again on the Government to do the right thing and compensate the women who were unfairly impacted by the changes to the state pension age, because it is the right thing to do. How much longer do these women have to wait for the Government to U-turn on state pension age inequality and give them the compensation that they deserve?

3.24 pm

Susan Murray (Mid Dunbartonshire) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) for championing the cause of WASPI women, who have

been utterly failed by successive Governments. I will not repeat what others have said, but it is clear that the Government should act on the ombudsman’s report after the maladministration of the DWP.

I have spoken to women in my constituency, WASPI Scotland and across the UK. These are women who historically have faced systemic inequalities, lower wages and difficulty accessing the same work opportunities as men. They have disproportionately shouldered caring responsibilities as primary carers for children and, later, they frequently cared for elderly relatives and loved ones with disabilities. They continue to give their unpaid labour without acknowledgment, which significantly reduces pressures and costs on our NHS and social care services.

I am one of those women myself. After a family illness, my life changed in an instant. I had to stop working and become a carer, and I had to be at home. If I was not fortunate enough to still have my health and strength to become a councillor later in life, when my caring responsibilities allowed, and now an MP, I would have been reliant on my state pension and a very small private pension due to circumstances totally outwith my control.

The reality is that I am far from being alone in finding myself with caring responsibilities or ill health, and many of my counterparts are not in my fortunate position. WASPI women like myself worked hard, paid into the system and looked forward to their retirement, based on their understanding of the system at the time. At times when others were planning their pensions, these women were in low-paid jobs that were flexible enough to allow them to continue with family commitments.

When it became clear that corrective action was necessary, the Government first exploited the plight of these women for political gain. Once they were in power, they then ignored the promises they had made to win their seats. Most troubling is the Government’s continued refusal to act, despite the ombudsman’s extraordinary call for parliamentary intervention. Rather than providing decisive leadership and delivering justice, the Government have delayed, deflected and evaded accountability.

If the Government are sincere about fairness, integrity and honouring their commitments to support working people, they must go beyond expressions of sympathy. Concrete steps must be taken to deliver the ombudsman’s recommendation, recognising both the scale of the injustice and the dignity of those involved. These women deserve better: they have spent their lives working and contributing to our society, preventing costs for the NHS. We must value their contribution and thank them.

Implementing the advice of the ombudsman is the least that the Government can do. For those women who, like me, are fortunate to have a higher income after reaching state pension age, His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs and the tax system will effectively claw back a large proportion of any redress and return it to the Treasury.

3.28 pm

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): I stand here in support of the 6,020 WASPI women in my constituency and every single WASPI woman across the UK. I congratulate the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) on securing this crucial debate. I also thank her for her powerful and compelling speech,

which clearly presented the case and evidence as well as the injustice that these women have suffered and the clear need to address it through the payment of compensation by implementing the recommendations of the ombudsman.

Without wanting to repeat any of the points that have been made, I will read out some specific comments from my constituents in Dewsbury and Batley. Virginia, a constituent of mine, wrote to me just after I was elected:

"I am absolutely devastated and I feel betrayed. For years, senior Labour representatives and even the Prime Minister himself pledged to deliver fair compensation to those impacted. They have now made a political choice to break that promise and to ignore the findings of an independent watchdog... The DWP got it wrong, and they cannot simply adopt a 'pick and mix' approach to which elements of an independent ombudsman's conclusions they find convenient."

She went on to say:

"Furthermore, in recent months, all pensioners losing their Winter Fuel Allowance have been written to directly. Why does the Government not feel this would have made a difference for WASPI women?"

Another constituent, Ann, wrote:

"I need to vent my frustration and anger at the Government's announcement yesterday that they will not accept the Ombudsman's recommendation to pay WASPI women some compensation for maladministration. They were in support of this whilst they were in opposition."

This decision is a complete betrayal and a breach of trust between this place and the people we represent, and it must be reversed. Ann went on to say:

"The people making these decisions are in fortunate positions themselves but I was relying on their understanding and compassion for others who were less able to make up the £48k which I reckon to have 'lost'."

Paula wrote to me:

"As you know, thousands of women living in Dewsbury were impacted. Many, including me, were left with little time to make alternative plans for their retirement and have been affected by this lack of notice ever since."

She raised a critical point, which was that she had no notification from the DWP at all until she wrote to it in 2006 asking for clarification. When it replied to say that she would be able to retire at 65, that came as a shock. In 2011, when an extra year was added, the DWP did not communicate that to her, either.

In conclusion, as the hon. Member for Salford has clearly explained, the Government's justification for not paying compensation is absolutely flawed. The argument that it is too costly or complex to provide compensation is untrue. As the ombudsman wrote in its findings,

"finite resources should not be used as an excuse"

to avoid "a fair remedy." As such, I repeat the calls of Members from across the House for the Government to reverse their decision, bring a vote on compensation to this House, and engage in out-of-court talks with WASPI women.

3.32 pm

James MacCleary (Lewes) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) for securing this debate. She spoke superbly and with great passion on the subject.

December last year marked a shameful day for this Government, when millions of women born in the 1950s—women who have given a lifetime of service, hard work and care to their families, communities and country—were utterly betrayed. As ever, the right hon.

Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) gave a superb speech, but I take slight issue with one thing he said, which was that the Government did nothing. If only they had done nothing, we would be in a better situation. Instead, despite the clear evidence from the parliamentary ombudsman of maladministration by the Department for Work and Pensions, the Government decided that there would be no financial compensation—no justice, only betrayal. That was a choice that the Government made on behalf of these women—women who faced significant hardship because they were not properly informed about changes to the state pension age. An apology, while necessary, is simply not enough. A Government cannot apologise for maladministration and then refuse to put things right. It is disgraceful to acknowledge an injustice, but refuse to fix it. These women deserve fairness, they deserve dignity, and they deserve compensation.

As other hon. Members have mentioned, we know exactly why the Government will not act. It comes down to money. For years, the Liberal Democrats have championed the cause of WASPI women, among others. We have consistently called for fair and proper compensation, in line with the ombudsman's recommendations.

In my constituency, I have seen at first hand how deeply this injustice has affected women's lives. They have worked hard, planned carefully and trusted this Government to keep their promises, only to be badly let down. I will quickly share the story of my constituent, Helen from Seaford, who is part of my local WASPI group. She was shocked to hear about the changes in 2012, in a letter informing her that the age at which she was due to retire would rise from 60 to 65. Unbelievably, that was only two and a half years before she was due to retire, and it meant she had to work an extra six years to be able to support her daughter properly. Helen spent 50 years paying national insurance as a single parent, and she told me she was so angry that what she had worked for had been taken away from her. I am sure the House would agree that Helen's resilience and determination are inspiring, but she should never have been placed in that position.

This Government made a cynical calculation that these women can be ignored and that they would not fight back and would not keep pushing, but they underestimate the strength and determination of women across this country, including in my constituency, who have stood up and demanded fairness. This decision cannot and must not stand. It is a bitter irony that the Government are now fighting in court the very people they said they would stand up and fight for. I urge the Government to reconsider their position, to listen to reason and finally do the right thing and compensate these women now.

3.36 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a real pleasure to speak in this debate. First, I thank the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) for setting the scene so incredibly well and all the hon. and right hon. Members who have contributed fantastically, putting across the demands of their constituents.

This is not a new issue, and we know that. I do not think I have missed a WASPI debate. Indeed, I do not think the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) has missed one either in

[*Jim Shannon*]

the time I have been here. This week in this House has given me hope that perhaps the Government can acknowledge when we are moving in the wrong direction. The Government need to correct the wrong steps taken and follow through on the recommendations in the ombudsman's report.

Northern Ireland has some 77,000 WASPI women, of whom 7,000 are my constituents. I do not know all 7,000 personally—I have not done that roll-call—but those who have come to me have told me their stories. In many cases, they are ladies who have cleaned floors or cleaned offices or been classroom assistants or teachers. Age catches up with us all, and it catches up with me, too. It catches up with them, and their knees are not as strong as they used to be. They planned their pensions in accordance with the timescale, and then it was taken away from them. That is the concern I have. They had planned for their life, and then they were deprived of that.

The report rightly found that some WASPI women were not informed about the changes to their pensions and had made long-term financial plans based on the assumption that they would receive their state pension at 60. All their financial planning was in place, and then it was just taken away. That meant that when the WASPI women lost their pensions, they lost all sources of income and met unexpected financial insecurity. The insufficient information was not only negligent, but deeply unjust, and the Government have acknowledged that to be the case, so there is a precedent. The hon. Member for Lewes (James MacCleary) was right to say that the process was backed away from.

Women who spent decades raising families, paying taxes and contributing to the economy were left without recognition for their hard work. Many WASPI women were forced back into the workforce, often with disabilities and often into low-paying jobs, or had no choice but to apply for benefits. Those women should never have had to do that after a lifetime contributing to the system.

A number of these women—I call them the silent generation—still face significant outstanding debts and loans that they will struggle to pay off for the rest of their lives due to the inability to manage their income appropriately. When they realised that they could not access their pensions, their ability to go back to full-time hours was not simple, and the emotional toll has been significant, too. Many WASPI women now experience stress and depression brought about by financial uncertainty. It is only fair that the hard and consistent work done by these ladies is financially recognised.

I say this with respect to the Minister, but one of the first steps that this Government took was to sort out the back pay of union workers. I am not saying they should not have done that, but if there is to be fairness in this system, I cannot for the life of me understand how they can do that in one breath, and then in the next apologise to the WASPI women but not do right by them.

The silent generation are determined to be silent no longer. I applaud them for going against the grain, as we often say at home, by continuing to complain. I applaud them for continuing to speak, when many of them have been told to be quiet and give it up. I applaud them for continuing to hold Governments—this one and the last one—to account. I applaud them for standing beside the weary and the worn, and for demanding compensation for all affected.

Apologising is not enough. As the hon. Member for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East (Seamus Logan) said, it is not about words any more. It is about action, and now is the time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I refuse to believe that age is catching up with the hon. Gentleman. I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

3.40 pm

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) on securing the debate, on campaigning on this issue, and on making sure that this debate came to the main Chamber. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions this afternoon. As well as hearing the very strong and powerful case around this particular issue, we have heard personal examples. Whether it is Gill from Tiverton, Ann from Newcastle, Helen from Seaford or Paula from Dewsbury, we have heard that many women rightly feel a sense of raw injustice, and the Government must act.

I have met WASPI women many times in Parliament, but I have also met them in my constituency. A couple of years before I was elected, I met a group of 30 WASPI women. I regret that I cannot recall the name of the woman whose case I remember, but her circumstances stuck with me. She was quietly spoken, and I could tell that she had real rage and fury inside her, but she was not prepared to show it. She just said, "I've spent my entire life working. I've raised a family. I've watched the pennies, and I was proud to stand on my own two feet. But at the end of my working life, I felt robbed of my money and robbed of my dignity. Even though I know this situation is not of my making and not my fault, I feel a tremendous sense of shame."

That really stuck with me. Some 3.8 million women are affected by this issue, and many of them feel a sense of shame. They should not, but they do. It is really frustrating that the Government, notwithstanding the terrible inheritance that they received, have chosen to do nothing, and there are two problems facing them. The first is that an obvious injustice has been left unaddressed. The second is that, as so many Members from across the House have said, it sets a very dangerous precedent. For some women, an offer of an apology or a payment might be symbolic, but it is far more than that for many of them. It is about survival, and it would help them to get out of the struggle that they are now in.

On behalf of my party, I urge the Government please to reflect after this debate, and to go back to the drawing board and think about what can be done. At the very least, they should think of something to help those women who are struggling the most. Doing nothing is really not an option. If the rebellion earlier this week was for any reason at all, it was to send a message to this Government that their own party, this House and the British public want a Government who will stand up for the underdog—those who are hard done by in life, by the Government and by circumstances out of their control. I hope the Government listen today and act, because to govern is to choose. The Government must know that it is not too late to make a different choice.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

3.43 pm

Danny Kruger (East Wiltshire) (Con): Let me start by giving credit to the hon. Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) for her very powerful speech and for all the work that she has done on this campaign over the years, and to many other Labour Members who have spoken so well today, particularly the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who I always listen to with respect on this topic and, indeed, on some others.

It has been good to hear from Members. I particularly welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman), who is a great new addition to this place. We see here the true voice of the Labour party. It is the Labour movement at its best, and I pay tribute to Labour Members for their campaigning on this topic. They are the heroes of the movement. We also have the heroes of the Conservative party behind me—my good friends the knights of the shires—whom it is an honour to listen to. It is like listening to Edmund Burke when my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) speaks about duty and responsibility.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Salford and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings on their work together on this campaign, which, a few months ago, secured the very significant Westminster Hall debate that has been mentioned. On that day, as if the product of their work, out popped, fresh and pink, the new Minister, who was appointed to his role on that day, as if for the very purpose of answering the question of what should be done for the WASPI women. There was hope of great things from him, but I am afraid to say that we were disappointed on that day. He could offer no hope at all, yet since then we have seen a whole series of U-turns. They have become fashionable on the Government Front Bench, and who knows what we may hear the from Minister today.

I recognise, and I am sure the Minister will stress, how difficult it is to address the very complicated circumstances of the very many women caught up in the pension age changes. As I am sure he will say, the ombudsman has recognised that there was no direct impact on pensioners' incomes from the maladministration and the miscommunication of which the DWP was guilty in the 2000s. However, as Members have said—I particularly recognise the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—women made decisions about their future, and about their life, in ignorance of their true circumstances. The failure by the DWP to successfully and appropriately communicate with the women caused them to make decisions that directly disadvantaged them.

It is simply not credible, and I hope the Minister will not advance this argument, to say that correspondence from the Government is essentially pointless and has no value. That would be to suggest that there is no point in any Government communication by post. Of course, women were not advised of the changes in the circumstances, and that was the fault of the Government of the day. As many Members have said, and I acknowledge the powerful point made by the hon. Member for St Albans (Daisy Cooper), women deserve so much more. As she said, our constituents feel that they have been robbed not just of their money, but of their dignity as a consequence of these decisions.

What is to be done? There has been a series of suggestions about how we might go forward. On a point of process, I do not agree with the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Tom Gordon)—and I am concerned that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings seemed to agree with him—that the ombudsman's report should in effect be binding on the Government. I do not think that is appropriate, because these are sovereign decisions that the Government, accountable to Parliament, should be making. However, I agree with the hon. Member and others that these reports should be respected by the Government, and I feel that simply did not happen in this case.

Tom Gordon: It is becoming a habit of mine to intervene on the hon. Member. He says that the report should be respected, but should not be binding, so what does he have in mind, and how would it look?

Danny Kruger: It is absolutely essential that the points made in the ombudsman's report are fully acknowledged by the Government, and it is necessary, as I will explain, that some meaningful redress is made to the victims of the DWP's maladministration.

The hon. Member for Salford suggested that there could be another review of the system by the Minister for Social Security and Disability, but I do not think that the magic words, "Timms review", will get the Government out of this hole. He has enough on his hands sorting out the mess they have made on benefits, so this is a job for this Minister, who is a very clever man, and I have great confidence in him.

The suggestion made by some Members of mediation may be usefully taken forward. However, as my right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) said, it is simply insulting of the Government to make absolutely no redress and no acknowledgement of the injustice that the WASPI women have endured, and it is appropriate for some meaningful acknowledgement to be made.

It is not for me to rescue the Government from the consequences of their own incontinence—their fiscal folly—which has got them into the mess they are in, but they have made several discretionary payments since they came to power. There were the salary increases for train drivers, without any improvement in productivity; the creation of a multibillion-pound energy company that makes no energy; our paying another country billions of pounds to take over sovereign territory belonging to the UK; and, of course, all the U-turns that have imposed significant new costs on the taxpayer, including those costing £5 billion this week alone. Obviously, Government can make discretionary payments if they want to; these are sovereign decisions that they can make.

Crucially, any such decision must be funded. We saw this week that the Government essentially fell apart as a consequence of a whole series of bad decisions made in the Treasury. Parliament rose up against the Treasury and demanded change. The decision making at the heart of the Government has been woeful for the past year since Labour has come to office. I pay tribute to the parliamentarians who resisted that this week. This is a new opportunity for the Government to put right a mistake, and I look forward to hearing how the Minister proposes to do that.

3.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Torsten Bell): I thank all hon. Members who have spoken powerfully today, and in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) for leading today's debate on behalf of the Backbench Business Committee. This is an important topic that she and I have discussed several times, both in public and in private. I look forward to her closing remarks.

When we retire, the question of how comfortable we will be in retirement and in the years leading up to it—ot least given the growth in pre-retirement poverty, partly due to ill health, as the hon. Member for Mid Dunbartonshire (Susan Murray) set out—is crucial to all of us. We ask that question of ourselves, and of those we care about. As the debate has shown, many hon. Members rightly ask that about the country as a whole. We should expect people to have strong views on the state pension age. We all know women affected by the changes made, since 2010 in particular, that affect that age group—constituents, friends and family. I have declared a family interest on this front before, alongside my professional one.

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): I, too, have many constituents who are affected, and I have held up the banner saying, “I stand with WASPI women.” My hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Rebecca Long Bailey) laid out where we can find the money. Surely we can promise to revisit this when the public purse allows, rather than letting down these women who have been let down over and over again. Justice delayed is justice denied.

Torsten Bell: I always thank my hon. Friend for her contributions. She makes a powerful case. I will come on to the reasons why we do not agree with that case, but I understand her point.

This is a cohort of women who have too often faced discrimination in the world of work, with lasting effects on the value of their workplace pensions. They have borne the brunt of unequal caring responsibilities, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Salford set out, historically the genders have had very unequal state pensions. That, at least, has been addressed, but the workplace pension divide remains as big as ever.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): I should declare that my mum is a WASPI woman. She would be disappointed if I was not here today, and there is nothing worse than your mum being disappointed in you. I also represent 6,030 other WASPI women in my constituency. I just wonder if the Minister really understands the discrimination faced by 1950s women, including sexism and a lot of discrimination in the workplace. They just feel let down. Does the Minister realise that, and that they absolutely deserve justice?

Torsten Bell: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I know, without having met her, that his mum will not be disappointed in him. Obviously, the point he makes is absolutely right; it is the point that I was just making. I think we are all aware of the experiences that this generation of women have had to face, not just in the labour market but much more broadly. He makes a powerful case, as always.

Now, there is broad political consensus that it is right to equalise the state pension age for men and women, but the acceleration of the state pension age increases by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition was more politically controversial. I was not going to mention it, but I will gently remind Liberal Democrat Members who have spoken today—the hon. Members for Eastleigh (Liz Jarvis) and for Lewes (James MacCleary) used particularly strong language on this point—that it was the choice made by their party. Not to mention that acceleration at all—[*Interruption.*] If Members are going to use strong language about difficult choices, then they need to reflect on the choices that led to that point. My party opposed those choices at the time.

However, neither the acceleration nor the longer planned increases to the SPA legislated for since 1995 were matters the ombudsman investigated. This matters, given that it is the desirability of the original policy decisions made by previous Governments that is most frequently referred to by campaigners and by hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) today, who focus on the increases to the state pension age. In contrast, the ombudsman's focus was on how those changes were communicated by the Department for Work and Pensions, as the hon. Member for Mid Dunbartonshire very clearly pointed out.

As all hon. Members know, we carefully considered the ombudsman's findings. We always will, given its important role, which was set out by the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) today and in several debates that I have taken part in with him in recent months.

Sir John Hayes: The Minister is right to say that no party—indeed, no previous Government—can be excused in this respect, because this matter covers the time in office of several Governments. The difference is that members of his party, in opposition, said,

“This injustice can't go on. I have been a longstanding supporter of the WASPI campaign”,

and that Labour “will compensate” the WASPI women, as it is “their money”. That was said by the current Work and Pensions Secretary and the current Deputy Prime Minister.

Torsten Bell: The right hon. Gentleman has been a Member of this House for much longer than me, so he knows how this works. Parties set out their manifestos, and I am sure that if he looks at the Labour party's 2024 manifesto, he will find there different words from the ones he has just shared with the House.

The Government agree that letters should have been sent sooner. We have apologised, and we will learn the lessons from that. However, as hon. Members and campaigners on this issue are well aware, we do not agree with the ombudsman's approach to injustice or to remedy—and neither, reading carefully between the lines of the speech from the hon. Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger), do the Opposition. The hon. Gentleman spoke very eloquently, as always.

Let us look at what the ombudsman said when it made its decision to lay the report before Parliament. It was not looking ahead to what a future Government might do; it knew that the then Conservative Government would have come to a similar conclusion. Hon. Members should remember that the long debate over those years

between the Government and the ombudsman was held in private, so the ombudsman was aware of the approach of the Government, to whom it was talking in a way that those of us outside Government at the time could not have known.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Tom Gordon) and the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) asked about the decision not to accept an ombudsman's findings. They are right to say that it is unusual, but it is definitely not unprecedented. I should spell out that the Government have accepted other ombudsman findings since, so it is not right to say that this is some kind of fundamental break in the approach by Government.

Seamus Logan: Earlier, the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) warned us that we might simply see the Government Front Bencher regurgitation the Government's views today. Can the Minister clarify whether he has been sent here to defend the indefensible, or will he give us something new today?

Torsten Bell: The hon. Gentleman is welcome to choose his tone; I will continue to the end of my comments. My job is to come and explain the Government's decision, and to be held accountable for it. That is what I am doing today, and what I will continue to do over the course of my remarks. It is right that the Government are then asked questions about their decision; that is the nature of this democracy, as the hon. Member for East Wiltshire said.

An important consideration in the Government making this decision was that evidence showed that sending people unsolicited letters is unlikely to affect what they know. That is why letters are sent only as part of wider communication campaigns. This evidence was not properly considered by the ombudsman. Another consideration was that the great majority of 1950s-born women were aware of the state pension age changing, if not of a change in their specific state pension age, as several hon. Members have pointed out. My hon. Friend the Member for Salford mentioned the statistic of 43%, referring to the 2024 rather than 2023 survey. However, as she will know, that refers to all women, including some women as young as 16; if we look at the cohort of women born in the 1950s, the figure is far, far higher. On those and other grounds, we rejected the ombudsman's approach to injustice and remedy.¹

Members will be aware that litigation is live, so I will not go into lots more detail on the research evidence, which is the core of that litigation. I will just say two things: first, our decision was based on published research reports, which were robust and met professional standards; secondly, the same awareness research, which the right hon. Member for New Forest East disparaged, was used by the ombudsman.

Sir Julian Lewis: Will the Minister explain to the House why not one single speech in this debate until his has taken the line that he is taking? Everyone who has spoken in this debate believes that some compensation, at least symbolically, should be paid.

Torsten Bell: I thank the right hon. Member for his intervention. I am a liberal man. People will come to different views on the evidence. There are many Members

in the House who have campaigned powerfully on this issue over many years, and I respect the work they have done on that. I am setting out a different view from the one that the right hon. Member has taken. That is the nature of policy choice, the nature of accountability, and the nature of this debate.

The ombudsman is clear that redress and compensation should normally reflect individual impact, as it did in the case of the Equitable Life compensation scheme that an hon. Member mentioned. And they spell out the challenges of assessing the individual circumstances of 3.5 million women, not least given that it took the ombudsman nearly six years to look at just six cases. The reality is that assessing them would take thousands of staff very many years. We gave detailed thought to whether we could design a fair and feasible compensation scheme. However, most of the schemes that were suggested would not focus on women who lost opportunities as a result of the delay in sending letters. Rule-based schemes, such as that suggested by the Work and Pensions Committee, would make payments on the basis of the likes of age rather than injustice. Simply playing a flat rate to all 3.5 million women born in the 1950s, irrespective of any injustice, is also hard to justify.

Fundamentally, though, our decision was not only driven by cost—to answer directly the question of the hon. Member for Falkirk (Euan Stainbank)—but by the fact that we do not agree with the ombudsman's approach to injustice or remedy for the reasons that I have set out. Indeed, our commitment to pensioners can be seen in the significant fiscal investments that we are making in our priorities for pensioners, including raising the state pension and rescuing the NHS.

John McDonnell: I have an awful lot of affection for the hon. Member. Is there any difference between this speech and the one that was made in Westminster Hall? As it does not look as though there is, he might as well just send us the tape of the last one.

Torsten Bell: Well, the right hon. Member has demonstrated more affection on previous occasions is what I would gently say to that. If he is asking me whether the Government's position has changed, I am afraid that the answer, from his perspective, is no.

Daisy Cooper: A few moments ago, the Minister said that the Government had concluded that it would not be appropriate to apply a flat rate to all 3.8 million women. Have the Government done any modelling on paying a flat rate to any other smaller cohorts within that 3.8 million women—for example, women on pension credit, or under a certain level of income or savings?

Torsten Bell: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I think we have discussed versions of this question before. Yes, there have been models that may have focused on a subset of women—for example, those on pension credit—but that still comes up against the fundamental challenge of payments based on some other qualifying condition, which in this case is income, and not the injustice that has been suffered. The ombudsman set out that compensation was due for the injustice, not just the virtue of being a woman born in the 1950s.

Daisy Cooper rose—

1.[*Official Report*, 1 September 2025; Vol. 772, c. 3WC.] (Correction)

Torsten Bell: I will give way, but then I will wrap up before Madam Deputy Speaker loses her patience.

Daisy Cooper: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. He will be aware that in other compensation schemes, there are often waves of compensation. The first wave of compensation can be on one indicator, with a second wave looking at other complicating factors. Have the Government looked at that model?

Torsten Bell: I refer the hon. Lady to our very detailed response, which was published in December. It runs over a number of pages, so I will send her the relevant extracts on the conclusions that we have considered. *[Interruption.]* I will have to conclude now because I am testing the patience of Madam Deputy Speaker.

I recognise that none of what I have said today is likely to change the minds of many Members here, as the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) has kindly pointed out to me. I know that, not least because I see many familiar faces from similar debates in Westminster Hall, as the even more friendly right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) has told me. The campaigners, too, are unlikely to be satisfied. Their tenacity has been clear for all to see and has been attested to sufficiently today. They are right to continue to point to the wider context, which is that society has been far from universally kind to women born in the 1950s, as they have wrestled with discrimination in the labour market and beyond, which is what the hon. Member for Ceredigion Preseli (Ben Lake) set out earlier. Nothing regarding the case I have set out today diminishes any of that. However, the Government have made their decision and we owe it to everybody to be clear about it. It is right that hon. Members hold us to account for it, as the hon. Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger) has set out.

That has happened today and in other debates in the House, including Westminster Hall. As I have said before, there are lessons for the Department to learn, and learn them we will. We will also continue to support women born in the 1950s and pensioners generally, not least by raising the state pension and turning around our NHS. I know that they and hon. Members will expect nothing less.

4.4 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey: I want to thank the whole range of colleagues who have spoken today. It has been a fantastic collegiate debate that has shown the House at its best. For those outside of the Chamber who are watching, the campaign continues. It is a campaign that brings so many of us together, and there are so many formidable campaigners in this Chamber who need to be celebrated.

I know that the Minister is in a difficult position, and I have a lot of time for him, as I say. I know that he is bound by the Government's current position on this

issue, but I want to pick up on some of the information he gave in his speech. He said that I referred to a piece of research from 2024, but it was actually from 2003, and it is research that the ombudsman itself relies on in saying that 43% of women did not know that the state pension age was increasing. The Minister again made the point about letters being ineffective, but he must understand that to people watching this debate, that is an absurd thing to say. I know that he says that DWP research states that, but the research is absurd and does not really have any basis in reality.

I do not want the Minister to go down in history as the man who denied justice for the 1950s-born women—I honestly do not. I want to see action on this, and I want him to go down as the person who finally managed to award these women justice. He has to understand that the arguments being put forward by the Government are absurd to say the least. In fact, in denying the ombudsman's report, the argument is akin to arguing that the world is flat.

John McDonnell: It is certainly not an argument that the Resolution Foundation would have put forward when the Minister was director of it.

Rebecca Long Bailey: The right hon. Gentleman is right; it is not. That is why I place so much hope in the Minister to take action on this.

To conclude, there were two statements made by colleagues that stood out for me. The first was from the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), who said that in the name of decency, justice must be done. The Minister must recognise that, so I urge him to get round the table with the women and present a package before Parliament that we can all support and celebrate. As the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said, we are not going to give up until justice is done, and neither are the women.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's (PHSO) report on Women's State Pension Age, HC 638, published in March 2024, which found that maladministration in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) communication about the Pensions Act 1995 resulted in complainants losing opportunities to make informed decisions about some things and to do some things differently, and diminished their sense of personal autonomy and financial control; further notes that there will likely be a significant number of women born in the 1950s who have suffered injustice because of maladministration in DWP's communication about the Pensions Act 1995; and also notes that, given the scale of the impact of DWP's maladministration, and the urgent need for a remedy, the PHSO took the rare but necessary step of asking Parliament to intervene, laying their report before Parliament under section 10(3) of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and asked Parliament to identify a mechanism for providing appropriate remedy for those who have suffered injustice.

Phone Theft

4.8 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of mobile phone theft.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for ensuring that we could have this important debate today. I know that there are many MPs who would have loved to be here today and who have suffered mobile phone thefts.

Ten years ago my bag was stolen when I was at a conference in a Westminster hotel. I used geo tracking and saw it moving slowly over the bridge. I called the police, but they were not interested—as I say, it was 10 years ago. Somebody at the conference had a car, and in true “Starsky and Hutch” style we used it to chase down the thieves. We noticed as we were travelling alongside them that we were probably going to make them very suspicious, so we went ahead of them and stopped. This is probably a lot of detail, but we then pretended to kiss as the thieves walked towards us. I called the police again to tell them that we were about to apprehend the thieves and retrieve my phone. The police then arrived, and when they jumped out of the van we jumped out of the car. The thieves had about 20 mobile phones on them. I recovered my bag and, although they had dumped my stuff along the way, I got all my stuff back. But the thing is, that was 10 years ago, and things have moved on—people understand that there is “Find my phone”, as do the police, so we know that we can recover stolen phones—so now is the time to prioritise this type of theft, which is making our streets less safe. Tourists are being targeted.

I know that the Home Secretary has had a roundtable with mobile phone companies and with the Mayor of London, but if the companies will not take this problem as seriously as they should, we need to force them to do that by law. I went to a good briefing on the Metropolitan police’s Operation Reckoning, which shows its determination. This is a vital way of achieving the Government’s safer streets mission. In Westminster, a mobile phone is stolen every six minutes.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady on bringing forward the debate. She is absolutely right, but it is about even more than mobile phones. I am not technically minded—I own up to that; I am of a different generation—but today’s young person carries on their mobile phone bank details, family things and personal things that allow access to accounts and whatever else. Sometimes, in the back of their phones they have their debit cards and their driving licence, so when someone gets their phone, they get almost their whole life. As the Minister acknowledged in a previous debate, perhaps today’s young person needs to understand that if they lose that, they lose almost everything financially.

Dawn Butler: I thank the hon. Member for that important intervention; he is absolutely right. A mobile phone is not just for making a phone call anymore; it is an integral part of most people’s lives. It holds data on it, as well as pictures that its owner will never be able to take again. It holds voicemails from loved ones. My friend who had her phone snatched in Egypt had a voicemail from her late mother on her phone. Mobile phones hold so much information that when someone snatches one, they are snatching a part of that person’s life.

Mary Glendon (Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend) (Lab): Further to the intervention from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), does my hon. Friend agree that public awareness is not where it should be? It worries me to see people with their phones sticking out of their back pockets or people standing and taking photographs around Westminster, knowing how high the incidence of theft is. Somehow the public need to be more aware and more careful with these precious things that hold so much of their lives on them.

Dawn Butler: I thank my hon. Friend for that important intervention. That is the thing: until we ensure that our streets are safe, we must ensure that people are acutely aware of what is happening. I find myself sometimes tapping people on the shoulder and saying, “Excuse me, can you move your phone from your back pocket? You might get pickpocketed.”

I feel that the manufacturers use this as part of their business model. They know that once a phone gets stolen, its owner will go and buy another phone, and phones currently operate on a monopoly. I do not know if anybody has ever tried to switch from an iPhone to a Samsung as I did—oh my goodness; it is like they do not want you to switch over. Even from Android to Android, it is difficult to move over the data. Mobile phone companies know exactly what they are doing. Thank God for USB-Cs, because iPhone chargers used to change with every upgrade, so people ended up forking out more and more money.

We need to hold the manufacturers to account because they make enough money and enough profit. We have to get to a stage where we are putting people and the safety of our citizens first.

London is one of the greatest cities on earth and we want Tories to come—not Tories, but tourists. *[Laughter.]* Tories are obviously welcome too, even though they are not here today. We want tourists to come to London to sample the art, the culture and the inclusion. We do not want to go around warning them about their mobile phones. Over 700 phones were also stolen from Departments, so the Government should have a vested interest in this because it will cost taxpayers money to replace those phones.

We can redesign mobile phones so that nobody wants to steal them. I do not know if people are old enough to remember—although there are a few in the Chamber today—when car radios used to be stolen out of cars. We combated and stopped that crime by building the radios into the cars so they could not easily be snatched out.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): I just want to throw something else at the debate around the insurance issue. Many say, “You should be covered by insurance.” My phone was stolen last November. It was classic: I got bumped into in a big crowd and did not realise. I then recognised the theft and did “find my phone”. It was in north London, so I contacted the police, but they do not investigate after an hour because they say it is gone. I said, “I have the personal numbers of the whole of the Cabinet there, so that might cause a bit of a problem.” I then claimed on the household insurance and was covered, but then the insurance company would not renew my cover. That just adds to the problems all the way through. Everyone seems to be making a profit out of it, apart from us.

Dawn Butler: I am impressed that my right hon. Friend has the all the Cabinet's phone numbers. He is absolutely right; the knock-on effect of this crime is huge. Whether it is the house insurance, the personal stuff or the global crime syndicate, it is huge. I watched a documentary by Dave Fishwick, known through "Bank of Dave". He spoke to one of the gang leaders and they talked about shoulder surfing, where they liked to watch people and get the details of their phones. They like to get phones when they are already open so that they can then scrape all the data and bank details. Within that hour, as my right hon. Friend said, they could empty out someone's bank account. Around 30,000 people are also victims of identity theft in this country every single day. This crime, therefore, is not simply about nicking somebody's phone; it goes a lot deeper than that.

One hundred million second-hand phones go to China and some go to Algeria too. Apple and Google say that they will reconnect phones that have been reported stolen. We should say to them that that admission, in itself, is unacceptable. China has become an illegal electronic recycling hub where, if they cannot get into a phone, they dismantle it and build a new phone using various parts from stolen ones. Those who do not disconnect their ID straightaway are sent threatening messages that talk about killing and raping family members, with some even sent videos of guns that say they are coming to kill them. That is terribly frightening and also why we need to stop this global crime now.

There is a link between neighbourhood crimes and organised criminality. Criminals think that the police do not care about mobile phone thefts because it is just a mobile phone and people can claim it back. I am glad that the Met police is taking this seriously, unlike 10 years ago. I doubt that many heads of criminal organisations will be watching this debate, but I note that 235 people were arrested in January 2024 through Operation Reckoning. On average, people are getting sentences of four to five years, which I think is right, because this is not a crime without consequences.

The Government have a huge role to play in making sure that we say to these criminals that we are serious about holding them to account. However, we must also say to the manufacturing companies that if they will not provide a kill switch for stolen mobile phones, we will force them to do it by law.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I plan to start the wind-ups at around 4.30 pm.

4.20 pm

Iqbal Mohamed (Dewsbury and Batley) (Ind): I congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for bringing this important debate. I rise to support her and to bring urgent attention to an issue that continues to disrupt lives not just across the UK, but in my constituency: the rising tide of mobile phone thefts.

This is not a petty crime or just about the loss of a device. This is about identity theft, financial vulnerability and, in many cases, the complete disconnection of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities from the services they rely on every day. The numbers for the

last two years speak volumes. Between December 2021 and November 2023, West Yorkshire police recorded over 560 mobile phone thefts in Dewsbury and Batley alone—293 in 2021-22 and 269 the following year. On average, more than 20 people in my constituency fall victim to this specific crime every single month, and that is just what is recorded. We know full well the real figures are likely higher. Many do not report these crimes, believing that the police have more serious matters to attend to or that nothing can be done.

As the hon. Member said, mobile phone theft is serious. These are not just communication tools; they are banks, medical records, job applications, childcare arrangements, emergency lifelines and priceless memories. I read about a constituent—a single mother—in Dewsbury Moor whose phone was stolen while shopping. It was not just the phone she lost; she missed three job interviews, could not access her new universal credit account and had her personal photos and private medical records compromised. That is not an isolated story. Mobile phone theft is a systemic threat to digital safety and personal dignity.

Nationally, hundreds of thousands of mobile phones are stolen annually, and many of those devices end up in highly organised criminal supply chains. Some are exported; others are wiped and sold locally. In some cases, victims are followed or even assaulted for their devices. What is worse is that recovery and prosecution rates remain disturbingly low. Across many police forces, less than 5% of mobile phone thefts result in charges.

What must we do? First, we need to treat mobile phone theft as organised crime, not petty theft. The links between phone theft, fraud and even violent crime are well established. Police forces must be resourced and mandated to treat it with the seriousness it deserves. Secondly, we need stronger action from telecom providers and tech companies. Why are some phones still so easy to wipe clean and resell?

Martin Wrigley (Newton Abbot) (LD): On that very topic, the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee had an inquiry where we put this to Apple and Google. It turns out that phones that are reported stolen in this country go on something called the GSMA blacklist, which stops the hardware from working and the phones cannot be reused in this country. The police says that most stolen phones go abroad to networks that do not use that blacklist. I put it to Apple and Google that they could use this blacklist. They said yes they could, but no they did not want to. Does the hon. Member agree that these companies should enable that blacklist, which would—in my humble opinion—effectively stop the theft of phones on the streets of London?

Iqbal Mohamed: I thank the hon. Member for his informed contribution to the debate. I agree with him and the hon. Member for Brent East, who indicated that companies are not doing enough. It should be easy to disable phones so they are beyond use both in this country and abroad, and so the only value they have would be in the spare parts they contain.

We need stronger action from telecoms providers and tech companies. They must put the protection of their customers' data above profits from their customers having to buy the same or a similar replacement. Why are some phones easy to wipe and resell? Why are

tracking systems so easy to disable? The Government must act to force companies to make tracking systems stronger and less easy to disable.

Thirdly, we must support local policing. In Dewsbury and Batley, neighbourhood policing teams are overstretched, trying to deal with phone snatching, shoplifting and antisocial behaviour with limited boots on the ground. They deserve the tools, the people and the political will behind them to make our streets safer.

Finally, we must support victims. Many cannot afford to replace their phone or reclaim their digital identity without support. Let us explore emergency tech funds or digital safety grants for vulnerable individuals and families.

We live in a digital world in which stealing someone's phone is tantamount to stealing their identity, their access to society and, for some, their only link to help. We must not stand by while our constituents are targeted, their privacy violated and their future interrupted. Let us act not just with concern, but with conviction.

4.26 pm

Uma Kumaran (Stratford and Bow) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for securing this important and timely debate. Seventeen years ago, I was a young Hutch to her Starsky, as a parliamentary staffer in the then constituency of Brent Central, so it is nice to speak in her debate today.

Those of us who have had our mobile phone stolen know how hopeless you can feel and how intrusive it can be. We know it is not a victimless crime. I have had my phone stolen, as has my husband. It can happen in seconds, leaving you suddenly vulnerable as you go about your daily life. For a woman walking alone, late at night, having her phone taken from her hands can be extremely intimidating. For many of us, having our phone stolen or snatched means we lose access to so much—our banking, our photos, our voice notes, and the occasional WhatsApp we might not want to be seen. In this day and age, having your phone stolen feels like your whole life is suddenly at risk of being cracked open and violated.

I know that horrible feeling, and so does my constituent Thomas, who contacted me after he saw a BBC article in which I discussed my own experience. Thomas did not just have his phone stolen. Thieves gained access to his wallet and online banking, and took out a huge loan in his name, which caused him massive anxiety over Christmas. Despite clear evidence of fraud, it was only when I intervened as his Member of Parliament that his bank allowed him to recover his money.

Thomas' story is just one of many accounts of the impact of phone theft that my constituents in Stratford and Bow have related to me. With 330,000 passengers passing through Stratford station each day and 1 million visiting Westfield each week, Stratford has become a phone theft hotspot. Cynthia and Andrew wrote to me, deeply concerned about the rise in e-bike enabled phone snatches and the anxiety this has caused in their neighbourhood.

Mr Calvin Bailey (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): E-bikes are a key enabler of mobile phone theft. This week, we held ASB forums in Redbridge and Waltham Forest. We heard about the great work being done by Councillor

Jo Blackman to address the problem of illegally adapted e-bikes. Simple measures we could implement, such as ending the off-road sales loophole, would have a real impact on our constituents affected by phone theft and other crimes. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must look at the regulation and enforcement around e-bikes, which can be adapted to go at dangerously fast speeds and so enable this sort of crime?

Uma Kumaran: I agree with my hon. and gallant Friend; he makes an important point, and I am sure the Minister will respond to it.

I want to mention a few other constituents' experiences. Jade contacted me to share her shock at witnessing a mother have her phone snatched while she was trying to buy shoes for her son. Matthew told me his partner was left feeling unsafe walking their dog at night after being accosted by thieves on his way home. Those are not isolated incidents. They are part of a wider and troubling trend—we in this Chamber know that it is happening across our constituencies—and it is one that leaves people feeling fearful in their own neighbourhoods, as they go about their daily lives.

Make no mistake: Conservative Members, who are not here in great numbers today, should look seriously at their record. In the final year of the previous Government, street crime rose by over 40%, and mobile phone thefts soared. It does not have to be this way. With properly funded and resourced police and community services, we can fight back. I mentioned the footfall at Stratford station. I have seen at first hand what is being done to tackle this issue there: a police taskforce launching targeted operations, with officers disrupting thefts and arresting phone snatchers. British Transport police recently had a similar operation.

This Labour Government are taking action, cracking down on the thieves and thugs and taking back control of our high streets, town centres and shopping centres. We are backing up police with stronger powers to tackle mobile phone theft in the Crime and Policing Bill, and we are calling on tech companies to design out the ability of thieves to re-sell stolen phones. Crucially, we are strengthening neighbourhood policing to restore public confidence that if a person reports their phone as stolen, someone will actually do something about it. In London, we are working with Mayor Sadiq Khan, who I know is personally committed to driving down these figures.

Phone theft is not a petty crime, and it is not a victimless crime. It can happen in seconds, but the impact is long-lasting. It can rob people of cherished memories stored on their phones. It can drain bank accounts in seconds. As my constituent Matthew put it:

"What way is that to live, afraid to walk your dog in your own neighbourhood?"

We owe it to him and everyone affected to make our streets safer. I will join Members here today in doing all we can to root it out, but we must also compel phone manufacturers to remove the incentive, because we cannot arrest our way out of this problem. Every layer of this chain must take it seriously.

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

4.31 pm

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee for granting it. Along with the hon. Members for Dewsbury and Batley (Iqbal Mohamed) and for Stratford and Bow (Uma Kumaran), she spoke eloquently of the emotional impact of a stolen phone. I still have a 2G Nokia, but that is another issue. A phone is far more than just something we can send text messages on or make calls. It is where we store our memories, where many people find romance and where we access critical services, as the hon. Member for Dewsbury and Batley said. It is so much more, and that is why the impact of a stolen phone is very significant and far more disruptive than it would have been 20 years ago.

Members have highlighted the important role that tech companies and phone companies need to play in preventing and mitigating phone theft. They also highlighted how the lack of police resources can sometimes mean a lack of immediate police interest or a need to improve police process. We must make sure that our police are supported, so that they can help people who are victims of this crime. Any form of crime can leave us feeling vulnerable. I was once burgled. Very little was taken, but nevertheless, the sense of worry and the fact that it could happen again stays with us and preys on the mind, particularly when by oneself late in the evening. That manifests itself here as well as anywhere else.

The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) made an important point about the role that illegal e-bikes play in this crime. I commend to Members a recent report by the all-party parliamentary group for cycling and walking about the issue of illegal e-bikes, which outlines a number of steps that could be taken to better regulate them and deal with that problem.

Government policy is that police will be able to search properties without a warrant for stolen phones or other electronically geotagged items under measures in the Crime and Policing Bill. Clearly, as we have heard this afternoon, more needs to be done to stop the tidal wave of mobile phone theft. It is right that the Government are taking steps in that direction but, if they are really serious about stopping mobile phone theft, they must also restore proper community policing, where officers have the time and resources to focus on their local neighbourhoods. Everyone deserves to feel safe in their own home and walking down their own streets, but for too many people in the UK today that is simply not the reality.

The Conservatives' unnecessary cuts have left our police forces overstretched, under-resourced and unable to focus on the crimes that affect our communities the most. Every day—[*Interruption.*] I am sure the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) knows how to make an intervention, if he would like to do so, rather than speaking from a sedentary position; he has been in the House some time. Every day, 6,000 cases are closed by the police across England and Wales without a suspect even being identified, and just 6% of crimes are reported to the police and result in a suspect being charged. That is partly because the Conservatives slashed the number of police community support officers by more than 4,500 after 2015, when they were in government by themselves—and with a decisive majority, in most instances.

There are significant public concerns about the prevalence of mobile phone thefts, particularly snatch thefts, as we have heard in this debate, where perpetrators on bikes and mopeds steal mobile phones from people's hands, often in busy urban areas. The exact offence linked to the theft of a phone will depend upon the particular circumstances of the case, such as where the phone was taken—on the street or from inside someone's home—and whether force was used, but we know from the 2024 Crime Survey for England and Wales that an estimated 78,000 people had phones or bags snatched from them on the street in the year ending March 2024. That is equivalent to 200 snatch thefts a day and is a 153% increase on the number of incidents in the year ending March 2023.

London is regarded as the epicentre of phone thefts, with £50 million-worth of phones reported stolen in London in 2024. The National Crime Agency says that stolen phones are disposed of overseas, in China, Dubai, Algeria and many other countries, and suggests that some offenders will access data contained within apps on stolen mobile phones in order to commit additional offences, such as theft from bank accounts. Reports published by the *Mail Online* and *The Times* state that organised crime groups pay people up to £200 per phone that they steal, showing the complexity of the crime we are trying to tackle and its links to other forms of crime.

Those organised crime groups ship stolen phones overseas, where they are sold on or broken down into parts that can be sold or used for repairs. It has been suggested that China is the preferred destination for stolen handsets, since China, unlike the UK, the European Union and many other countries, is not a member of the central equipment identity register, a global database that mobile networks use to block stolen devices.

The Government are taking some welcome steps on this issue. As part of their safer streets mission, they are working to

“crack down on theft and other crimes that make people feel unsafe in our communities, including...strengthening neighbourhood policing”

and restoring public confidence. The safer streets mission includes a neighbourhood policing guarantee:

“Each neighbourhood will have named, contactable officers to tackle the issues facing their communities”,

including dedicated teams who will spend their time on the beat, with guaranteed police patrols in town centres and other hotspot areas at peak times. Central to that guarantee is the Government's commitment to putting 13,000 additional police officers, PCSOs and special constables into neighbourhood policing roles. The Government aim to have the additional 13,000 in place by 2029.

In February, the Home Secretary hosted a mobile phone theft summit,

“to drive new action to tackle mobile phone thefts and secure a collective effort to grip this criminality.”

The summit, attended by police leaders, the National Crime Agency, the Mayor of London and tech companies, discussed ways to break the business model of mobile thieves. The Home Secretary urged all in attendance to join forces to help to

“design out and disincentivise phone theft, by making phones effectively worthless to criminals.”

It was agreed that the mobile phone theft summit would reconvene in three months' time, but we have not yet seen any public record of the summit meeting again.

As hon. Members have said, there is an important role here for the tech industry. While some companies such as Apple and Google offer tools to lock, locate and wipe devices remotely and require identity verification, there is a lot more that they must do to ensure that this crime is dealt with.

In conclusion, losing a phone is more than just losing a bit of technology. Our phones have now become intrinsic to most of our lives, and many people are unable to pay for things without their phone. That is why it is important that we have debated this issue and that the Government continue with their efforts to tackle it. I look forward to hearing from the Minister.

4.38 pm

Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con): It should go without saying that law and order is the bedrock of a healthy society, but laws that we make in this House are only worth anything if they are enforced. In Britain today, this is all too often the story: a widening gulf between our laws and how they are actually applied. I can think of few better examples than mobile phone theft.

There is a temptation to think of phone theft as an example of petty crime, but it sounds as though we in this House all agree that there is nothing petty about it. Mobile phones are a link to our friends and family, and for many people they are a necessary tool for work, study and day-to-day life. They often hold sensitive information, both personal and financial, to say nothing of the intimidation and violence experienced by victims, and the corrosive impact that rampant phone theft has on our public realm. So when we think about phone theft, we should not just be thinking about the inconvenience of a missing phone; we should be thinking about the distress to victims and the creeping sense that, increasingly, we are no longer safe in public.

To capture the scale of the problem, it is useful to reflect on the data. According to last year's crime survey for England and Wales, snatch thefts of mobile phones and bags rose by 70% last year, reaching a 20-year high. Overall, theft stands at the highest rate for a decade, according to the Office for National Statistics. At the epicentre of this crime wave is London, where thefts have more than doubled over the past five years. Three quarters of phone thefts take place there, with 116,656 phones stolen last year alone. Those devices have a street value of more than £20 million.

Phone theft often contributes to other forms of crime. According to Commander James Conway of the Metropolitan Police, about 70% of London's knife crime is linked to theft, meaning that the increase in phone theft is likely to be contributing to the city's rampant knife crime epidemic. Cyber-security experts have also warned that phones stolen in London are being shipped off to countries like China, where they are often used in international organised crime.

Perhaps that should not come as a surprise given the approach taken by Sadiq Khan, London's Labour Mayor. He is focused on cracking down on stop and search, which is clearly proven to cut crime, while his police and crime plan barely mentions phone theft, focusing on introducing new regulations for phone companies, instead

of stopping actual crimes. Of course, technology companies should do their bit where they reasonably can, but our focus should be on catching and imprisoning criminals.

In the vast majority of the 116,656 cases, the reported crime is not solved, the phone is not retrieved and the offender is not arrested, leaving them to walk free to commit more crime. That is simply not acceptable and we should not accept it. All the while, police forces across the country spend an estimated 60,000 hours per year on non-crime hate incidents, collecting and storing data on speech that might be perceived to be offensive. Is it any wonder that many people are beginning to describe the state of modern Britain as anarcho-tyranny? More rules, applied more strictly for the law-abiding majority, while actual criminals walk free.

While many police officers work hard and genuinely wish to make our country a safer place, the systems and incentives that govern their activities are totally broken. It is simply wrong that resources are spent on policing speech, while prolific thieves run rampant through our streets. Phone theft is not the only crime like that. For too many people in Britain, particularly in our larger cities, low-level disorder is now the unpleasant mood music of their day-to-day lives. We all feel the decline in our public realm, and it makes our country a worse place to live.

Speak to any member of the British public, and they will be able to tell us exactly what to do: spend less time on policing speech and more time on catching thieves; give police forces the tools they need to tackle these crimes; and when we catch a career criminal, ensure they serve a proper prison sentence. In short, enforce the law.

4.43 pm

The Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention (Dame Diana Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) on securing the debate and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allocating the time. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for sharing her experiences, particularly the "Starsky and Hutch" approach that she took to trying to recover her mobile phone when it was stolen 10 years ago.

I am grateful to all Members of the House who have made contributions. In the limited time that we have had available, we have had an important discussion, spanning many different areas, both geographically and topically. The hon. Member for Dewsbury and Batley (Iqbal Mohamed) spoke about the experience in West Yorkshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford and Bow (Uma Kumaran) talked about the interchange at Stratford station and, along with my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey), talked about the problems with e-bikes as enablers of mobile phone theft.

I want to be very clear: this Government are absolutely determined to address the menace of mobile phone theft. I say to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam), that the unfortunate truth is that by the time this Government took office, this type of criminality had become so common that it was essentially a feature of daily life in some areas, and the statistics bear that out. She talked about the policing of speech and locking criminals up, but she needs to reflect on the record of the Conservative Government. They introduced the non-crime hate incident guidance under the previous Policing Minister, the right hon.

[*Dame Diana Johnson*]

Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), who is now the shadow Home Secretary, and failed the prison system by not building enough prison places. This Government are having to deal with that.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Dame Diana Johnson: No, time is very short. The hon. Gentleman's record when he was a special advisor in the Home Office really is nothing to be proud of.

I will talk about the statistics. Street theft increased by more than 40% in the last year of the previous Government, driven largely by soaring rates of snatch theft involving mobile phones. While we are starting to see some promising reductions, including a decrease in the number of mobile phone thefts by force or threat of force in the capital, levels of mobile phone theft sadly remain intolerably high, which is totally unacceptable.

We recognise that the impact of this criminality goes beyond the loss of a mobile phone, costly and stressful though that undoubtedly is. It undermines people's sense of personal safety and security in the most insidious way. It snatches parts of people's life, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East said, including bank details, personal records and precious memories stored on phones. Decent, law-abiding people deserve much, much better, which is why the Prime Minister has placed safer streets at the heart of his plan for change. Through that mission, we are taking decisive action to restore law and order to our town centres and high streets, and the scourge of mobile phone theft is very much in our sights.

It may be helpful if I set out for the House some of the key steps we are taking to combat this crime. It has been clear throughout the debate that we accept that if we are to drive the real change we need to see, we need to work effectively with tech companies, the police and others in civil society, both to prevent thefts from happening and to better detect the perpetrators when thefts occur. In that spirit, the Home Secretary chaired a very productive summit in February, bringing together representatives from the police, including the Metropolitan police, the National Crime Agency, the Mayor of London, local government leaders, leading technology companies and other sectors to push for much stronger collaboration in this space.

I have been working closely with stakeholders from industry and law enforcement on this important topic, so I was pleased to see the summit result in clear commitments from attendees to working in partnership, and to significantly boosting the sharing of data and intelligence on mobile phone theft, so that we can build a comprehensive picture of the problem and better understand the role of organised criminal networks. Ultimately, our aim is to disrupt, design out and disincentivise mobile phone theft. Officials are working closely with law enforcement partners, tech companies and other industry representatives to deliver practical and effective measures, so that we can crack down on these crimes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent East talked particularly about mobile phone theft in London, which is a particular hotspot. That is why the Metropolitan police are an important partner in the collective effort

to tackle this form of crime. We welcome the two recent periods of intensification of activity by the Metropolitan police, which together resulted in more than 500 arrests linked to mobile phone theft. We will hold a second summit in the next few weeks to reflect on the progress made, and to galvanise cross-sector agreement on the ambitious outcomes that we all want. There remains a long road ahead, but I am really hopeful that the tech companies and the wider stakeholders will come to the table with bold proposals. To be very clear, the Government will not hesitate to take more decisive action if the summit does not result in clear commitments to tackle this issue, including considering further legislation and regulation to radically reduce this—and related—criminality.

I draw Members' attention to the fact that the Crime and Policing Bill introduces a new power to help police recover stolen mobile phones more quickly. It allows officers to enter and search premises to which a stolen device has been electronically tracked in situations in which it is not practicable to obtain a warrant. This will allow the police to act swiftly, and will increase the likelihood that criminals will be caught and punished.

We welcome the innovative steps already taken by tech companies to tackle mobile phone theft. It is crucial that we now deepen collaboration between those companies and law enforcement. That is how we will ensure that anti-theft features cannot be bypassed by criminals, and that the technology supports police investigations and the recovery of stolen phones. While anti-theft features are vital to ensure the safety of mobile phones, we acknowledge that some technology can be misused by bad actors, particularly in cases of domestic abuse. That is why we are working with tech companies to ensure that new solutions are safe and proportionate, and do not inadvertently put victims at risk. This is about making stolen phones worthless without creating new vulnerabilities.

During this debate, several proposals have been put forward for how we might strengthen our collective response to mobile phone theft. I have heard them all, and I am grateful for all of them. While we will of course keep our approach under review, we are focused on delivering our plan to reduce mobile phone theft in partnership with law enforcement, technology companies and service providers. The Government are working with those tech companies to ensure that people's phones are protected. Through working groups established by the Home Office and attended by technology companies and policing partners, we aim to ensure that everything possible is done to disincentivise phone theft by making stolen phones effectively worthless to criminals.

I conclude by again offering my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East for securing this debate, and to all the Members who have contributed. I hope that, in the limited time available, I have addressed some of the points discussed this afternoon. In essence, this issue is as much about people as it is about policies and powers. We must always remember that behind the statistics are thousands and thousands of real victims who have suffered the shock and distress—as well as the inconvenience and disruption—of having their device snatched. Our high streets and town centres are filled with people going about their everyday lives. As they make their way from place to place, there should be no question but that they are safe, and that their belongings are secure. The notion that they might be pounced upon

by thieves at any moment is simply unacceptable, and this Government will not tolerate it. Our message is clear: Britain's streets belong to the law-abiding majority, not to thieves and muggers, and we will do whatever it takes to protect the public from those callous and harmful crimes.

4.53 pm

Dawn Butler: I was in the middle of writing, "We all know what the issues and problems are," and then the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam), started speaking.

I thank the hon. Member for Dewsbury and Batley (Iqbal Mohamed) for his contribution, including his mention of universal credit. We have started encouraging people to do everything online, so when their phone gets taken away, all of that also gets taken away. I also thank my partner in crime, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford and Bow (Uma Kumaran)—I will not tell you about any of the adventures we have been on, Madam Deputy Speaker. Stratford is a very busy centre and attracts a lot of crime, so it is important that we get this right. She also mentioned our Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and all the work he is doing on this issue.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr Bailey) for the intervention he made on the issue of e-bikes that have been illegally hacked so that they go faster. Generally, there are two riders on the back; one steers them in, and the other takes the phone. This is a problem that we have to get to grips with, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend (Mary Glendon) and the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said. At the end of the day, we need to get to the bottom of this, because it is not petty crime, but a huge crime that affects our streets.

The shadow Minister completely missed the point, but as she spoke about free speech, let me say this: when the police arrested the last person who called me the N-word and other racist slurs, they thanked me for taking a far-right extremist off the streets, because that person was not on their radar, and the police were shook. The shadow Minister may want to hold a protective shield over those who are racist, sexist, misogynistic and homophobic, but we do not. All I can say is: thank goodness the Conservatives are no longer in power.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of mobile phone theft.

Gravesham: River Crossings

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Keir Mather.)

4.56 pm

Dr Lauren Sullivan (Gravesham) (Lab): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to come to the House to discuss the importance of river crossings in my constituency of Gravesham. I am grateful to the Minister for giving up his time today to respond to the debate.

I wish to cover two crossings: one old and closed, which is the Gravesend to Tilbury ferry; and one planned and very expensive, which is the lower Thames crossing. For those who do not know, Gravesham constituency is a river community. We are bound by the River Thames, with all its history, just as we Members are here in the House, and we are only 20 miles apart. For much of the history of the borough, there have been river crossings, certainly since Roman times. According to one esteemed local historian, Christoph Bull, the right of long ferry was exclusively given to Gravesend watermen to provide a river service to and from London. This is a bit of a history lesson, but that was confirmed by the King in 1401 in a charter, the aim being to help rebuild the town after a fire in 1380.

Since then, there has been a river crossing in place between the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jen Craft) and mine. It has connected the two ancient kingdoms of Kent and Essex for eons, enabling travel for trade, leisure and tourism. Today, the Port of London Authority, which controls all travel of boats up and down the Thames, is based in my constituency, and I pay tribute to it. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution has a base on the river in Gravesend, and I know that the House would want to extend our thanks to it for the work it does across the country.

The people of Gravesham and of my hon. Friend's constituency of Thurrock are river people. Many families, including mine, have links to the river. My late father-in-law, Trevor Mochrie, was a Gravesend tug seaman, who worked on the river early in his career, before working on the high seas. As the river is the main artery to and from London, Gravesham was and is strong on industry, and it is a source of employment in tourism and leisure. In particular, we have our Gravesend regatta, which is celebrating 179 years. It was running before that, but it was made official 179 years ago by the council, because of some very unparliamentary disputes that took place about who won a race. I place on record my tributes to the committee, its chair, Shane Cleaver, and all the volunteers for keeping this tradition going in a sportsmanlike fashion, and there have been no further disputes of that kind.

Given that extensive local history and heritage, it was to our dismay and that of residents, businesses and visitors from Thurrock and Gravesend that Thurrock council and Kent county council ceased funding the Gravesend-Tilbury ferry service last year. Since the ending of that service, local businesses have suffered significantly. They have told me that it has impacted on people's ability to get to and from work, and that they have lost many people who cannot bear the thought of taking the Dartford crossing in order to get to work. On our high street, one particular business, Marie's Tea Room, which used to cater for the passing trade from the large cruise ships that used to dock at Tilbury, has

[Dr Lauren Sullivan]

been impacted to the point that it can no longer employ a member of staff. These things have impacts, and I am sure it is the same across our high street.

I have been running a petition, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock, and there have been others. Our petitions have garnered thousands of signatures—

5 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Keir Mather.)

Dr Sullivan: Our petitions, which have garnered thousands of signatures, call for the return of the ferry service. It is clear that businesses and residents want their ferry back.

At present, there is a desire for people to travel by public transport, which I support. People should leave their cars at home, but they need options. Previously, the option was a 10-minute jump across the water. Now, the options are a train into London and back out again, or multiple buses to get through the Dartford crossing. All this is costing us precious time.

If we as a society want to support public transport, relieving congestion on the roads should be at the heart of everything we do. Take the example of the Woolwich ferry, which, by parliamentary statute, must be run and is not able to charge. I am not asking—tempting as it is—for that to be the case for the Gravesend-Tilbury ferry, but I am asking the local authority to protect these valuable transport routes.

Daniel Francis (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): In the last 20 years, we have seen two new public transport options that my constituents in Bexleyheath and Crayford benefit from when crossing the river: the docklands light railway in Woolwich, and the Elizabeth line into Abbey Wood. But as my hon. Friend has said, there is no public transport option from Woolwich to the Kent coast that her and my constituents can benefit from. Will she join me in welcoming some exploration of river and other public transport options through south-east London and into Kent?

Dr Sullivan: I absolutely agree. The Thames Clipper is a remarkable service that is supported by Transport for London, but it needs to be subsidised. It is looking at expanding into the estuary. Taking on board the desire of my hon. Friend's constituents and mine to be able to travel via the river, I think that is a very good proposal that we in this place should get behind.

I know from my past role as a councillor on Gravesham borough council that operators are very interested in introducing a ferry service. In fact, Gravesend pier was sold to Thames Clipper in order to make way for the exciting development of the new public transport route to London and beyond. However, Gravesham borough council is not a local highway authority, so it has neither the status nor the money to develop this kind of public transport and hold the contract. Given the local government reorganisation that is coming, the council is prepared to do it, but it cannot be left with no money, because that would be poor financial management. The

ferry service could be a public-private partnership—if businesses are listening, perhaps we can come together with the Government and fund it through moneys that go down to local authorities.

I will speak briefly about the lower Thames crossing, which may not be the solution or the silver bullet. It sits within Gravesham and goes through the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock. It is fair to say that we have been vocally opposed to it since the outset, particularly because of its significant impact on Gravesham. Quite rightly, Labour has promised that local residents will see the benefits of major infrastructure projects, and it is in this vein that I will ask the Minister some questions, which I hope he will be able to follow up. I would welcome a private meeting, if needed, to go through this issue with his Department for Transport colleagues.

The lower Thames crossing will have an impact on Gravesham. Option C was chosen nearly a decade ago under the Tories. It was the most expensive option compared with another bridge at Dartford. I do regret the loss of ancient woodland, the impact on air quality and the congestion of our local roads. The Conservatives took a “dither and delay” approach. Therefore, while a new bridge could have already been built had it been funded, we are still waiting.

Residents of Northfleet, Gravesend and the villages along the A227 in my constituency already suffer with congestion and gridlock when the Dartford crossing goes down or when the A2, which is a huge arterial road into London, has problems. Gravesham and Gravesend will be cut in half, yet sandwiched between the Dartford crossing and the proposed lower Thames crossing. The modelling data from National Highways show that congestion levels will be back to what they are now within four years of the opening of the lower Thames crossing.

Residents are worried about getting to Darent Valley hospital for urgent care when these problems occur on our roads at peak times or, sadly, when there are accidents. Giving people a choice of reliable public transport options would ease that congestion. If there are reliable public transport options—buses, river boats, river ferries—to take cars off the road, there would be greater capacity on the roads for when such unfortunate congestion events occur.

The wider impacts of the tunnel need to be considered. Currently, we fear that the A227 will be used as a rat run to access the M20. When the original plans for the lower Thames crossing were thought of, there was going to be an upgrade at Bluebell hill. Sadly, under the Conservatives, that was cut back and then cut back further. Unless that junction is improved, sadly, the villages in my constituency will be bearing the brunt of the hugely increased number of vehicles travelling to the M20.

I would like some assurances about the lower Thames crossing, and I have some questions to which I would like answers in the days to come. How will National Highways ensure that the years of construction and of delays will minimally impact Gravesham residents? How will the traffic get to and from the lower Thames crossing without impacting local roads? Indeed, there was talk of using the river for bringing in equipment and materials. What powers exist to ensure that local roads are not used as rat runs, and who will be held accountable for that?

Our local infrastructure, such as housing, will be impacted by the influx of workers. We would like a halt on people working on the lower Thames crossing moving into the area, because we already face a significant housing crisis in the area. Other things that could be affected include leisure and health services, so will such wider infrastructure projects be increased in the future? What accountability is there for the modelling data? As I have said, four years on, and the congestion will be at the same level, which will have a wider impact. Local residents have raised that concern with me, but who can I hold accountable?

We are all local MPs, and it is right that we ask the tough questions and make requests for our constituencies. So I kindly request the Minister to look at restoring the Gravesend to Tilbury ferry and sustainably maintained in perpetuity as a decent public transport option, and it could be subsidised and promoted from a small proportion of the tolls on the lower Thames crossing.

We want a guarantee, with accountability, that Gravesend businesses and residents are at the front and centre of the new jobs. We have deprived wards in Gravesham, which is among the top 10 most deprived areas, and we want those people to have access to such skills. I hope Members understand that Gravesham and Thurrock will be most impacted by this programme. It is only right that those residents see some of the benefits, especially as at the moment “local” is considered to be a local resident or a local person who is employed within a 20-mile radius. Now, that is half of London. I ask that we capture that information from a five-mile radius. I am not saying all of it should be local, but we need to ensure that local people and businesses are encouraged to apply and take up those jobs.

On the mitigations and accountability for the rat running that will ensue on the A227 based on the wider road modelling, there is the issue of proposed tolls. We are directly opposite the larger unitary authority of Thurrock. The residents of Thurrock enjoy a residents’ discount scheme. In Gravesham, however, such a scheme has not been promoted, yet very many of my residents use the Dartford crossing on a regular basis, especially now that the Tilbury crossing is down. I therefore ask the Minister if Gravesham could be included in the Dartford crossing scheme while the lower Thames crossing is being built and thereafter in perpetuity.

I want to raise mitigations for the environmental impact. We know the terrible air quality in Dartford and we do not want that in Gravesham. How can we improve both places and protect Gravesham residents? Finally, on housing, a vast array of our land that could have been developed for housing is now no longer available.

In conclusion, I thank the Minister in advance for his upcoming reply and to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this Adjournment debate. Most of all, I would like to thank the residents, businesses and visitors of Gravesham. Gravesham has a long history on the river and we would really like to see the return of the Gravesend-Tilbury ferry crossing.

5.11 pm

Jen Craft (Thurrock) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Dr Sullivan) for securing this debate. We call each other our sisters across the river, as we are separated by a small stretch of the River

Thames. I want to very briefly add my contribution on the importance of the Tilbury ferry, as we call it on my side of the river. My hon. Friend has spoken at length about the history of the Tilbury ferry, and it does have a long and proud history. We always refer to it as having been granted to us by Henry VIII. It ran continuously for the best part of 500 years until bankruptcy by a Tory council in Thurrock took it out. I am really determined to see its return.

The ferry is personal and special for me. I have many childhood memories of taking the Tilbury ferry across the river to Gravesend to spend a delightful day on my hon. Friend’s side of the river going to the cafes and there is a lovely shop that sells boardgames—in case hon. Members cannot tell, I have a penchant for geekery and boardgames are very much up my alley. There is a lovely pub called the Three Daws, where I have spent many a happy time. Sadly, we are no longer able to visit, because it would mean a 45-minute to an hour trip over the Dartford crossing and around. Indeed, there is congestion daily on the Dartford crossing. When there are more severe issues, as there are today—my husband rang me to say he had to get my daughter from school as her bus cannot pick her up due to traffic backing up right into my constituency—it is a huge issue for us. Many of my constituents will tonight be sat about 10 minutes from their house, unable to get there because of the issues with congestion. Clearly, that needs to be addressed.

My hon. Friend spoke eloquently about why we do not feel that the lower Thames crossing is necessarily the way to answer the problem of congestion, but I would like to add my voice to say that the Tilbury ferry provided a public transport alternative to using the roads. That is the direction of travel we should be looking at: making public transport open, accessible and easier to use. When the Minister rises, he may say that the Government are not in the habit of funding boat and river services. My answer would be that we should perhaps explore the art of the possible, and look at what it is possible to do and how we can restore this service.

The ferry was not only something wonderful, cultural and historic; it was actually a key part of public transport infrastructure in my part of the world. We share a lot of health services, so people would take the ferry over the river for that; I used to see my orthodontist in Gravesend when I was a teenager, which was something I looked forward to less than day trips out and visiting the cafés, shall we say. However, it was important. Some of my constituents commute over to go to the grammar schools in Kent. We also have quite a lot of people who take the river to travel to work; I understand that the Port of London actually puts on a small boat for their staff who live either side of the river. Indeed, my brother lived for a time over the river, just a short hop on the ferry away—again, that is no longer possible. It is really quite upsetting and sad for a lot of us.

Within about a week of starting a petition to try to bring back the Tilbury ferry, I had received 500 signatures; it now stands at a little over a thousand. We asked people to share their memories and share why they want to bring the ferry back. If we are looking at someone coming on board—a potential private partner—we want to show that there is an appetite for the ferry and that it will be used, because it was always used. There was

[Jen Craft]

never an empty ferry when it was running; it was always busy throughout the day, any day of the week that it was running.

People have shared things like wanting to go on the ferry one more time before they die—things that are really quite moving. They have shared memories of taking their grandchildren and great-grandchildren on it and going on day trips out, as well as travelling for work. Someone said, “We don’t have lots of nice things in our part of the world—the things that we do have, we want to keep, and the things that we did have, we want back.” It was absolutely delightful.

Coincidentally, the Tilbury ferry is exactly the right amount of time that any child can spend on a boat before going mad and getting bored: five minutes. They see the boat, get on the boat, and are excited; then they want to leave the boat, but by then the boat is at Gravesend—brilliant. It is a fantastic day out.

My plea to the Minister is to consider what my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham has said, particularly in relation to using some of the money that will be generated by the lower Thames crossing; a minuscule proportion could fund the running of this service in perpetuity. It would alleviate that congestion—the congestion that will still exist after about five years of the lower Thames crossing’s operation. In the meantime, the Government should look at other ways to support the return of this absolutely vital, crucial service for my constituents and those of my hon. Friend.

5.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Kane): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Dr Sullivan) for securing this important Adjournment debate on the impacts of river crossings on her Gravesham constituency. She said that the charter for the river and her town was from 1401—I think it was Henry IV, having taken over from Richard II. The whole Shakespeare play was about rebellion, and I feel rebellion on the Back Benches at the moment because of how important this subject is to both my hon. Friends the Members for Gravesham and for Thurrock (Jen Craft).

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham has been a true champion in this field. She has made a number of representations to me, as she has mentioned, and to other ministerial colleagues calling for the reinstatement of the Gravesend-Tilbury ferry services, which ended in March 2024 due to a lack of funding. I appreciate the efforts and passion that my hon. Friend and her sister across the river, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock—fearsome sisters, I would say—have displayed in supporting these services, which can provide a quick link between Kent and Essex across the Thames estuary, in particular providing an alternative when there are problems on the Dartford crossing, as has been pointed out. I recognise that the ferry provided a useful link across the estuary and was very popular with regular users. It was particularly useful to those travelling to their respective workplaces, and provided an alternative to car journeys via Dartford.

As my hon. Friend well knows, there are a number of key industries and employment sites in north Kent and south Essex that play an important role in both regional

and national economies. We know that the Thames gateway is going to be a massive driver for economic growth in the UK, with both the Amazon plant and CLdN there. We have other ambitions for the estuary in terms of becoming a clean energy superpower and driving growth in the maritime sector.

I thank my hon. Friends for their work with the maritime sector as it affects their constituencies. I am sure that they will acknowledge that ferry services run on a private sector basis to meet commercial demand. Any decisions to provide funding for local ferry services is ultimately a matter for local partners. Where local ferry services form part of local transport options, it is for the local transport authorities to consider such decisions in line with devolution. It is for local authorities to decide their transport priorities and where to allocate budgets.

There have been successful examples of ferry services receiving local funding, including Mersey Ferries in Liverpool and Woolwich Ferry in London, which are both funded and operated by the local transport authority. To support local transport authorities, the Government have been clear on their transport priorities, with capital funding to support local bus services, improvements to active travel and the maintenance of local roads.

Jen Craft: On that specific point, my hon. Friend and I have asked in the past whether it would be possible to use some of the bus funding, which has received an uplift, to fund the Tilbury ferry. The answer has been that it would not be possible, because it is not a bus—it is fairly obvious that it is not a bus. Will the Minister perhaps consider reclassifying the Tilbury ferry as a river bus?

Mike Kane: No, we cannot use those moneys in that way, but that does not stop us talking in the future with Department officials and the private sector about the river to see what is the art of the possible. Let us hold that in abeyance, and I will say a little more about that at the end of my speech.

The Government are exploring all viable funding options for the lower Thames crossing. That includes private finance options, which would use public seed funding to unlock investment. A road users charge will help finance the lower Thames crossing and reduce the burden on the public purse for major infrastructure projects. The road user charging regime for the lower Thames crossing has not been set, so I urge my hon. Friends to make their representations to the Secretary of State, the Roads Minister and me on this matter as it pertains to their local constituencies.

Dr Sullivan: When we consider the private companies and contractors that may come forward, the ask here is whether we could extract a social value—a social good—from the funding for the Tilbury-Gravesend crossing.

Mike Kane: I recently met the chief executive of Thames Clippers, which I think owns the pier, and that model has been pursued in other parts of the country, so, again, it is worthy of exploration with me and my officials.

Across the financial period 2025-26, the Department has allocated Kent county council nearly £40 million to support its local highway network, over £23 million to

support the improvement of bus services, and £5.7 million to support active travel improvements. That is a significant uplift under this Government. In the same financial period, the Department has allocated Thurrock council nearly £3 million to support its local highway network, £2 million to support the improvement of bus services and over £350,000 to support active travel improvements.

In addition, the Chancellor recently confirmed in the spending review that the £3 bus fare cap, which was expected to finish at the end of the year, will be extended until at least March 2027, benefiting both local authorities. However, there is limited revenue funding for the local authorities, and it will be for them to decide which services to prioritise. I urge all partners in the region and the Members of Parliament who have spoken eloquently here today to work together constructively

to find appropriate local transport solutions, including river services. I have asked my officials at the Department for Transport to work closely with local partners to identify any funding opportunities that could become available to help support local plans.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock that I hope one day she will be able to visit the Three Daws public house once again. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham for securing this Adjournment debate and for being a doughty champion on this matter in her constituency.

Question put and agreed to.

5.24 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 3 July 2025

[VALERIE VAZ in the Chair]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Music Education

1.30 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Southgate and Wood Green) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of music education.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Vaz. I declare an interest as the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on music education.

Music has the power to move us and stir our soul. We marvel at a captivating song or composition when we hear it for the first time, and we are transported back in time when we hear a long-forgotten evocative melody. A world without music would be empty and barren: that is why we need to value music and do everything we can to protect its long-term future. Key to that is music education. It brings many benefits to students, aside from the ability to play an instrument or make music: building confidence, improving learning skills, fostering teamwork, increasing concentration, strengthening discipline, inspiring creativity and equipping individuals with the transferable skills necessary to succeed in life. But there is a crisis in music education in our schools, and if we are to reverse it we need to start with the basics.

The number of students who receive music tuition in schools is falling rapidly, and schools are no longer encouraging students to pursue a music GCSE. There is a worrying decline in the recruitment and retention of music teachers. Music hubs are being financially stretched, and music education funding remains at a standstill. Music education should be accessible for everyone, but at present it is becoming inaccessible to those who cannot afford to take private lessons or take part in extracurricular music activities. It is no accident that the finalists in this year's BBC young musician contest were all privately educated.

Many older musicians tell me that they became musicians because of the encouragement and inspiration that they received from music teachers when they were young, and the pathways that were open to them to progress and pursue their talent. We are struggling to meet recruitment targets for music teachers, however, and many teachers are leaving the profession altogether. The Department for Education has missed its recruitment targets for music teachers in 11 of the past 12 years. In 2011 there were 8,000 music teachers, but in 2023 the number was 7,184—a decrease of nearly 1,000.

The situation is even worse for peripatetic music teachers, who are on low pay and precarious contracts. We have also struggled to meet the recruitment target for postgraduate initial teacher training in music: we have met it only once since 2015. Last year, just 27% of the target was met. Additionally, the financial incentives to train as a music teacher are severely lacking. While

trainee geography teachers receive a bursary of £25,000, trainee music teachers are entitled to a bursary of just £10,000.

The retention of teachers is also an issue. Key stage 5 music has experienced a workforce decline of 35% in the past 13 years, while taught hours have fallen by 40%, indicating that qualifications such as A-level music are not being offered in school as key stage 5 options for young people. That is why Ofsted's 2023 music subject report says that some schools have dropped music altogether because they cannot recruit specialist teachers. In other schools, music is now taught by a non-specialist, which is a very worrying trend.

One suggestion to improve the recruitment and retention of music teachers is to implement strategies to bridge the gap between trainee music teachers and early career teachers, given the significant recruitment shortfalls over the past 12 years. On recruitment, the Government should commit to increasing the size of the initial teacher training bursary so that it is in line with other subjects. Currently, the initial teacher training bursaries for trainee music teachers are nearly a third of what is offered to trainee chemistry, maths or computing teachers. Being a music teacher should once again be an attractive career option for music graduates.

I have been working closely with the Ed Sheeran Foundation over the past few months. One of its key asks is that we urgently train 1,000 specialist music teachers to close the recruitment gap and make sure that students across the country can access music tuition. We need to make sure that there is at least one specialist music teacher in every school by the end of this Parliament.

Access to continuing professional development for music teachers in state schools is a serious challenge and is crucial to the quality of music education offered, yet recruitment is struggling badly. In 2024-25, only 331 of the 820 training places for secondary music teachers were filled, leaving a massive 60% shortfall. There are nearly 600 fewer music teachers than there were a decade ago. Investing in focused, reflective CPD is a vital step to bridging that gap and improving music education for all students.

With recruitment falling, and with an exodus of specialist music teachers, there is a severe inequality between state and independent schools in children's access to music education. According to UK Music, 50% of children in independent schools receive substantial music tuition, compared with just 15% in state schools. The Education Policy Institute found that disadvantaged pupils are 39% less likely than non-disadvantaged pupils to take music at GCSE.

Funding for music education in English state schools is severely lagging behind the independent sector. The Independent Society of Musicians report on music education found that the mean yearly budget in maintained schools' music departments was just £1,865; in independent schools it was nearly £10,000. It is clear that music in state schools, where the majority of children are educated, is facing significant difficulties with access and inclusion.

That is made worse by the fact that there is no accountability mechanism for schools to teach music. The mechanism for calculating school league tables, Progress 8, heavily incentivises schools to prioritise English baccalaureate subjects at GCSE, which exclude arts subjects entirely. This is creating a two-tier system

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

within schools, with subjects like music deprioritised in the curriculum. The evidence supports this: GCSE music entries have fallen by 30% and A-level music entries have fallen by 43% since the EBacc was introduced in 2010.

Music hubs are another key area in need of reform. They support music teaching in schools, typically through instrumental lessons and whole-class instrument tuition, but they also do incredible work outside the school curriculum. I have had the pleasure of seeing that work at first hand at the Haringey music service's "Mini Massive" concert, at which year 4 children from schools across Haringey come together and perform at Alexandra Palace every year at the end of 30 weeks of whole-class instrumental lessons.

However, since the publication of the second national plan for music education in 2022, music hubs have faced significant funding challenges. The plan promised to maintain funding levels until August 2025, yet no additional resources were allocated to cover rising costs, including teacher pension contributions, despite a clear Government commitment in 2019 to supporting them.

There are many good things in the national plan for music, but it is in urgent need of an update. A clear steer is needed from the new Government. Arts Council England's guidance made it clear that there would be no additional ringfenced funding for pensions, effectively slashing over £1 million in crucial support. On top of that, the rushed consultation process for the plan led to a reduction from 80 hubs to just 43, increasing administrative burdens without evidence that access to music education would improve. The delayed announcement of successful funding bids, which came only in April 2024, left hubs with a mere four months to implement major changes, further straining limited resources. The ongoing uncertainty and underfunding risk undermining the vital role that music hubs play in enabling access to music education across the country.

I am sure we all agree that the current situation cannot be allowed to continue, so what needs to be done? Funding levels for music education have been roughly the same for the last decade, which represents a significant real-terms cut. The Government's plans to increase spending for state schools are welcome, but they must make it clear how much additional funding will be allocated to music.

Music hubs need urgent reform and better funding, because without sustainable support they simply cannot provide equitable access to music education for all children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many hubs that cover more than one local authority area complain about the duplication of paperwork, which is adding to the pressures of ensuring that quality music services are delivered at a local level. The lack of central co-ordination means that any data collected by the hubs is not properly collated. Additionally, music hubs need the certainty of long-term funding. I know that the Government are looking to give local authorities financial settlements that go beyond a year; perhaps the same can be applied to hubs.

To truly reform music hubs, we need improved, detailed and long-term data collection that reflects the diverse musical experiences of young people and local contexts, enabling strategic, targeted funding to support meaningful,

high-quality music education across all regions. The announcement of a new national centre for arts and music education presents a good opportunity to make a positive contribution to the development of music education across the state sector, particularly in secondary schools. However, the uncertainty about what it is, what funding will be made available and who will run it is undermining its credibility. The Government are undertaking public engagement on the national centre, but greater clarity would be welcome.

Most people involved in music education cite the EBacc and the Progress 8 measure as a barrier to music education and in urgent need of reform. Since the introduction of those accountability measures, schools have been under significant pressure to prioritise other subjects, and music education has been left behind. Research shows a decline in the uptake and provision of music education in schools since the EBacc was introduced, with disadvantaged students most affected.

Many in the sector suggest that, as a minimum, a creative or vocational qualification should be introduced in Progress 8, as was previously pledged in the "Creating growth" plan in the Government's manifesto. I was recently visiting friends in France and was surprised to discover that philosophy is a compulsory subject there until the age of 18, as part of the baccalaureate. If it can be done in France for philosophy, we should be able to do it in the UK for music and creative subjects.

The curriculum assessment review is due to report later this year, and although it is narrowly focused, it is vital that it address the issue. I am sure that Professor Becky Francis and her team are doing great work, but I hope that as a result of the curriculum review, creative subjects will be given greater prominence in the school curriculum. By reforming the accountability system, the Government can ensure that music thrives in state schools and gives high-quality music education to pupils from the most deprived backgrounds.

Many amazing things are happening in music education. Last week, I saw work that the London Sinfonietta had done in getting local schools in Enfield to create their own musical composition, which was then performed by the London Sinfonietta's excellent musicians—many thanks to the Enfield music service for co-ordinating that performance. I know that the Minister is a big music fan, as she and I recently attended the wonderful BrightSparks key stage 1 lunchtime concert performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra in front of a packed house of children at the Royal Festival Hall. It was a wonderful concert, as I am sure the Minister will agree. The English National Opera and many other fantastic music organisations also do incredible outreach work with schools, but if we do not get more direction and leadership from the Government, I fear that the ball will be dropped and we will not get the change that we want.

I have some questions for the Minister. First, what steps are the Government taking, including on terms and conditions for peripatetic teachers, to attract and retain more music teachers? Will more support be provided for music hubs, along with the review of their work, including the impact of the bureaucracy that they face? Can the Minister tell us whether the now outdated national plan for music—it was last updated in 2022—will be refreshed under the new Government? If so, when? Can she also tell us more about progress on the national centre for arts and music education and when it is likely

to be up and running? Can she tell us of any plans to review the English baccalaureate and Progress 8? Can she tell us when the curriculum assessment review is likely to report back with its final findings? Finally, will she meet me and representatives from music education to discuss the progress of music education?

For many people, the music that they are taught in school is their only exposure to the discipline, yet the availability and quality of music education has suffered greatly in the past decade and a half. We need to fix that and ensure that music education thrives under this Labour Government and has a bright long-term future, enriching all our lives.

1.45 pm

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Vaz. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) for securing this incredibly important debate. It is vital that we discuss these issues in this House. I am one of those few MPs who has found a happy middle ground between orchestra and hip-hop. I will go into a bit of detail on that: I learned the violin from the age of seven, played in orchestras, and latterly ended up playing in rock bands—not playing the violin, but playing the guitar and the keyboard, and singing.

I know from personal experience that a background in music improves many aspects of our lives, such as discipline and creativity. It actually teaches people the value of hard work towards an objective, and it provides both hard and soft skills. I sometimes say to people—I mean this with no disrespect—that all too often music is regarded as sitting around the campfire singing “Kumbaya”. I am all in favour of doing that—indeed, I have done so. However, it is far more than that; it is so much more than the mere pleasure and enjoyment of creating the music. It is a stable bedrock to build one’s life on, but I fear that over the past 14 years the opportunity to do so has been stripped back by Conservative Governments.

Students of Paddox primary school tell me that their music department budget has been steadily eroded, and most of the existing music activities are the result of the passionate and dedicated music teacher, Mrs Pearson. A priority of mine as an MP is to give more of a voice to young people, so I am glad to do that. Vanessa from Paddox primary school’s student council explains that there is a strong mandate for an orchestra or band as an extracurricular club. Isabelle speaks for the silent majority of year 6 students, who are sceptical that body percussion music is an adequate substitute for the playing of actual musical instruments in the end-of-year production. Sally Ann, on behalf of many, strongly commends the benefits of peripatetic music lessons, and is dismayed that this is not an option available to everyone.

There is so much young passion for music, so much creative potential, and yet by the time they are in their mid-teens, precious few students take music qualifications, as was set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green. This all contributes to a downwards spiral in too many cases: a lack of space in the curriculum means few, or often no, music lessons for too many students; fewer students take up the subject, so fewer teachers become qualified; and university departments are closing because of poor uptake—they lack the placement opportunities because of a lack of lessons in the curriculum. The cycle must be broken.

After 14 years of the previous Government, the mean yearly budget for music departments in maintained schools was £1,800; in academies and free schools it was £2,200; in independent schools it was £10,000. The Labour Government cannot continue to allow 93% of the student population to be let down. Furthermore, the Conservative Government only allocated enough funding to cover 40% of the cost of music hubs. The remaining cost can only be covered by families, and inevitably this often means only the most privileged and economically thriving. According to the Independent Society of Musicians, the gap between private and state music education has become, sadly, a chasm.

I am really glad that this Government have made significant steps in the right direction: providing £25 million for instruments in schools this academic year; introducing the music opportunities fund, which will support 1,000 young people and children; and changing progress 8 measures to include creative arts subjects, an issue on which I have engaged with my hon. Friend the Minister. I know that she takes it very seriously and is doing great work; however, I respectfully call on the Government to go further.

Music has as much to offer young people as maths or science. I therefore endorse the recommendations of Birmingham City University academics and the ISM—let me put on record my gratitude to the Birmingham City University academics for the time they spent briefing me and for all they do to research this important area. They and the ISM recommend giving music teachers equal priority by increasing bursaries and recruitment, in order to put music at the heart of the curriculum in the upcoming curriculum and assessment review—I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is considering these matters very seriously. They also recommend reforming the EBacc to prevent music being sidelined, making GCSE and A-level music more accessible and appealing, and creating a sustained pipeline for music education.

We must fundamentally view music in a different light, adapting the motto “Sports for all” to “Music for all”. Hon. Members will not be surprised to hear that, representing the town of Rugby, I am a passionate supporter of sports. They provide people with wonderful lifelong skills. However, it is my personal view that a disproportionate amount of attention is given to sport in our educational settings and, frankly, in society in general. That needs to be reversed. We need a change, frankly, in the culture of our entire society. That goes beyond the powers of any of us in this Chamber, and indeed perhaps even those of Ministers, yet we must all engage in seeking, really, a revolution in people’s attitude towards music.

My dad began learning the trombone in his middle age, and his life has been transformed by the joys that music education and performance have given him. When we had a chat recently, he said that we perhaps should have a “duty of candour” not to abandon one of the most successful aspects of our creative life in schools and beyond.

Caroline Lumsden, my former violin teacher, agrees, saying that we must democratise music. We must make it available to all students, regardless of wealth, and recruit more specialist music teachers, especially in primary schools, because we all know that earlier intervention is better intervention. As I have mentioned, we must intervene at the very beginning of people’s lives and break any destructive cycles.

[John Slinger]

Caroline and her late husband Alan moved into the village next to the one I grew up in, creating a wonderful music school called Beauchamp Music Group, which started in her front room and then expanded into the dairy of the farm, which still contained dairy equipment. Latterly, they developed the barn into a space that even a full orchestra could play in and where summer courses could take place. That transformed my life. Even my academic abilities improved when I started learning the violin—probably not enough, but they improved none the less.

That experience added to the education at the superb comprehensive school I was privileged to attend, Newent community school. Its head, Mr Landau, was a true believer in music and gave huge backing to my music teacher, Miss Wrenn. She was head of music, and through her dedication and inspired leadership of that department, the students in that state comprehensive school were able to participate in peripatetic lessons. Lots of us took GCSE and A-level music. There was a brass band, a jazz band and a rock band. There were chamber concerts each term. There was a junior orchestra and a senior orchestra. We even wrote the music for one of the school's dramatic productions and played in the pit orchestra. It was truly incredible and wonderful. However, I would imagine that latterly it has become harder for schools to achieve such a level of provision.

Thanks to those dedicated educators, thousands of young people's lives were transformed. In a recent meeting that I helped to organise, the chief medical officer for Scotland, quite incredibly but aptly, described investment in the creative arts as a public health intervention. In my view, anything that we can do to invest in music education and the creative arts more broadly is also a hard and soft-skills intervention. It is an anti-crime, community-strengthening, child development and community cohesion intervention. It is an intervention in local economies and our exports. It is an intervention that boosts jobs. Going back to my "Kumbaya" point, it also drastically improves wellbeing, fun, happiness and joy in our lives as individuals and communities.

Yet despite the best efforts and the genuine belief of the Minister and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in this cause, there is a chance that the system simply does not quite get it. To be clear, that is in no way to denigrate the excellent work of my hon. and right hon. Friends the Ministers, who I thoroughly believe want to do everything that they can to improve music education. But, as I alluded to earlier, I think the broader system—society at large and parts of the media—do not fully get just how important music and creative arts education are.

I again thank my ministerial colleagues for all the work they have done. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green for securing this important debate. I conclude by saying that no student from Paddox primary school should have to give up their passion. No one should be denied the opportunity of a musical education. I challenge any hon. Member here to defy the mandate of Paddox primary school's student council.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): The hon. Member has failed to take the opportunity to give us a verse of "Kumbaya".

John Slinger: I don't think you would want to hear me do that.

1.57 pm

Anna Sabine (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I warmly thank my friend the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) for securing this debate and speaking so passionately on an issue that matters deeply to so many of us. I serve with him on the music education APPG, which I declare as an interest.

I want to speak not just in a political capacity, but from personal experience. For me, this issue is deeply rooted in my own story. I grew up in a single-parent household and attended my local state comprehensive school. My journey into music began in a somewhat unlikely way. My clarinet teacher, the wonderful David Leverton, rummaged through a school cupboard and unearthed an old plastic bassoon. David said I was good at music and had big hands and suggested that I started playing it. That was a genius move because bassoonists, as many here may know, are often in high demand. As a result, I was able to join ensembles and experienced opportunities that might not have been available to me as just another clarinettist.

The real turning point, and what changed my life, was joining my local youth orchestra. That was possible only because of a music scholarship from Hampshire county council, which supported me to pay to take the train from Eastleigh to Parkstone each week and to cover the cost of the lessons with the incredible Eric Butt, the former principal bassoonist of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, to whom I also pay tribute. At a difficult time in my school life, music offered me more than just education; it gave me new friends, a place to belong and unforgettable experiences. It taught me discipline, teamwork and performance skills. None of that would have been possible without that council scholarship.

Today, swathes of young people are being locked out of those kinds of opportunities. We are seeing the steady erosion of music education, with fewer scholarships, less local support and growing inequality in access. Many of us came into politics to lower the rope ladder for those behind us; but right now, it feels as though successive Governments, through policy choices and a broad indifference to the arts, are pulling that ladder up. The facts are stark. As the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green said, the Department for Education missed its recruitment target for music teachers in 11 of the last 12 years, and in the most recent initial teacher training census for 2024-25, just 49% of the target for music trainees was met. That is not just a statistic; it is a flashing warning light.

According to a 2021 report from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, around 60% of people working in music, performing and the visual arts come from privileged backgrounds. As has been mentioned, we now see a vicious cycle. With less music education in schools, fewer young people are choosing to pursue it professionally, further deepening that divide. At the heart of our communities, music hubs remain vital engines of creativity, inclusion and opportunity. They give children the chance to pick up an instrument, find their voice, and discover joy, resilience and confidence

through music. They spark lifelong passions and, in many cases, careers. But despite their enormous impact, many music hubs are hanging by a thread.

National funding for music hubs has been frozen in cash terms since 2015-16. In real terms, that has meant a significant cut, especially in the face of rising cost and inflation. That is compounded by deep uncertainty about future funding, new responsibilities under the national plan for music education, and a recent structural overhaul that imposed additional and often unbudgeted, costs. I have spoken to representatives of one south-west hub where the situation is particularly alarming. It has received a 100% cut in local authority support, as of March this year, which has left it facing a massive financial shortfall.

As a result, that hub has had to cancel a major children's concert at a professional venue, creative projects with local artists have been scaled back, grants to vital community ensembles have been reduced, and schools—of which, locally, 100% subscribe to the hub—face a 20% price increase, while special projects and emergency support have been shelved altogether. If that trend continues into 2026-27, the consequences for that hub will be even more severe: staff redundancies, the dismantling of a highly successful model, and a dramatic reduction in services for schools and young people.

That is not an isolated case. Music hub leads across the country are sounding the alarm. They are doing everything they can, but are stretched to the limit. Without urgent investment, the entire ecosystem is at risk of collapse. If we are serious about nurturing the next generation of talent, and truly believe that every child should have access to the transformative power of music, we must act.

That is why I and the Lib Dems are calling for three things: first, proper funding for music education through an arts pupil premium so that access to music is not determined by postcode or privilege, but by potential and passion; secondly, a significant expansion in the number of teacher training places for specialist music educators, so that we can rebuild the pipeline of talent needed to inspire the next generation; and thirdly, we have to reverse the real-terms cuts to arts education and music hubs.

If we cannot sort the structural issues with music education, I worry that no number of new national centres for arts education will stop the steady decline in young people from all backgrounds being able to take part in a full music education.

2.2 pm

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Let me start by saying that I completely echo the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) about recruitment. It is important that we get that right. I enjoyed him reminding me of my previous life, as he took us through many parts of his constituency; I know much of his new constituency well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (John Slinger) was typically modest. I believe he is one of very few Members of the House, if not the only one, who has a track on Spotify. So forget “Kumbaya, my Lord”—

John Slinger: It is on SoundCloud, actually.

Adam Jogee: SoundCloud—there you are. The point is made: he is cooler than I am.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green for securing this important debate, and I refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. This is an important subject, and how lucky we are that my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby did not sing in his speech.

Music is very important to us in Newcastle-under-Lyme, from music venues such as the Rigger, in town, to the Brown Jug on Bridge Street, where my late uncle Colin and his Climax Blues Band used to perform on a Friday night in many years gone by, not to mention the karaoke sessions in a number of pubs right across the constituency. Recently, I had the good fortune to attend the 50th anniversary concert of the Keele Bach Choir, which was brilliant. I pay tribute to all those involved, including people who joined the choir when it started 50 years ago and are still singing today. I give a particular shout-out to Glynis Brewer, the constituent who extended the invitation to me.

I was raised on my parents' Motown collection, and who does not enjoy an Irish traditional music session on a Sunday night? Music is a tonic and a skill; it can be a refuge, and it brings people together. That is why music education is so important. One of the best decisions of the Labour Government that was in power when I was growing up was the introduction of free music lessons in schools. The only thing I regret is my choice of instrument. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby, I chose the violin but I wish I had gone with the saxophone, which would have been much cooler. I used to watch “The Simpsons” every day after school, and the saxophone from Lisa just rubbed that in. I have been advised that there is nothing stopping me picking it up now, but since coming to this House there has been a bit more on the agenda. I remember Mary Jones, my music teacher at primary school, very well. If she is watching the debate today, I remain grateful for the tolerance that she showed me week in, week out.

Since my election to this place, I have seen the power that music has in our schools. On a recent visit to St Mary's primary school in Newcastle-under-Lyme, I met Caroline Walton, who has been teaching music there for almost two decades. I pay tribute to Caroline and her colleagues for the work they do to ensure that young people in our community are able to benefit from the power that music brings. I also pay tribute to the Newcastle-under-Lyme Community Orchestra, led by Tom Barlow-Coxon. It is a community project based in our patch that aims to create a friendly atmosphere for local musicians to make music. We want people to join that orchestra, so we need music education in our schools for them to be able to do so.

I want to speak briefly about a couple of specific points. First, the scope of the independent curriculum review is very narrow, focusing just on the content of the national curriculum and methods of assessment for qualifications. The important issues—time spent on arts subjects, accountability measures such as the EBacc, teacher numbers, teacher training, funding and resourcing—are outside the scope of the review, and that is a matter of some regret. The review will report later this year and it will then be in the hands of politicians in this place. What will the Government do to ensure that all the structural issues undermining arts education in our

[Adam Jogee]

schools, not just the ones within the scope of the review, are properly and adequately addressed? I hope that the Minister will be able to address that specifically. If not, perhaps she can find time to meet me to talk about it on a separate occasion.

Like Members across the House, I welcome the news of the national centre and the fact that hubs will be part of it. We have heard colleagues mention hubs, which I think speaks to this point. I hope that the Minister can confirm the funding that will be available for the national centre, and that it will not be the same amount previously provided to hubs but now with the expectation that all arts subjects will be covered from the same pot. I am conscious that the Minister's response will be that it is not for her to write Budgets—our hon. Friend is not the Chancellor—but I would be grateful if she could get as close as she can to confirming that an inflation-based funding increase will be provided to hubs, separate from the new settlement that will be needed to cover other arts subjects.

Will the Government follow other nations in the United Kingdom and commission a review into the pay and conditions for visiting music teachers? Those teachers, who come to the classroom from different professional backgrounds to provide different teaching, are vital to the Government's plans for music education. Yet many of those teachers are on low pay and precarious contracts, and there is no oversight or policy governing how they are paid. A review is at the very least a first step, so I hope the Minister will consider that.

One of the most important parts of education is the ability to share, discover and unpick. With that in mind, there remains a glaring omission from our reset with our friends and neighbours on the European continent, and that is action on visas. A visa waiver for touring artists could lower costs for UK artists and increase the amount of time that they are able to work in the European Union, allowing for more last-minute bookings and European collaboration opportunities. A visa waiver agreement for touring artists would enhance the competitiveness of the creative industries in our country and strengthen our ties with the EU as a whole. I hope that the Minister will take that point back to the Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office so that we get the issue firmly on the agenda.

This is an important debate. I accept that I have given the Minister several quite detailed questions, but I am happy for her to follow up in writing or to meet me in person. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green for bringing the debate to the House.

2.8 pm

Ian Sollom (St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) on securing this important debate. I say that as someone who, just a few weeks ago, stood in this hall and led a debate on the contribution of maths to the UK, where I argued that investment in science, technology, engineering and maths education was crucial to the UK's future.

To some, it may seem a little odd that I am about to make the same argument for the creative arts, which sadly are often pitted against STEM, as though we must

choose to side with one versus the other when devising education policy. I would argue that that is a false dichotomy. There is no reason why we cannot afford appropriate time and funding to both areas. In fact, I would suggest that they work hand in hand in many ways. Many fundamental mathematical discoveries came from those who first had musical inclinations. Pythagoras identified the harmonic series through an interest in the sounds that a water-filled urn made when struck. Leibniz once stated:

"Music is the pleasure the human mind experiences from counting without being aware that it is counting."

John Slinger: I very much appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comments. Does he agree that this is the cultural and societal-level challenge that I referred to in my speech, whereby music is seen in some way as a flowery activity for an elite or a tiny minority of the population? Perhaps it is seen as something that men or boys would be less inclined to do—as dancing is—and it is regarded as a particular niche. That is not helpful, because we need to show that music is for absolutely everybody and that it has benefits to offer all, just as we do when we talk about sport.

Ian Sollom: I could not agree more. This absolutely goes beyond the practicalities of learning an instrument or understanding music theory. It is about those soft skills that we so regularly talk about in sport, but less so in music for some reason, and that is a cultural challenge.

Beyond that, music can also be hugely pleasurable as an activity that does wonders for mental health and stress relief. Certainly, I most reliably relax when I sit down in front of the piano or pick up the guitar, although I do not think the people I live with relax quite as much. Above all, music brings value to our society, and the UK's thriving cultural sector is a national treasure. The creative industries are crucial to our economy and are worth £126 billion. Too often, they have been neglected, and they will decline without appropriate attention.

Like any other subject, everyone should have fair access to participation in music education. Unfortunately, as hon. Members have observed today, music education in the UK is currently one of the poorest performing subjects for fair access and inclusion. Although music forms part of the national curriculum from key stages 1 to 3, meaning that all maintained schools must teach music from ages five to 14, a 2022 survey by the Independent Society of Musicians found that there was significant variability in the quality of teaching across the country. Whether a child is lucky enough to attend a school with good musical provision is a complete postcode lottery, and that is stifling the pipeline of future creative professionals, which will impact industries such as film, theatre, music and design. Has the Minister considered giving Ofsted the power to monitor curriculum breadth, ensuring that schools are offering a rich and diverse programme that gives equal weight to academic, creative and practical learning?

In my constituency, Cambourne Village college, in particular, is an example of great music education, where students are entitled to three sessions of music a fortnight, as opposed to only once a fortnight in a carousel with other performing arts subjects, as is often the case in other schools. As such, the school's GCSE

music numbers have remained stable and healthy for many years, but real-terms per-pupil cuts have led to a narrowing of the curriculum that is felt acutely at key stage 5, where subjects attracting small numbers are not financially viable. The Cambourne sixth form has found itself unable to offer either music or music tech A-levels, despite there being more than enough enthusiasm, at least from teachers.¹

Yearly school budgets also expose the inequalities faced across the country. To repeat some of the statistics cited by the hon. Member for Rugby (John Slinger), there was an average of £1,865 per year allocated to music departments in maintained schools and around £2,000 in academies and free schools, in 2022. That contrasts with the £10,000 spent in independent schools. For maintained schools, that is sometimes around only £1 per student each year, so the cuts really make a big difference.

Budget cuts have had a disproportionate impact on music and arts departments, leading to fewer resources, less specialised teaching staff and reduced opportunities for students. I have heard from one music teacher who told me of his regret about leaving his state school post for an independent one. He felt that in the state school he was not just a teacher, but a shoulder to cry on, because music sessions were sometimes the only chance for students to talk to someone one on one. However, the pay difference between an independent school and a maintained school was just too much to turn down. It is clear from this that the lack of opportunity is not only shrinking our children's future options, but having an impact on their wellbeing.

Liberal Democrats have long campaigned to ensure all teachers are paid a fair wage for the work they do and are empowered to deliver high quality education to their pupils. In many previous debates on education, I and many other colleagues have made the point to the Minister that, because inequalities in the arts are not tackled at their root in schools, they continue into universities. The decline in the further study of music can therefore be seen working its way up through the education system, with several high-profile cuts to music degree programmes over the past few years, including the well-regarded department at Oxford Brookes University.

The Sutton Trust has found that music as a university subject has a far larger percentage of privately educated students than any other subject, with more than 50% of music students at Oxford, Cambridge and King's College London coming from upper-middle-class backgrounds. That is not the case with STEM. Some might question why that matters, but it is a fundamental question of fairness. If children are interested in music or show talent, they should be able to pursue that just like they would in any other subject.

That is part of the reason why the Liberal Democrats believe that art subjects, such as music, fine art and photography, should be included in the English baccalaureate, so that students do not have to choose between that false dichotomy of STEM and creative subjects, particularly music, and do not have to narrow down their options so early in school.

The Britten Sinfonia in Cambridge is the only professional orchestra in the east of England. It has historically done some excellent outreach work at schools in the area, including at Impington Village college in my constituency, leading workshops and mentoring to improve

the standard of the school's orchestra and, in doing so, widen access. In 2023, it had its Arts Council England funding completely cut. It was not a small cut; it was totally removed. It was left high and dry with a shortfall of £1 million over three years.

Cutting the budget of Arts Council England is just one example of the way that the previous Government neglected the social, economic and mental health benefits that the arts can bring. I strongly urge the current Government to do better with the funding.

When Pink Floyd claimed, "We don't need no education," they wrote a great song but were very wrong. Some suggest that they actually wrote the song about what is now Hills Road sixth form college, which serves my constituency; it is a brilliant institution with a clear track record of producing excellent musicians. Pink Floyd were wrong, because we do need education—perhaps not the restrictive, authoritarian education that they were railing against, but fair and inclusive education, of which music is absolutely part.

2.20 pm

Neil O'Brien (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) on securing this very important debate.

They say that politics is showbusiness for ugly people, and in my case that is directly true: the only reason I am here is that the band that I was in when I was 16, alas, did not work out. It was very unfair. The main reason it did not work out is that we were objectively terrible, and I was probably the worst member. None the less, I have always appreciated the contribution of music to our lives.

Like others, I thank our fantastic music teachers and all those involved in music education in and out of schools at all levels. I would particularly like to thank my former music teacher, Tim Slater—alas, no longer here—and those who teach in my daughter's primary school, who put on the most amazing musical works, including a series of musicals at Easter for the Passion that they wrote themselves. The quality has to be heard to be believed: they could genuinely be on Broadway. For weeks afterwards, our children and I were going round the house humming bits of the songs written by the music teachers in that little primary school, so incredible work is done across this country by wonderful people.

We have had fantastic speeches from Members from both sides of the House, including the hon. Members for Frome and East Somerset (Anna Sabine), for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jogee) and for Rugby (John Slinger). I always find Westminster Hall debates fascinating, because they are like peeling an onion: we see new sides of colleagues, from the plastic bassoon and the fusion of hip-hop and classical to the discovery that the hon. Member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire (Ian Sollom) is also into the Floyd—we must take that offline.

John Slinger: I merely want to correct the record. I hope it is understood that I am not claiming to be a hip-hop artist; I do not want to get the wrong booking or anything like that. I played in a rock band, which probably sits somewhere in between, not a hip-hop band—much as I like hip-hop.

1.[*Official Report*, 10 July 2025; Vol. 770, c. 10WC.] (Correction)

Neil O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman has taken the opportunity to put on the record an important point of clarification. I understand that the Leader of the House is looking at modernising the terms that we use in this place—the word “Bill” will be scrapped, perhaps—so the next time we come to this Chamber, it may no longer be a Westminster Hall debate, but a sound system clash or some equivalent that has been modernised.

To create a sense of balance, I will say various things about what the last Government did on music education. I will not say that everything in the world was brilliant—obviously it was not—but, for the sake of balance, let us hear some of the things we did. We introduced the music education hubs, which hon. Members have mentioned. They did a mix of providing musical education directly and helping schools. There are, I think, 43 in England today, and we put in £79 million over the past three years towards that programme and another £25 million for the direct capital funding of musical instruments for kids. We brought in the first ever national plan for music education, a key goal of which was to give every child the chance to learn a musical instrument. By 2018, a record number of children were learning instruments.

That plan also set out goals to have high-quality music education and more partnerships between schools and others, and to try to reverse the decline in the amount of time spent on music in schools, which I will come back to in a moment.

I will not make lots of political points today, but I note that the current Government have pulled the funding for the national youth music organisations. I think it was in February that the national youth music organisations announced that the Government would not be renewing their contribution of £0.5 million towards their work. That is one thing that perhaps takes us in the wrong direction.

A question I want to ask the Minister early on in my remarks is about something where there is quite a lot of uncertainty for parents. The Government announced that they would top up the music and dance scheme bursaries for musically gifted young people, so that the effect of the VAT increase on independent schools was counteracted, and they said that that would mean that things would remain unchanged for the rest of the 2024-25 academic year. I want to ask the Minister what will happen for future academic years, which are of course now looming. We have only two weeks left of school, certainly in Leicestershire; it may be three in the rest of the country. The next academic year is looming, and I am keen to understand from the Minister whether that decision will stand for all future academic years and in particular for the one coming up.

We have talked a bit about the various changes and trends in music education. It has not been one thing over the last 14 years; there have been different phases. There definitely was a squeeze on music in the coalition period, in the years from 2010 to 2015, but there has been a recovery since, which has not necessarily come out in the debate so far. If we look at the number of hours of music taught across all years, we see that that has gone up from about 80,000 hours a year in 2017-18 to about 86,000 now, so the total amount of music education has been going up since that low point in 2017.

This is all aligned with some of the things that were happening to funding over that period. Very difficult decisions on funding were being made in the light of

inheriting, in 2010, the largest structural deficit in our entire peacetime history. That was not something we wanted to inherit, but over time we moved towards more generous settlements for schools. In the last Parliament, for example, there was an 11% real-terms funding increase per pupil, and that benefited lots of different things, including music.

We have talked about the loss of music teachers, but the number of music teachers has followed a similar, U-shaped trajectory. We have 1,000 more music teachers than we did in 2017-18. The number went from about 6,500 up to 7,500 by 2024. It is worth bringing out some of the nuances in this debate. Also, in a lot of debates about this subject—I have read previous debates on it—we hear people talking about GCSE entries, but as the Government's own curriculum and assessment review points out, we have to also look at the other qualifications. Although GCSEs have gone down, technical music qualifications that are not GCSE qualifications have been going up, so it is worth having the full and rounded picture.

Speaking of full and rounded pictures, the hon. Member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire also talked about the nature of education debates and the way we often have different priorities being advanced. As someone who has followed education for a long time, I am very conscious that there are constant calls for x to be put on the national curriculum or for schools to do more y. Of course, our poor old teachers, our hard-working teachers, have only so many hours in their day. They are already working hard and there are inevitable trade-offs. The hon. Member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire said—I agreed with 90% of his speech—that these things are not in tension with one another. To some extent, they are. There are only a certain number of hours in the school day or in a child's day, and we do need to make choices.

I do not always say this, but one very sensible thing that the Government did was to commission some polling, as part of the curriculum review, about what parents and young people themselves want to see more of in school. The results are really interesting. The survey was of kids who did their GCSEs last year and their parents, and they were asked, “What would you like to have spent more time on in school?” In response, 35% say employment and interview skills, 27% say academic subjects, like maths, history and science, 26% say digital skills and computing, 26% say creative thinking and problem solving, 22% say sports, 22% say communication, like debating and public speaking, 19% say technical subjects, 18% say volunteering and outdoor pursuits and 15% say cultural activities like music, drama and media.

I mention that not to say that music is not important—obviously it is; the whole point of this debate is that it is hugely important—but merely to sympathise slightly with Ministers for once, because a lot of different people want more of different things in the school day and there are tensions and choices for them. In that same poll, only about 1% of parents said that their kids were not doing arts subjects because they were not available at their school. There was more of an issue with technical and vocational subjects.

One of the things that I am proud of about our time in government is that we prioritised gateway subjects, which has had positive effects. For example, having

fallen from 83% to a low of 70% between 2006 and 2011, the share of pupils who take double or triple science has now increased to 98%, and the share of children doing triple science increased from 6%, to 27% in 2019. There was a real turnaround in science, and the same is true in other areas. One of the reasons that English schoolchildren have become the highest achieving in the western world in reading and maths, in studies such as the trends in international mathematics and science study and the programme for international student assessment, while Scotland and Wales have gone backwards, is that we have focused on the important core academic disciplines.

None of that is an argument against music or doing more in music; it is simply that there are choices for us. If people say that they want more of the school day devoted to something, they should be clear about what they do not want. I am a bit sceptical about messing around too much with long-running accountability and progress measures such as Attainment 8 and Progress 8. Of course, a student's results in GCSE music can already be put into those measures if it is one of their eight best subjects. There is discretion: three of the eight have to be from the broad range of subjects in the EBacc, but three do not, so there is already huge school choice in the measure. I am very sceptical about using it as the way to solve our problems.

I will end by introducing a thought that has not been much discussed in previous debates on music education. I will not relitigate the debates we have had with the Government about phones in schools, and I do not think that this is something we will disagree on, but we need to think about the way that young people are spending their time, including out of school. I am alarmed by the changes in the way that young people are spending their time: the increase in the amount of time they are spending alone and on social media and the incredible number of kids who, when you ask them, "What are you doing this evening?", say, "I'll be scrolling TikTok."

That is incredibly depressing, and we can see that it is having negative real-world consequences. It is leading to worse mental health among young people and worse real-world consequences in, for example, A&E admissions. It is eating up the time for other things that, when we are much older, we wish we had spent more time on. I wish that I had spent more time learning the guitar and less time faffing around on the ZX Spectrum, that time thief of the 1980s, but young people today have it much worse because of social media. They feel compelled to be on it because of social pressure and because it is designed by geniuses to be incredibly addictive, and it is eating up their time.

One thing we may find a consensus on over time is the need to do something about that and to change the balance of young people's lives and the amount of time they spend on social media, often on platforms that they are not supposed to be on but that happily welcome young people, who they can monetise—in violation of their own terms and conditions, by the way. I fear that I am veering away from the subject, but this is an important part of the conversation. Here is a very large part of the time of young people, who are at the time of their lives when they have the opportunity and the mental sponginess to learn something new—and could, unlike me, make a success of a career in rock and roll—yet it is being swallowed up by things that in future they will not think were a good use of their time.

I again congratulate the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green on securing this very important debate, which I welcome. There is a lot more we can do. I hope that the Minister will cover the point about the special bursaries scheme.

2.34 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell):

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) for opening this valuable debate on the future of music education. He made it clear what a great advocate he is for music education. He chairs the APPG on music education and is a constant powerful voice on this issue in this House. I also want to declare that my husband runs a music venue. It is not directly relevant to this debate, but I put it on the record just to be clear.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (John Slinger) for his thoughtful contribution. I appreciate his concerns about ensuring that music is held in the high esteem it deserves in the education system; they came across clearly in his speech. I enjoyed hearing about the childhood experiences of the hon. Member for Frome and East Somerset (Anna Sabine) and about that aspect of music that creates a sense of belonging and friendship. That is in short supply for too many young people; where music can meet that demand, we need to make sure that the opportunity is available. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jogee) gave a wide-ranging speech, covering an array of Departments, which clearly displayed his passion for this issue. I hope that I can answer his questions.

Finally, I thank the hon. Members for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire (Ian Sollom) and for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston (Neil O'Brien) for their thoughtful contributions—in particular the latter, who was uncharacteristically comradely. That obviously shows the measure of him, but it also indicates the level of cross-party agreement on this issue, which is always welcome in this place.

The Government are clear that music education must not be the preserve of the privileged few. Creative subjects such as music are important pillars of a rounded and enriching education, which every child should have. That is why, as part of our opportunity mission, we want to widen access to the arts so that young people can develop their creativity and find their voice. That is important in its own right—creative exploration is a critical part of a rich education—but it also helps young people to find opportunities and helps to support our desire to power growth for the creative industries.

I learned to play a musical instrument at school. I played the flute, which, I have to say, conflicted with my talkative nature—that was probably the thinking when they gave it to me. I had the opportunity to play in the school orchestra, perform in school productions and sing in the choir. From those experiences, I know that music can be incredibly beneficial to academic achievement, too. It taps into parts of the brain that many subjects just do not reach. It builds confidence, presentation skills, teamwork and resilience, and it really feeds the soul, which is what keeps the mind expanding as well.

It starts with the curriculum. We want every child, regardless of their background, to have a rich, broad, inclusive and innovative curriculum, including in music.

[Catherine McKinnell]

That is why one of our first actions in government was to launch the independent review of the curriculum and assessment system, chaired by Professor Becky Francis. The review is an important step in the Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity, with a new curriculum that will set up all our children to achieve and thrive at school. It is considering all subjects, including music, and seeks to deliver a curriculum that readies young people for life and for work, including in creative subjects and skills.

The review is being informed by evidence and data and is being conducted in close consultation with education professionals and other experts, parents, children and young people—as the hon. Member for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston referred to—and other stakeholders, including employers, universities and trade unions. We have had over 7,000 responses to the public call for evidence, and a range of research and polling. The final report, with recommendations, will be published this autumn, along with the Government's response.

We will consider all the associated implications for accountability measures, such as EBacc and Progress 8, alongside the changes. We are legislating too, so that, following the review and the implementation of reforms, academies will be required to teach the reformed national curriculum alongside maintained schools. That will ensure that music education is reinstated as an entitlement for every child in a state-funded school. It will give parents certainty over their children's education while giving both academies and maintained schools the freedom to adapt their curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils.

We recognise, however, that curriculum reforms alone will not be enough to give all children access to a high-quality arts education, including in music. We know that we need to support our schools and teachers, which is why we have announced our intention to launch a national centre for arts and music education, which a number of Members asked about. The new centre will help us meet our ambition for an improved and more equitable arts education. It will support schools in the teaching of music as well as art and design, drama and dance. Music will be an important aspect of the centre's work, as it will also be the national delivery partner for the music hubs network. The 43 hub partnerships are central to supporting schools.

I recognise some of the challenges outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green, who wants to see less bureaucracy and a more streamlined service. The aims of the national centre will be to support excellent teaching, develop sustainable partnerships and promote arts education. The research is clear that high-quality teaching is the in-school factor with the greatest positive impact on a child's outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children.

Sustainable partnerships between schools themselves, within and between academy trusts, and with cultural organisations with knowledge of arts education are so important in supporting teachers and addressing equity in arts education. The promotion of arts education in and of itself is needed to tackle the persistent inequity of access in and beyond schools.

As this work develops, we will very much take on board some of the concerns about how the current system is working. The intention is to launch the new centre by September 2026, and to appoint a new delivery

partner for the centre through an open, competitive procurement. We have been engaging with sector stakeholders, including the music hubs network, to refine the details of the centre, and the invitation to tender will be issued later this year.

I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme that the funding for the national centre will be separate from the grant funding for the music hubs. Funding for the centre and the hubs from September 2026 will be confirmed in due course.

Music hubs play a vital role across England in supporting children and young people to access music education and providing opportunities for them to progress. The 43 music hub partnerships across England offer a range of services, including musical instrument tuition, instrument loaning, whole-class ensemble teaching and CPD for teachers.

John Slinger: I have heard a rumour that a local authority found in one of its municipal buildings a vast store of unused but usable musical instruments. Will my hon. Friend ask her colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government if they might gently ask other local authorities to do a little audit to see whether they have similar stores? If they do, the instruments could be distributed to primary schools, in particular, where they are very much needed.

Catherine McKinnell: That sounds like a very sensible suggestion, and my hon. Friend now has it on the record. We will make sure that it is raised in the appropriate way.

We continue to support the crucial music hubs programme, for which grant funding of £76 million has recently been secured for the full academic year 2025-26, up until the end of August 2026, following the outcome of the spending review. We will confirm longer-term funding as part of the spending review process, which is ongoing. To widen access to musical instruments, which my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby rightly raised, from the current academic year the Government are investing £25 million in capital funding for musical instruments, equipment and technology. Those instruments and technology must be put to good use, so we will take his concern on board.

For some pupils, in particular those facing disadvantage and with additional needs, the barriers to accessing music education can be particularly high. That is why we are also investing in a new programme to pilot targeted support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special educational needs and disabilities. The Government's music opportunities pilot offers pupils across primary and secondary schools the opportunity to learn to play an instrument of their choice or to sing to a high standard by providing free lessons and supporting young people to progress, including by taking music exams. The Government are investing £2 million to support the pilot over a four-year period up to 2027-28. It is backed by a further £3.85 million from the Arts Council and Youth Music. The pilot is delivered by Young Sounds UK in 12 areas of the country as an expansion of its successful Young Sounds Connect programme.

I saw for myself the impact of the pilot on a visit to Mountfield primary school in Washington, where I had a lovely time chatting to the children about the difference

that accessing music education had made to them. Indeed, for some of them it was why they came to school. The impact was evident. We will use the pilot's findings to inform future policy on widening music opportunities, but it is a really rich start.

Adam Jogee: Will the Minister accept my invitation, from one Newcastle MP to another, to follow up on her visit to the school in Washington and come and see the formative impact that music has at St Mary's school in Newcastle-under-Lyme? I am sure she would be very welcome.

Catherine McKinnell: As my hon. Friend will know, I am a big fan of Newcastles. It would be nice to come and see the other one, as I have never been; I would love to accept his invitation if there is an opportunity.

High-quality teaching is the in-school factor that makes the biggest difference to a child's outcomes. That is why, as part of the Government's plan for change, we are committed to recruiting an additional 6,500 new expert teachers across secondary and special schools and our colleges, where they are needed the most, over this Parliament. To support that, we are offering a teacher training incentives package for the 2025-26 recruitment cycle worth £233 million—a £37 million increase on the last cycle. It includes a £10,000 tax-free bursary for music.

We are seeing positive signs. The 2024-25 initial teacher training census reported that 331 trainees had begun courses in music, up from 216 in 2023-24. We have also agreed a 5.5% pay award for teachers for 2024-25, and a 4% pay award in 2025-26, meaning that teachers and leaders will see an increase in pay of almost 10% over two years. We have expanded our school teacher recruitment campaign and we are allowing planning, preparation and assessment time to be undertaken at home to give more flexibility to the profession.

We are also working hard to address teacher workload and wellbeing, and to support schools to introduce flexible working practices. We have the "Improve workload and wellbeing for school staff" service, developed alongside school leaders, with a workload reduction toolkit to support schools to identify opportunities to cut excessive workload.

I spoke on teacher recruitment at the Schools and Academies Show just over a year ago, prior to the general election, when I was the shadow Minister. After I finished speaking about our vision of unlocking opportunity for children to access art, music, sport and enrichment at school, I said hello to a gentleman who had been patiently waiting to speak to me. He introduced himself; I asked him what he did, and he said, "I'm a music teacher. To be honest, I had taken the decision to give up and do something else, but after listening to you today, I think I'm going to hang on." I thought he should definitely hang on—we need more people like him—and that we had injected a sense of hope that this Government would care about music and enrichment. Now that we are in government, I hope that he is still teaching, along with many others, and that he knows that we are determined to deliver our vision to unlock access to music for all children. I hope our brilliant teachers feel supported to have a rewarding and fruitful career inspiring the next generation of musicians.

We know that enrichment opportunities like music and the arts help young people to gain skills and strengthen their sense of school belonging, supporting them to thrive.

That is why we are supporting schools to plan a high-quality enrichment offer, with a new enrichment framework developed in collaboration with a working group of experts, including from school, youth, sports and arts organisations. The Department is working closely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and we are committed to publishing the framework by the end of 2025. It will identify what a high-quality enrichment offer will look like, reflecting the great practice that already exists in schools and providing advice on how to plan a high-quality enrichment offer more strategically and intentionally, including how to make use of specific programmes to increase access to sport and the arts.

In addition, under the first ever dormant assets scheme strategy, which was announced last month, £132.5 million will be allocated to projects to increase disadvantaged young people's access to enrichment opportunities, including in music, to boost wellbeing and employability. The fund will be delivered by the National Lottery Community Fund, with which the Government are working to design the specific programmes that will be delivered.

We recognise the importance of specialist training in supporting young people to pursue the most advanced levels of music education. That is why we continue to provide generous support to help students to access specialist music and dance education and training: we are committing £36 million for the academic year 2025-26. As several hon. Members have mentioned, this important scheme provides means-tested bursaries and grants to enable high-achieving children and young people in music and dance to benefit from truly world-class specialist training, regardless of their personal and financial circumstances. The scheme supports students to attend eight independent schools and 20 centres for advanced training that provide places at weekends and evenings and in the school holidays. The bursaries support more than 2,000 pupils per year, with about 900 pupils attending one of the schools.

The Government continue to provide such generous support because we recognise how important it is. All families earning below the average relevant income of £45,000 a year and making parental contributions to fees will continue to benefit from the additional financial support in the next financial year, so they will not be affected by any VAT changes introduced in January 2025. Any future funding will be determined as part of the post-spending review process.

Neil O'Brien: The Minister talks about the next financial year. Can she be clear about which school years are covered? People going into the start of the school year in September 2026 will be covered, but the Government have not made a commitment for those starting in September 2027—I just want to check that that is correct.

Catherine McKinnell: My understanding is that the current commitment is for this academic year, 2025-26, and we will confirm funding for future years in due course.

The Department also provides a grant of over £210,000 to the Choir Schools Association and its choir schools scholarship scheme, offering means-tested support to choristers attending member schools, including cathedral and collegiate choir schools in England, to help those with exceptional talent to access this specialist provision.

[Catherine McKinnell]

As part of our plan for change, we are committed to ensuring that arts and culture thrive in every part of the country, with more opportunities for more people to engage, benefit from and work in arts and culture where they live. Between 2023 and 2026, Arts Council England will invest £444 million per year in England through its national portfolio to drive participation in cultural activities, including by children and young people. The Government have also announced more than £270 million in investment for our arts venues, museums, libraries and heritage sector. That sum is made up of multiple funds, including the £85 million creative foundations fund and the £20 million museum renewal fund, to invest in fit-for-purpose cultural infrastructure.

The arts sector also benefits from generous tax reliefs. From 1 April 2025, theatres, orchestras and museums and galleries benefit from higher tax relief rates of 40% for non-touring productions and 45% for orchestral and touring productions. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme asked about touring. That is the responsibility of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, but colleagues in Government are clearly very engaged with counterparts and stakeholders to make sure that these issues are addressed, because clearly there is a huge interest in supporting both non-touring productions and touring productions, where they create cultural, creative and industrial exchanges on a global basis.

As part of Labour's "Creating growth" plan, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is currently undertaking a review documenting current and past funding for the arts, culture and heritage sectors. It is important that all that public money be spent really well. Baroness Hodge of Barking is leading the independent review of Arts Council England, examining whether the regions have access to high-quality arts and culture across the country and whether everyone is able to participate in and consume culture and creativity regardless of their background or where they live. I know that she was in the north-east recently, as part of that work.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): Order. Will the Minister wind up?

Catherine McKinnell: Yes, Ms Vaz. Growth is the number one mission of the Government, and our new industrial strategy is central to the growth mission. As a sector in which the UK excels today, and which will propel us forward to tomorrow, the creative industries have been announced as one of the eight growth-driving sectors. Ensuring that the UK can provide a workforce that has the right skills and capabilities is key to unlocking

that growth, which is why we have prioritised it within Skills England. We also want to see all that opportunity unlocked within our education system.

In closing, I hope that I have responded to the various questions that have been raised. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, I have a potential correction—well, I don't think it is a correction, because I think it is what I said. We have committed the £36 million for the next academic year, 2025-26, in full, including support for lower-income families.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): Order. We will not get a chance for Mr Charalambous to wind up if the Minister has not finished. Has she finished?

Catherine McKinnell: I hope that I have managed to respond to all the issues raised. Finally, I want to underline my and this Government's commitment to ensuring that all children can access and engage with high-quality music education. I know that creative subjects, music and art are a vital part of a rich and broad school experience. That is what we are working towards. They must not be the preserve of the privileged few. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green again for the opportunity to discuss these issues today.

2.56 pm

Bambos Charalambous: It has been a delight to take part in this debate. We have had cross-party unanimity about the need for better music education, and I am heartened to hear the Minister's remarks. All the speakers today thanked their music teachers; we should all say a big thank you to all music teachers for the service that they provide, whether they are at school or peripatetic—many thanks to them all.

I hope that the Minister will look at recruitment of teachers. If things are not working, we will need to put things in place. I was not quite sure about the national plan for music, but I will catch up—

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend's final question was a request to meet and discuss the matter. I am more than happy to do so.

Bambos Charalambous: Thank you.

Bearing in mind that we have so many talented musicians both in this room and in the Cabinet—including the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who is a saxophonist, and the Prime Minister, who is a flautist—the future is bright. We must make sure that we have these discussions and get the best future we can for music education.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the future of music education.

Children with Allergies: School Safeguarding

[EMMA LEWELL *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Chris Bloore (Redditch) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of safeguarding children with allergies at school.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell. First, I would like to declare that I am an officer for the all-party parliamentary group on allergy. To be clear, I am not the first person to host a Westminster Hall debate or an Adjournment debate on the topic; Members who have been in this place for a much longer time than me, most notably the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Rutland and Stamford (Alicia Kearns) have long called for improvements to allergy safety in schools, and I pay tribute to them.

Many of us have experience of allergies: one in three people in the UK now live with allergic disease. In fact, this afternoon my speech will be tempered by the fact that my own allergies have taken control this morning, so I apologise for the slightly laboured delivery. I have my own personal experience, too; my son suffered a severe allergic reaction to an over-the-counter medication. The terrifying car journey to the hospital, watching his whole body turn blotchy red and not knowing what was wrong, is a fear that no parent should have to endure. The months that followed were filled with anxiety about what else he might be allergic to, and constant worry about receiving a call from nursery with bad news.

I have experienced this on a small scale, compared with many parents who live with the fear every day. I will not be commenting on individual cases, for legal reasons and because of ongoing legal proceedings, but I want to make clear that any child who has been lost in our schools because of an allergic reaction is one too many. Hospital admissions for allergic reactions have risen by over 160% in the past 20 years, and 50% of children are now affected by at least one allergic condition. Every year, approximately 43,000 new cases of child allergy require care. The number of children diagnosed with allergic rhinitis and eczema has tripled in 30 years, with 3.9 million currently affected. Studies show now that incidents of food allergies in England nearly doubled between 2008 and 2018, with a prevalence of 4% among pre-school children.

Children spend at least 20% of their waking hours in school, and food allergies affect around two children in every classroom. It should come as no surprise that 18% of food allergy reactions and 25% of first-time anaphylactic reactions occur in the school environment. Given the amount of time spent at school and the proportion of children affected, it is vital that children and their parents feel that school is a safe place and prepared to deal with allergic reactions, but sadly that is often not the case.

Sarah Edwards (Tamworth) (Lab): Parents want to know that their children can go to school safely, but they might equally have a reaction when they are not at school; 70% of parents of children with allergies report that they have experienced an absence because of an allergy. Does my hon. Friend agree that the vast number of difficulties faced by children with allergies and their

parents merits the creation of a cross-departmental allergy tsar who could advise the Government on all the ways that allergies affect the sufferer?

Chris Bloore: My hon. Friend is a little ahead of the rest of my speech, but I completely agree, and I will give reasons for that. An allergy tsar who can cross Departments—Health, Education and others—could have a huge impact on how we deal with children with allergies.

Leigh Ingham (Stafford) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. I do not usually speak much about my family in the Chamber, but it is interesting that my hon. Friend spoke about his personal experience with his son. I phoned my nephew yesterday—it was his first day at primary school and he had his taster day—to show him Big Ben, which was going off at the time. When I did, he had hugely swollen eyes; he had had an allergic reaction at school, which had also been happening at nursery. He has an egg allergy. The nursery updated parents daily to say what they were having for lunch—I do not know whether my hon. Friend has seen these apps—and my brother phoned me one day to tell me that he had been told that my nephew had had quiche. Although it is important that we make sure we have these provisions in school settings, does my hon. Friend agree that we should make sure they are also there in early years settings?

Chris Bloore: I completely agree. Those family apps are a daily part of my life, as I see what my son is eating. I still have a little jittery feeling every time I see what food is going to him and whether he will have a reaction.

Allergy provisions in schools are unfortunately inconsistent, leaving children vulnerable and families sometimes fearful. There is no comprehensive national framework to safeguard children with allergies effectively. Approximately 70% of UK schools do not have basic protections in place, which has led some families to resort to home education, denying their children the opportunity to learn alongside their peers. One in three schools has no allergy policy at all, and many that do simply say “no nuts”. Half of schools do not have spare adrenaline auto-injector pens on site, and over 60% do not provide training to staff on how to manage allergies.

The impact on attendance is significant. Research by the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation found that 70% of parents reported that their allergic child had missed school because of their allergy. Reasons include illness and medical appointments and, crucially, anxiety about safety and bullying. Two thirds of parents believe allergies negatively affect their children’s educational attainment. Allergies should never be a barrier to education and success. The mental health impact is equally serious. Data show that 83% of people with food allergies say it significantly impacts their wellbeing. Many children face bullying and teasing related to their allergies, causing feelings of isolation, fear and anxiety. Around 32% of children surveyed have been bullied due to food allergies at least once.

Some school practices worsen the isolation. I have heard of children being made to sit alone at lunch or missing out on treats given to other children on special occasions. Many parents restrict their children’s activities because of safety concerns, and some consider removing their children from mainstream education altogether. Allergy UK’s research shows that 61% of children with food allergies avoid social situations to reduce risk.

[Chris Bloore]

The lack of understanding can have tragic consequences. Eighty per cent of parents believe that their child's allergies are not taken seriously at school, and such indifference can lead to delays in treatment and, heartbreakingly, to children not returning home from school.

Members from all parties have referenced the inconsistent and dangerous approach to allergy safety in schools. A brief look at *Hansard* reveals statements made by Ministers from all parties over the last 15 years about how an inconsistent approach to allergies causes dangers in our schools. To agree with the hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford, who is not here today, the root cause of these issues is a lack of clarity in the Department for Education's guidance, and a lack of accountability mechanisms to ensure that existing guidance is followed properly.

We must also remember that allergies are simply not a dietary issue. They are a medical issue requiring proper medical protocols and support. Yes, schools should lead on allergy policies, but freedom of information requests and research done by the Benedict Blythe Foundation show that not enough of them are doing so. We cannot blame schools for those failures. They must be provided with the right leadership, resources and support to implement consistent allergy safety measures. Teachers and staff want to protect children, but cannot do so without proper training and guidance.

Fifty per cent of parents believe that staff and teachers should have more training on allergies. This training should include allergy awareness management and emergency response training, including administration of adrenaline auto-injectors. It must be consistent, evidence-based and delivered in collaboration with medical professionals. Schools are under-resourced and need proper funding. A recent NASUWT survey found that 67% of school staff had not received allergy awareness training because of funding issues.

Alongside training, every school should have a specific allergy policy that includes an anaphylaxis plan. This ensures everyone knows their role in allergy safety, and families can be assured that a safe environment has been created. Safeguarding guidance should be strengthened to specifically reference children with allergies. Each child with a diagnosed allergy should have an individual healthcare plan developed with parents, schools and healthcare professionals, providing clear guidance on risk management and emergency procedures. All schools should record and report allergic reactions and near misses. A centralised database would allow better tracking of trends, identification of risks and improvements in policy.

Every school should be funded to hold in-date spare adrenaline auto-injectors, with staff trained in their use. Those devices should be as commonplace and accessible as defibrillators are now. Half of our schools do not have spare medication, and timely use of AAIs can mean the difference between life and death. We must also challenge stigma and raise awareness across our schools. Providing dairy-free alternatives to free milk for under-fives, ensuring free school meals and breakfast clubs are allergy inclusive, and including allergy in anti-bullying policies will foster compassionate, inclusive environments.

The Minister who will reply to this debate is the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), but a cross-Government approach is essential. Charities have long called for an allergies tsar to co-ordinate efforts across Departments such as Education and Health. The role would champion collaboration, advocate for evidence-based changes and help embed effective policies on the ground. Access to prompt diagnosis and treatment is critical. Allergy UK proposes placing allergy nurses and dietitians in GP surgeries, reducing waiting times from months to weeks and supporting schools in creating healthcare plans.

Before I finish, I have several specific questions for the Minister. The debate has made clear the urgent need for stronger, more consistent protections for children with allergies in our schools. I respect the challenges our schools face, but the safety and wellbeing of our children must come first. I therefore ask the Minister to consider making allergy training, fully funded and supported by the DFE, mandatory for all school staff. That training must be comprehensive, evidence-based and regularly updated.

We should require every school to hold spare adrenaline and AAI pens, with clear protocols for their proper storage, maintenance and use. Those lifesaving devices must, as I have mentioned, be as accessible as defibrillators. Working closely with our colleagues at the Department for Health and Social Care, every child diagnosed with an allergy should have an individual healthcare plan, developed collaboratively with parents, schools and healthcare professionals and embedded within safeguarding policies. We should strengthen reporting requirements so that all allergic reactions and near misses in school are recorded centrally, enabling data-driven improvements in policy. We should support the appointment of an allergy tsar and make sure that organisations such as Ofsted consider a school's approach to allergies in their inspections.

These policies, set out by various organisations, would provide a real road map to not only meet but exceed international standards for allergy safety in schools. Following these recommendations will help us to create a safer and more consistent environment in which every child with allergies is truly protected and supported. Laws that exist but are not properly implemented are not fit for purpose.

Next week, I will introduce the Schools (Allergy Safety) Bill to legislate for the mandatory training of school staff, allergy policies and spare medication at schools. It is time we took allergies seriously and enabled schools to create safe environments for children to learn and flourish. I hope that, after countless debates in this place and in the House of Commons, we can finally put this issue to bed and put our children's safety first.

3.12 pm

Becky Gittins (Clwyd East) (Lab): I was diagnosed with an anaphylactic peanut allergy at the age of seven. Much of the coverage around allergies centres on the devastating occasions when anaphylaxis and avoidable reactions result in tragic deaths. For most allergy sufferers, today's debate feels much closer to our daily life and is therefore incredibly poignant. The impact of allergic diseases on the lives of children goes far beyond severe and occasional reactions; it impacts every part of their lives.

I begin by endorsing the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore); I endorse much of the additional provision he has asked for. In my experience, having a food allergy has meant feeling different and isolated from my peers at school. I was often not able to be involved with school experiences or even rewards for getting my times tables or spelling right, if they were food-based.

I also experienced a high degree of anxiety from my parents when other parents continually sent their children in with peanut butter sandwiches despite repeated warnings, the result of which was always that I, as a seven-year-old, needed to restrict myself further to keep myself safe. Having to take huge precautions when going on school and residential trips, which required me to challenge some cooking staff—adults—who were asking me to eat food that I knew to be unsafe. In a school setting, where good behaviour is often associated with deference towards teachers and other adults, that is very difficult for a child to navigate. On one occasion, a member of the catering staff at an outdoor pursuit residential centre called me a pain in the proverbial—her language was not so polite—for having allergies and refusing to eat unsafe food that was put in front of me. I was 10.

As I got older, I became more resentful of my allergies, always having to carry a messenger bag with adrenalin auto-injectors when out with friends, not being able to eat at the fast food places and restaurants where my friends held birthday parties or went at the weekend, and never being able to sit with them for school dinners in the canteen. One thing that is often not discussed is that I, like many with allergies, know there are things I will never do and places I will never go, as their cuisine is unsuitable for my allergies and there is a lack of medical access while travelling.

Like many allergy sufferers, I have suffered periods of anxiety when my allergies have either caused or become a vehicle for intensifying periods of poor mental health. The early physical symptoms of an anaphylactic reaction are remarkably similar to those of a panic attack: laboured breathing, potential loss of consciousness and what the medical profession call an impending sense of doom. For a child—indeed, throughout life—navigating the difference between anaphylaxis and anxiety can be incredibly difficult when their body is alerting them to threats: real threats that must not be ignored, in the case of allergy, or perceived threats, as often in cases of anxiety. That is an often under-appreciated part of what life is like for young people living with allergies. For allergy sufferers, a life of restriction, anxiety and fear is not just a one-off tragic story; it affects the everyday life of those children.

I would love to be able to say that in the 23 years since I was diagnosed with an anaphylactic allergy, the outlook for children with allergies has become much better. In fact, the biggest change in that time is that the number of people with allergies has more than doubled, while the support and infrastructure for allergy sufferers has remained much the same. The rates are such that one in 13 children now has a food allergy, which equates to two children in every classroom. That is the real importance of this debate. Data shows that 20% of food allergic reactions, and approximately 30% of first-time anaphylactic reactions, like the one we heard about from my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Leigh Ingham), occur at school. One in five food allergic reactions occurs outside the school building: on the playground, travelling to and from school, or on school field trips.

Hospital admissions due to food-induced anaphylaxis tripled between 1998 and 2018, with the largest increase seen in children under 15, reflecting a growing incidence of severe allergic reactions. Astonishingly, it is estimated that half a million school days are lost to allergic disease each year. That has a massive impact on the educational attainment of a growing number of young people in our schools. That makes it all the more worrying that 69% of schools do not have in place the recommended safeguards of allergy policy plans, medication or training; that, despite being permitted to carry AAIs since 2017, almost half of all schools do not hold their own life-saving allergy medication; that two in five teachers feel unprepared to respond to a child experiencing an allergic reaction; and that, according to NASUWT research, 67% of teachers have had no formal allergy awareness training.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to attend the launch of the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation's allergy school module. Designed to address the lack of allergy training in schools, it is a comprehensive suite of free training resources designed to empower, include and protect children with food allergies. I have written to every school in my constituency about those fantastic resources. They have been available since January, and a module is coming later in the year for secondary school students.

I regularly speak to schools in my constituency about allergy school, and I have been heartened by the work that many schools are doing to keep allergic pupils safe. Recently, I was heartened when asked, in an interview with young reporters from the *Bodnant Bugle* at Bodnant community school, about my work with allergy in this place. I also heard how informed pupils and staff are working together with the aim of keeping pupils feeling safe and, crucially, included in their school community. That is a huge stride, but we must do more.

As a champion of the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation, and a proud member of the APPG on allergy, I am keen to support the progression of its allergy safety action plan. The following calls are most important. All nursery and school staff should be trained in allergy awareness, allergy management, and how to respond in a food allergy emergency, including the administration of medication. Lists and photos of children with food allergies should be available to all staff to ensure that they can be easily identified and their needs can be met throughout the school day. All schools and nurseries should have a specific allergy policy that includes an anaphylaxis plan. All schools and nurseries should have an individual healthcare plan for every child with a diagnosed allergy. Such plans should always include paediatric allergy action plans and an anaphylaxis risk assessment. All schools and nurseries should record and report all known instances of food allergic reactions and, crucially, near misses.

That record keeping should be included in the evaluation criteria for Ofsted inspections. All schools should have an allergy-aware anti-bullying policy. Schools should ensure that their behaviour and anti-bullying policies include awareness of food allergy-related bullying. There should be milk alternatives for free school milk provision; allergy-friendly provision in breakfast clubs, of which we are so proud; requirements on schools to publish their catering information and the allergy assessments done by school catering staff and agencies; and provision for children who cannot safely eat school dinners, in recognition of the fact that parents of food-allergic children spend an average of 14.4% extra on their weekly food shop.

[Becky Gittins]

Since I became an MP, I have met so many children who suffer through allergic disease and whose experiences of growing up with allergies are painfully similar to mine, although they are 20 years apart. I hope the work that we will discuss this afternoon ensures that allergic children have a much better, safer experience of school in the future.

3.21 pm

Daniel Francis (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, as ever, Ms Lewell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) for securing this debate and for his advocacy and hard work to ensure that children with allergies are kept safe at school. He has outlined the work required to assist them in their education. I have close friends in my constituency who have experienced with their children what my hon. Friends the Members for Redditch and for Clwyd East (Becky Gittins) described, so I thank them for their advocacy.

I pay tribute to Allergy UK for its dedication in this area. In February, I visited its headquarters in Crayford in my constituency, in the deepest eastern part of south-east London. During my visit, I heard from an Allergy UK supporter who had benefited from its dietitian service for her young baby. I welcome Allergy UK's campaign to introduce access to allergy dietitians through GP surgeries in each health region. I am pleased to be an Allergy UK champion, and I support it in its work to keep every person with an allergy across the UK safe.

Keeping children safe at school is vital. Allergy UK estimates that 40% of children have been diagnosed with an allergy, and that one in 12 young children suffer from a food allergy. As we are all aware, food allergies can be devastating and, in the worst cases, deadly. It is therefore crucial that we ensure that teachers and training staff have the correct training and allergen awareness. For the worst-case scenarios, it is crucial that every staff member knows how to provide life-saving care and administer life-saving medication.

We have all heard about and read heartbreaking stories of entirely avoidable deaths. I am sure that, with the correct training and equipment, many such situations could have ended entirely differently. I therefore welcome the ten-minute rule Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch will introduce next week, on 9 July, which would ensure that schools are required to maintain an allergy management policy, and would require allergy training for staff in schools. I believe those are vital measures to ensure that children are safeguarded and protected at school. If we implement those measures, parents will be able to send their children to school in the knowledge that their allergies will not hold them back from accessing a well-rounded and fulfilling education.

Parents should not have to worry about their child receiving proper care and safeguarding when they send them off to school every morning, but too many parents of children with allergies worry every day that there may be traces of allergens in food and the school environment. As we know, children share food or could use someone else's water bottle by mistake. It is therefore vital that the safety and medical risks are decreased by allergy awareness management and emergency response training provided to all education staff.

I pay tribute to Allergy UK's partnership with the Allergy Team, which has created essential allergy training for schools to help them confidently manage allergies and anaphylaxis to ensure a safer environment for all students and staff. Teachers need to be given the tools and skills they need to deal with medical emergencies quickly and calmly. Through that partnership, I hope schools will be safer for children with allergies.

I once again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch for securing this important debate. We have heard some truly tragic stories about too many children falling ill due to a lack of training or proper equipment on allergen control. I hope that, through this debate and my hon. Friend's ten-minute rule Bill, we can ensure that the additional safeguarding that children with allergies require in schools is introduced.

3.24 pm

Jodie Gosling (Nuneaton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Lewell. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) on securing this debate on an issue that has such a wide-ranging impact and is very close to my heart. I know that he works incredibly hard to champion people with allergies and the challenges they face. As the newly-elected chair of the APPG on allergy, I thank him dearly for his efforts.

I have complex allergies that impact my everyday life. My first allergic reaction happened when I was two years old, when I took a bite out of a raw fish finger waiting to go in the oven. I scared the living daylights out of my mother, as my face and hands swelled up until it looked like, in her words, I had gone 10 rounds with Frank Bruno. I have lived with allergies all my life, as has my son, and have worked alongside many parents and children's professionals in my 20 years of teaching. Navigating the world of allergies is difficult. The advice I have been given has been inconsistent and sometimes outright dangerous. There is simply not enough training or education for people to understand the issues and mitigate the harm.

Eating anywhere is difficult. Most businesses would rather lose my custom and exclude me with a blanket of "may contain" and "cannot guarantee" notices than provide the information needed to eat safely. I fully appreciate that, in a world where we have acceptable levels of contaminants in food, there will never be 100% certainty, but I have been asked to sign waivers for pizzas and referred to companies' policies, where pubs, clubs or outlets have refused to share ingredients that would allow me to make an informed choice. I have been insulted, ignored, condescended and asked to show my auto-injectors to prove that I am not just being fussy.

I have difficulty navigating this world, and yet we expect children to do the same, without the same level of understanding or autonomy over their situation. The number of children with allergies has soared, with two children in every classroom diagnosed with allergies. Most of our schools do a brilliant job of trying to support and care for those children, but children's allergies are routinely excluding and stigmatising them at school. They want to carry their own tray at lunchtime alongside their peers. They want to sit on the same tables with friends, not be segregated. They want to be able to eat puddings and take treats the teacher has brought in. The protections are simply not there to allow that to happen. School parties,

discos, end-of-term treats and the dreaded cake day in schools present significant threats to children and exclude them from participation.

When my eldest attended residential trips, he was sent with four days-worth of frozen meals packed up in an icebox because they could not guarantee safe food for his trip. I know other parents who have been required to attend school trips so that they can safeguard their children. I also know at first hand that school staff time is stretched and there are limits under the current system. The last 14 years have seen cuts in teachers' expertise, teaching assistants and support staff, as well as larger class sizes and lower ratios. We are faced with a growing need.

Amanda Hack (North West Leicestershire) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) on securing this important debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Jodie Gosling) is talking about cuts. As a parent of a child with multiple allergies, I used to get support from Leicestershire county council for nutritional services, but that has all gone. It was one of the first areas that local authorities cut. Does my hon. Friend agree that that reduction in support has made life for parents of children with allergies so much harder than it needs to be?

Jodie Gosling: Absolutely. With my eldest son, we had Sure Start centres available, and I had access to support from health visiting teams. With my daughter, who has a less impactful allergy, there has been little support, and we are still waiting, at 12 years of age, for referrals to dietitians.

We need to ensure that children with allergies stay safe in education, and to do so, we need clarity of training, access to EpiPens at all times, and clear procedures to make sure they are accessible for an effective response. We need a planned response, a whole-school risk assessment, individual healthcare, and clear pathways to make sure that staff are not only aware of the children but confident and able to respond quickly and effectively, not just going to the Tupperware box in the back of the dusty office cupboard.

I have talked to school leaders, teachers, nurseries and, most importantly, students in my constituency, and they echo the need for clarity and consistency in training and access to emergency EpiPens. The Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2017 allow schools to obtain auto-injectors for emergency use, but they are not required to, and this provision does not extend to early years.

Our early years settings are key to children's development, providing new experiences and a place for exploring sensory development, and widening horizons and diets. Nurseries have cultures of trying new things, but they are also where many children have their first experience of allergens and allergic reactions. As we have heard today from first-hand experience, this can be quite terrifying for those involved. In these circumstances, no auto-injectors would be held by the setting, as they simply would not know that they needed to use them. A requirement to have auto-injectors as part of a standard first aid kit—with protocols and an anaphylaxis response team—would significantly reduce the risk of serious harm from those first reactions.

The group Spare Pens in Schools highlighted that most children, like mine, will have been accidentally exposed every two or three years. Pancake day with my

child who is allergic to meat, wheat and eggs was, as I am sure hon. Members can imagine, a yearly trial. I would wait for the call at work to be asked if they needed to use the AAIs, which realistically would already be too late. A structured healthcare plan would not only reduce the incidence of accidental exposure, but provide a planned, effective response.

Issues around the short shelf life of auto-injectors can cause challenges with ad hoc school policies—the Tupperware box at the back of the cupboard still needs checking frequently, as many EpiPens remain in date for six months or less. A plan and protocol built into schools' existing first-aid responses would mean checking the date as a matter of course, alongside other equipment—not when things are needed quickly and urgently.

As we await the publication of a national allergy strategy, which we hope to see later this year, questions remain about support for implementation. At present, the management of allergies is left to individual schools and trusts. The lack of national leadership and a cohesive strategy means that the experience of, and support for, children with allergies varies widely.

Research by the Benedict Blythe Foundation showed that, in 2024, as we heard, one in three schools had no allergy policy in place, while a quarter had no training on allergies, anaphylaxis or a plan for emergencies. Data from the national child mortality database shows that between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2023, two children died as a result of anaphylaxis in our schools. A 2015 report showed a 615% increase in hospital admissions. However, we do not routinely keep that data and have no idea of the true impact on our children's lives in schools. It is essential that a database is created and maintained for an evidence-led approach.

I call on the Minister to pay particular attention to the calls for auto-injectors in all education settings, for a national allergy strategy in response to this debate, and to recognise that this will require cross-departmental working. Allergies reach into all areas of our lives: schools, housing, health, business, sport, culture—everything a child wishes to do can be affected by their allergies.

To achieve the cohesion we need in a national allergy strategy, it is essential that we work cross-departmentally. Adam Fox OBE, who chairs the National Allergy Strategy Group, has been instrumental in bringing a strategy forward. I would welcome the Minister joining us at our APPG to discuss further how we can best address the issues raised today; and how an allergy tsar could draw together those complex issues and provide proper support not just for our children, but for all allergy sufferers.

3.34 pm

Ian Sollom (St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire) (LD): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Lewell. I thank the hon. Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) for securing this debate and for his forthcoming introduction of the school allergy safety Bill to Parliament. As a parent, I understand the concerns when a child starts their school life. We hope that they settle well, are happy making friends and enjoy learning. The anxiety that comes when our children have an allergy, particularly a severe one, must be enormous. It is one that I cannot truly understand, not having experienced it, but I have been really moved by what I have heard today from Members who have.

[Ian Sollom]

There are 680,000 pupils in England with an allergy, so there are also many more anxious parents. The hon. Member said that he would not talk about specific cases, and I will also respect that. Sadly, there have been a number of tragic cases in the last few years, and our thoughts in this debate are surely with those families. It is important to recognise that the coroners' reports in those cases have cited a lack of in-date adrenalin devices, inadequate training of staff and confusion about the process, with those delays ultimately resulting in deaths. It needs to be a given that parents can feel assured that their children's school can deal with any allergy incidents, whether minor or life-threatening.

It is estimated that around two children in every classroom have an allergy of some kind. Food allergies, which can be life-threatening, are particularly concerning in young children, between 5% and 8% of whom are affected, compared with 1% or 2% of adults. Studies have shown that the incidence of food allergies nearly doubled between 2008 and 2018, and we can see from an increase of 161% in hospital admissions over the last two decades that the problem is getting worse. There has been some welcome progress on research into prevention, but we have to make sure that young people are safe in schools.

In addition to the effect on physical health, it is also important to look at the other ways in which having an allergy affects children. It can have a huge impact on key areas of their lives, including disrupting their education and limiting their social lives. Again, I refer to the lived experience shared by the hon. Members for Clwyd East (Becky Gittins) and for Nuneaton (Jodie Gosling) of the psychological stress and anxiety from living with this.

Allergy UK's research shows that 61% of children with food allergies avoid social situations, such as birthday parties, to reduce risk. When we consider that number, it is really sad to know that there are so many children missing out on playing with friends or making new ones, and just enjoying what ought to be care-free moments outside school life. Occasions such as school trips and cultural celebrations in school can lead to increased levels of stress for children, parents and carers, due to uncertainty over allergen exposure and inconsistent implementation of safety practices.

There then comes the time when children move schools, from primary to secondary, or even head off to further or higher education, which brings further stress because there is not a standardised process for reviewing or updating allergy care plans across those transitions, which can lead to gaps in provision and inconsistent safety protocols. Again, that just increases stress and anxiety all the time.

We know that, in some cases, allergies can lead to severe and life-threatening reactions, so it is essential that schools have the right level of equipment to deal with those emergencies and that staff have received sufficient training. However, as many Members have observed, that is simply not happening in schools. Although there is Department for Education guidance on school food standards and allergy guidance, there is now lots of research showing that it is not enough just to have the guidance; we really need to go further. In collaboration with the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation, the national teachers' union, the NASUWT, surveyed nearly

2,000 teachers across the UK and revealed really concerning findings. I will go into just a few of those and I hope that Members find them interesting.

Despite 95% of the teachers saying that there were pupils at their school with allergies, only 40% said that their school had an allergy policy; 46% said that they did not know whether there was a policy; and 13% said definitively that their school had no allergy policy. On top of that, when it came to training on administering an adrenalin pen, only 28% of teachers said that they had received training in the current academic year; 20% had received training last year; 34% said that they had received training but not in the last two academic years; and 17.5% said that they had never received any training at all. I found those figures fascinating—just the distribution and the inconsistency across that. There were also questions about broader allergy training, such as on adapting classroom practices to reduce the risk and ensuring that activities are safe but inclusive. The survey found that two thirds of respondents had never received any training on those elements.

Research carried out last year by the Benedict Blythe Foundation found that 70% of schools—as has been mentioned—did not have spare allergy pens, allergy trained staff or a school allergy policy. There is no current requirement for schools to provide those, even for pupils at high risk. School staff look after our children day in and day out, which is a huge responsibility on their shoulders. Expecting them to act in an emergency without the proper equipment or training is just not reasonable.

Finally, I draw attention to Allergy UK's trial, which embedded specialist allergy nurses and dietitians in primary care settings. It has been mentioned already, but with that earlier support for families and clearer clinical guidance to inform school-based care, we get safer day-to-day management for children with complex allergy needs. The trial saw waiting times reduced dramatically: 95% of patients were managed safely within primary care, and it cut unnecessary referrals to secondary care to just 5%.

The Liberal Democrats believe that these kinds of pilots, which invest in public health and early access to community services, reduce the spend on NHS crisis firefighting and ultimately save money in the long term. Therefore, I hope that the Government will take account of the evidence from the Allergy UK trial and look to roll that pilot out nationally in a bid to bring about positive change in schools and beyond. Surely we owe it to children, parents, carers and staff working in schools to make sure that those schools are safe places for everyone.

3.44 pm

Neil O'Brien (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Lewell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) on securing this important debate, which he opened by telling a frightening story about his own child. I am sorry that he is also suffering in a smaller way this afternoon, but we never would have known; he did a good job of making his case. We also heard good speeches from the hon. Members for Clwyd East (Becky Gittins), for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) and for Nuneaton (Jodie Gosling), which included stories about their own frightening experiences and fears of social exclusion.

As other Members have done, I thank some of the groups that do great work on this subject, including the Benedict Blythe Foundation, the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation, Anaphylaxis UK and Allergy UK. When I was the Minister for public health, I met some of the parents and others who had lost loved ones, and those who were working with these campaign groups. I was struck by not only the fear that people experience that something bad or terrible will happen, but that sense of people being excluded or missing out, or feeling that they cannot do things because they are not getting the information or protection they need. That is a hugely important part of the discussion.

I will touch on some of the things that the previous Government did, not to say that everything is fixed—of course it is not—but to talk about how we got to this point. One thing that made a big difference was the creation of Natasha's law in 2019, which requires all prepackaged food products to display all the key 14 allergen ingredients in bold. We started to join up the discussion across Government—something Members have called for this afternoon—with the expert advisory group for allergy. There is potentially scope to go further, and a number of Members have talked about the argument for an allergy tsar. I am sympathetic to the idea of having, in some way, shape or form, better cross-Government join-up of policy; it is a sensible thing that we need.

In schools, we introduced a duty on governing boards to make arrangements to support pupils with medical conditions, so that they are all supported to actively play a part in school life. In practical terms, in 2017 we changed the law to enable schools to have their own supply of adrenalin auto-injectors for use. There is scope to go much further, but half of schools have them, up from relatively few before that change in the law. Of course, a conclusion from this debate is that there is lots of scope for pens to be available in more schools, and for us to do more to ensure that they are in date and that everyone knows where they are so they can be used at a useful point.

One of the bigger things we did was bring in the statutory school food standards in 2015, which removed things like nuts as an acceptable snack. We got all schools to do a risk assessment of the way they handle these issues. We also updated the allergy advice for schools more broadly to emphasise the importance of awareness-raising about common allergies and to get more staff to recognise symptoms, particularly anaphylaxis. Again, as hon. Members have pointed out, there is scope to go further to improve the training of teachers across the board.

One thing that has not been mentioned so far is the ongoing debate about Owen's law, and the availability of information about ingredients in restaurants and settings where food is not prepackaged. It is a complex debate, but there is clearly scope to do better and to ensure that children and people of all ages feel more included in our society. I wish Ministers well in coming to a landing on some of these questions. Even just the discussion about them and the campaign itself is doing a lot of good to get providers to change their behaviour and to be more inclusive.

There has been progress, but, as Members have said, there is a lot more to do in our schools to ensure that children are kept safe and can play a full part in school life and in their broader community, without having to

worry or constantly duck out of or be excluded from activities that they want to be part of. This has not been a politically contentious debate. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about the next steps.

3.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Stephen Morgan): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Lewell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Chris Bloore) for securing and opening this debate. I have greatly valued the opportunity to listen to his insights and hear the arguments on this important topic, especially given his personal experience with his family. I know that all hon. Members will today be thinking of their constituents and families who have lost loved ones as a result of allergies.

I acknowledge the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Clwyd East (Becky Gittins), for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards), for Stafford (Leigh Ingham), for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis), for Nuneaton (Jodie Gosling) and for North West Leicestershire (Amanda Hack) to this debate, as well as their contributions to the APPG or as allergy champions. I thank them for their hard work and for the priority that they are giving to this important topic for children, early years and schools.

I absolutely understand that allergies can be worrying for parents and pupils. When parents send their children to school, it is only right and natural that they expect them to be kept safe. For parents of children with allergies, there is understandably an additional level of concern. Allergies can be complex conditions and can range enormously in severity. While much of the debate focuses on food allergies, it is important to note that not all allergens are food, which makes the issue more complicated for individuals to manage. Allergies are therefore a highly individual condition, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Last month, I was lucky enough to visit Edith Neville primary school with the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation. I got to see at first hand how allergy awareness training can increase the safety of pupils with food allergies and allow them to feel fully involved in school activities. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that allergies are complex and, by their very nature, require individualised approaches. These issues are best dealt with locally. That is why the Government have put in place a number of pieces of legislation, as well as guidance for schools and parents, covering a range of areas and circumstances. We are very aware of recent calls to strengthen the law around allergies, with specific references to voluntary approaches and voluntary guidance.

I stress that section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014 places a legal duty on schools to

“make arrangements for supporting pupils at the school with medical conditions”

including allergies, and that governing bodies must have regard to the accompanying statutory guidance supporting pupils with medical conditions when carrying out their duties. The guidance makes it clear that schools should ensure that they are aware of any pupils with allergies, and have processes in place to ensure that those can be well managed. The guidance sets out that a school's policy should be clear that any member of the school's staff providing support to a pupil with medical needs should have received suitable training. The Department's

[Stephen Morgan]

allergy guidance for schools signpost them to allergy available resources and training. I again stress that individual schools are best placed to work with parents to put in place a system that works for the school, parents and individual children.

Individual healthcare plans can set out arrangements for specific pupils' medical needs, and schools will need to draw on, or seek advice from, clinicians on how the individual's medical condition should be managed while in school. That is particularly important where children and young people have conditions that, if not managed effectively, could pose a high risk to their health and safety. Individual healthcare plans will be particularly important where conditions fluctuate or there is a high risk that emergency intervention will be needed. They are likely to be helpful in the majority of other cases, especially where medical conditions are long term and complex. However, not all children will require one.

In addition to the section 100 duty, schools are subject to other requirements. For example, in the UK, food businesses must inform consumers if they use any of the 14 mandatory allergens as ingredients in the food that they provide. How allergen information should be provided depends on whether the food is prepackaged, non-prepackaged or prepacked for direct sale. That includes food provided by institutions including school caterers, who have the responsibility to protect individuals in their care.

As hon. Members may know, rules on the provision of food labelling are set out primarily in the retained EU Food Information Regulations 2014. These rules include a requirement to identify to consumers the presence of any of the 14 mandatory allergens, including cereals containing gluten, eggs, fish and milk.

The Department for Education works closely with the Food Standards Agency on all matters relating to school food. The FSA provides a free food allergy and intolerance online training course, which offers practical advice to local authority law enforcement officers and anyone who wants to learn more about food allergies, such as those working in the food manufacturing and catering industries. The FSA also offers a host of other training, technical documents and guidance documents, including information on the 14 most common allergens, food labelling requirements, and the handling of allergen ingredients.

Auto-injectors can be vital if a child suffers an allergic reaction. To support schools in meeting the needs of children with allergies, the Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2017 were passed and they allow schools to obtain and hold spare adrenalin auto-injectors for administration to pupils in an emergency. The Department for Health and Social Care has produced guidance on the use of these injectors and emergency inhalers in schools, including the purchase of spares. The guidance makes it clear that any adrenalin auto-injectors held by a school should be considered as a back-up device and not as a replacement for pupils' own adrenalin auto-injectors.

Beyond this, families are also able to play an important role in managing their child's condition. We are very clear with schools that no one will know a child's needs as well as their parents, and that schools should work closely together with parents. The parents of children

with allergies will work with medical professionals and other organisations to plan for and navigate their child's specific needs, and parents should be fully consulted and engaged in any discussions about their child's allergies. Schools will also need to ensure that parents and carers of children with food allergies or intolerances are given information about allergic ingredients used in the foods available, and good communication between parents and schools about allergies and pupils' needs is essential to keep children safe while they are in school.

Since March 2024, the Department has reminded schools of their duties concerning pupils with allergies every six months, via the DFE's bulletin to the education sector. These reminders have included links to Government guidance, as well as signposting to credible resources from the charitable sector, including the voluntary schools allergy code, which is co-produced by the Benedict Blythe Foundation, the Independent Schools' Bursars Association and the Allergy Team.

For younger children, the early years foundation stage framework sets the standards that all registered early years providers must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to the age of five. The EYFS states that before a child is admitted to an early years setting, the provider must obtain information about any special dietary requirements, preferences or food allergies the child has, as well as any other special health requirements. Providers must also have a policy and procedures for administering medicines, and they must have systems to obtain information about a child's needs for medicines and to keep this information up to date. Training must be provided for staff where the administration of medicine requires medical or technical knowledge.

There is also a requirement for at least one person who has a current paediatric first aid certificate to be on the premises and available at all times when children are present, and they must also accompany children on outings. The PFA criteria is clear that the training should include being able to help a baby or child suffering from anaphylactic shock. There is also a requirement within the EYFS regarding adequate supervision. This is explicit that while children are eating, they must always be in sight and hearing of an adult—not within sight or hearing—to help educators to notice the signs of an allergic reaction as soon as they are present and allow them to act quickly.

The new early years educator level 3 qualification criteria came into force in September 2024, ensuring that early years educators have an understanding of allergies and anaphylaxis. Following consultation last year and subject to parliamentary procedure, we will introduce changes to the safeguarding requirements of the EYFS from September this year. They will include a new safety eating section containing a number of requirements relating to allergies, such as a requirement for providers or childminders to have ongoing discussions with parents and/or carers about special dietary requirements, including food allergies and intolerances that a child may have, as well as a requirement to develop allergy action plans, where appropriate, to manage them.

In addition, providers and childminders will be required to ensure that all staff are aware of the symptoms and treatments for allergies and anaphylaxis and the differences between allergies and intolerances, and that they have

an understanding that children can develop allergies at any time. That is particularly pertinent during the introduction of solid foods, which is sometimes called complementary feeding or weaning. It will also be a requirement that while children are eating there should always be a member of staff in the room who holds a valid first aid certificate. Where possible, providers and childminders should also sit facing children while they eat, to ensure that children are eating in a way that prevents choking and food sharing, and so that the provider is aware of unexpected allergic reactions.

From September, early years providers will be required to have regard to the new nutrition guidance published in May this year. It includes a section on food allergies, and it provides information on the symptoms of both allergic reactions and anaphylaxis, as well as common food allergens. It also provides links to helpful resources, such as the Food Standards Agency's free food allergy training.

This Government are committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity and tackling child poverty. We have now announced that we are extending free school meals to children from households in receipt of universal credit from September 2026. This will lift 100,000 children across England out of poverty and will put £500 back into families' pockets, supporting parents in a decisive action to improve lives ahead of the child poverty strategy coming later this year. The Department will expect schools to make every effort to ensure that eligible pupils with allergies can benefit from that entitlement.

In deciding what is reasonable, schools and their caterers are expected to take into account factors such as the type of diet required by the child with allergies, the number of children in a similar position and the cost of making suitable food available. It is important that schools have a culture of inclusivity, and we expect schools to do what they can to ensure that no child is unnecessarily disadvantaged or made to feel disadvantaged.

The same applies to breakfast clubs. The Government are committed to delivering on our pledge to introduce breakfast clubs in every state-funded primary school. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will mean that every state-funded school with children on the roll from reception to year 6 will be required to offer a free breakfast club before the start of each school day. This will ensure that every child, regardless of circumstance, has a supportive start to the school day.

I have outlined the various legislation and guidance that covers allergies in schools. We do, of course, keep those policies under review, and we welcome feedback on how we can better support schools' implementation of them. Senior DFE officials sit on the expert advisory group for allergy, which is convened by colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care and the National Allergy Strategy Group, and which plans to publish a 10-year strategy later this year. It will make recommendations to Government on levers that can improve the lives of people living with allergies, including in education. I encourage stakeholders to feed any ideas on those issues to officials via that route.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch again for securing this debate and for his instructive, insightful and personal contribution, and I thank all hon. Members, including those with lived experience, for their speeches and interventions this afternoon.

4.3 pm

Chris Bloore: Whenever I meet the Minister, I have a bad habit of simply asking for things. I appreciate that yet again I am in this place asking for something, but such is the job.

I thank all those who contributed to the debate, as well as someone else who is in the room but did not contribute because she is a Member of the other place: Baroness Kennedy. I thank her for all her work on the subject in both her professional and her political life. More than many, she has raised the importance of the issue and the discourse around it. I thank her for what she does, day to day.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd East (Becky Gittins) for her remarks, which were informed both by her role on the APPG and by her personal experience. I feel slightly fraudulent, because I think I secured this debate just ahead of her. Her contribution was a lived story about what it is like to suffer from these allergies and the impact that they can have on the way a person grows up—but certainly not on her attainment, because she is in this place, doing an incredible job. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Jodie Gosling). I was astounded to hear the stories about the challenges that she has faced, simply being in this place, in keeping herself safe, let alone the stories that she has told about her son.

I always listen intently to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis). He was absolutely right to make those points about the quality of life for our children in our schools. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Amanda Hack), who is no longer in her place. She was absolutely right to highlight the fact that parents have lost support from county councils.

I thank the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire (Ian Sollom), for his contribution. He was absolutely right to raise the damning statistics that have been found in many pieces of research in the last 18 months. I thank the spokesperson for His Majesty's loyal Opposition, the hon. Member for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston (Neil O'Brien). He noted what has improved in the past two to three years, and the work that has been done in this place, but he also addressed Owen's law and the challenges that we still face in moving forward on the issue. Of course, I also thank the organisations that we have all mentioned.

I would like to return to the Minister's comments. The statistics on the number of children who are developing allergies and are having incidents in schools are going only one way. Laws are fit for purpose only if they are delivered appropriately, and only if the people who serve under them are accountable for their actions. It is clear both from this debate and from the information in the public domain that the laws we have in place right now are not meeting the safety needs of our children.

The Minister's response echoed many responses that have been given before in this place. I welcome the Government's contribution on breakfast clubs and school nursery places, but the canary in the coalmine is right in front of us. There are things happening in our schools that should not be happening. There are articles in the national newspapers about what has happened when things have gone wrong.

[Chris Bloore]

The complexity of the issue should not be a vice. We cannot let it defeat us in this place; we should be able to rise to the occasion and change things. We should not have to wait for things to go wrong again before we act. I am afraid that this will not be the last time that I raise the issue. I plan to raise it not just next week, but throughout my short time in this place, I am sure. We can do more, and we can do better. This is not just about the life chances of our children; sometimes it is their very life itself.

*Question put and agreed to.**Resolved,*

That this House has considered the matter of safeguarding children with allergies at school.

4.7 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 3 July 2025

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

CCUS Track 1 Contingent Liabilities: Padeswood

The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones): Today, I am pleased to have laid a departmental minute with an update on the contingent liabilities associated with the carbon capture usage and storage track 1 clusters, HyNet and East Coast Cluster. This update is in anticipation of our signing contracts with the Padeswood cement project, which we expect soon, subject to timely conclusion of negotiations and resolution of outstanding conditions. Padeswood is a key demonstrator for decarbonisation of the cement industry, on which the security of the UK’s net zero transition is dependent. The addition of further CO₂ capture projects like Padeswood was planned and is part of the Government’s plan to maximise our investment in the HyNet cluster.

Context

CCUS is the only feasible method for decarbonising many hard-to-abate sectors, including cement. Located in north Wales, Padeswood will be the first at-scale UK cement plant incorporating carbon capture and storage technology. The project presents a high value opportunity for the UK to secure a strong global foothold, in a growing customer market, for low-carbon cement production.

His Majesty’s Government’s CCUS programme is the first of its kind and consequently we have sought to overcome multiple market barriers which inhibit the development of a CCUS market in the UK. The costs of constructing and operating CCUS currently exceed the costs of emitting CO₂—Government support is necessary to address these challenges and enable CCUS deployment at scale. Parliament agreed in November 2024 to accept five contingent liabilities within the CCUS track 1 contracts in order to reduce investor risk in CCUS technologies by bearing some of the initial risk inherent in developing a CCUS market, as well as the cross-chain risk existing across the participants in the CCUS network.

Parliament was notified on 13 November 2024 of the five CLs outlined below, which are associated with the various CCUS track 1 contracts. These were:

The supplemental compensation agreement, which is a long-term mechanism within the Government support package that enables the management of leakage risks at the geological store during operations and the post-closure period.

The revenue support agreement, which addresses demand-risks by providing for payments to CO₂ transport and storage companies if their allowed revenue is not covered by user fees.

The discontinuation agreement, which provides a right for the Secretary of State to discontinue support to the transport and storage companies and entitles investors to be compensated for their investment.

The decommissioning shortfall agreement, which covers potential decommissioning fund shortfall which might arise if decommissioning is required before the fund has been fully built up.

The discontinuation of capture project contracts, which allows for payment of compensation to capture projects for any losses due to a qualifying change in law or prolonged CO₂ transport and storage unavailability.

Now that HMG is near finalisation of negotiations with the Padeswood project, I am updating Parliament on our exposure to these contingent liabilities.

Update to contingent liability exposure

The table below shows the impact of signing contracts with the Padeswood project for the discontinuation of capture project contracts contingent liability. It is important to note that while the table below represents the maximum possible exposure, the probabilised exposures and likely crystallisations are far lower. There are robust risk management frameworks in place. Our assessments indicate that there are no liabilities that are likely to be realised and the vast majority are very remote.

Contingent liability	Maximum exposure (£m) for Padeswood	Reasonable worst-case (£m) for Padeswood
The discontinuation of capture project contracts	447	187

The increase in maximum exposure outlined above is necessary to allow us to decarbonise, not deindustrialise, our cement industry. The adoption of the five contingent liabilities summarised above is already allowing HMG to deliver a first-of-a-kind CCUS sector, which we know will be vital for delivering on our net zero targets, as well as supporting jobs and growth in our industrial heartlands.

[HCWS776]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Beneficial Ownership Registers: Overseas Territories

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty): Illicit finance, corruption, and kleptocracy pose a direct threat to our national security, economic resilience, and the integrity of the global financial system. The UK remains steadfast in its commitment to tackling these threats both at home and abroad by strengthening our defences and leading international efforts to ensure there is no safe haven for dirty money.

Illicit finance is a transnational challenge that thrives on opacity and weak governance. It undermines sustainable development, distorts markets, and erodes public trust. That is why this Government have made it a core priority to enhance transparency, restrict enablers of financial crime, and hold perpetrators of grand corruption to account.

In November, the Foreign Secretary launched a comprehensive illicit finance campaign, placing corporate transparency at the heart of our agenda. A key pillar of this work is the implementation of beneficial ownership registers across the overseas territories and Crown dependencies.

At the Joint Ministerial Council in November 2024, all overseas territories committed to increasing access to company ownership data. The Falkland Islands and St Helena pledged to implement fully public registers by April 2025, joining Montserrat and Gibraltar, which had

already done so. Other territories—including Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands—committed to implementing registers with legitimate interest access by June 2025, with appropriate safeguards to protect privacy in line with their constitutions.

Since then, we have worked closely with each territory to support implementation. I am pleased to report that progress has been made across the board, with several registers now operational.

I welcome the launch of St Helena's fully public register on 30 June 2025.

The Falkland Islands reaffirmed their commitment to transparency in their public statement on 30 June and intend to implement their register by July 2026 due to capacity constraints. Preparatory work is under way, and UK support remains available to help implement their register as soon as possible.

Gibraltar has maintained a fully public register since 2020. I commend its leadership and welcome its efforts to improve user access.

Montserrat has also played a leading role by launching its public register in 2024. I welcome its leadership.

The Cayman Islands launched their legitimate interest register in February 2025, which allows access by a range of people, including journalists. I welcomed Premier Ebanks' commitment to make further enhancements in our meeting last month, including more streamlined processes for multiple search requests, including on fees.

The Turks and Caicos Islands launched their legitimate interest register on 30 June, which was very welcome. My understanding is that further enhancements will be made to the TCI register, and we look forward to working with them to deliver on this. I had a constructive conversation with Premier Misick on Wednesday 2 July.

Anguilla is progressing towards implementation later this quarter, and we remain in close contact to support timely delivery. I welcome the discussions I have had with the new Premier Richardson-Hodge.

Bermuda is targeting implementation by July 2026, with interim access for obliged entities. I have made clear our expectation that Bermuda implements a register of beneficial ownership as soon as possible. Officials continue to be in touch with their counterparts in Bermuda to offer support in implementing its register as soon as possible.

The British Virgin Islands published a revised policy on 23 June. Although improvements have been made, I remain concerned about the system's limitations, particularly regarding proactive investigations, and provision for data subjects to be notified of searches concerning their information. The delay on implementation to April 2026 is disappointing. It is important that further progress is made to improve functionality of their proposed registers. I have set clear expectations and officials are following up directly with counterparts in BVI to bridge this gap and to implement their register as soon as possible. The recent decision by the Financial Action Task Force to place the BVI under increased monitoring underlines our concerns.

Later this month, I intend to convene an illicit finance dialogue with elected leaders of the overseas territories. This will be an opportunity jointly to take stock of progress against the Joint Ministerial Council commitments on beneficial ownership registers, agree further remedial actions, and reaffirm our shared commitment to transparency and accountability. I am pleased that Baroness Hodge, the Prime Minister's anti-corruption champion, will join us to share her insights and update us on her role and mandate. I will update the House following that dialogue.

[HCWS774]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Security Service: Evidence

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): The purpose of this statement is to provide an update to the House on MI5's correction of previously incorrect evidence that it provided to the High Court, the special advocates, the Investigatory Powers Tribunal and the Investigatory Powers Commissioner in relation to the case of agent X. I first notified the House about this matter in my written ministerial statement [*Official Report*, 12 February 2025; Vol. 762, c. 19WS.].

The High Court yesterday made its judgment regarding MI5's provision of incorrect evidence, in which it had wrongly told the Court that MI5 had never previously confirmed that agent X was a covert human intelligence source. In fact, it had done so on more than one occasion.

The Court has concluded that the High Court, the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner and the associated special advocates were misled by MI5. It criticised MI5 for providing evidence in "a piecemeal and unsatisfactory way" and it also concluded that—once it had been determined that the evidence given to the Court was incorrect—the subsequent investigations carried out suffered from serious procedural deficiencies.

In February, the director general of MI5 publicly apologised to the courts for MI5's submission of incorrect evidence, and this unreserved apology by MI5 was made again during the court proceedings and has rightly been repeated again yesterday.

I remain deeply concerned that inaccurate evidence was provided to the High Court and Investigatory Powers Tribunal. This was a serious failing by MI5.

The Government accept the High Court's conclusion that a "further, robust and independent investigation" should take place. I will provide further details to the House in due course.

I have also asked the Attorney General to conduct an internal review of how evidence from MI5 should be prepared and presented in future, to respond to the Court's specific findings on witness statements in this regard. Alongside this I have asked my officials to review the wider issues raised by this case.

The vital work MI5 does every day keeps our country safe and saves lives in the face of myriad threats. We owe them a debt of gratitude for the work they do. But that is also why it is essential that they always maintain the highest of standards and rigour, including in responding to the courts.

Internal processes at MI5 must improve, starting with the implementation of all recommendations made so far in relation to this case. Director general Sir Ken McCallum has initiated a wide-ranging learning and response programme within MI5, including professional culture to ensure that all its staff—who go above and beyond every day to protect the UK and its citizens—are receptive and thoughtful in response to challenge, and fully understand and value their responsibilities towards oversight bodies. This work will be assured by an external reviewer reporting directly to me.

MI5's provision of incorrect evidence also arose in the context of legal proceedings in front of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal relating to accusations that agent X committed acts of domestic abuse against their partner, known as "Beth". Given those proceedings are still ongoing, I am unable to comment on them. However, as I set out in my previous statement, the Government are clear that all organisations must have robust safeguarding policies under continuous review and must take any allegation of domestic abuse extremely seriously. Tackling violence against women and girls is a top priority for this Government and we will use every tool available to target perpetrators and address the root causes of abuse and violence. The public and Parliament must have the highest confidence in the processes in place to protect the most vulnerable and protect those most at risk in society

[HCWS775]

**State Threat Prevention and Investigation Measures:
20 December 2024 to 19 March 2025**

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): Section 55(1) of the National Security Act 2023 (the 2023 Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of their STPIM powers under the Act during that period.

STPIMs were introduced through the 2023 Act and came into force on 20 December 2023. There have been no STPIM cases imposed to date.

[HCWS772]

**HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Local Government Outcomes Framework

The Minister for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon): Local government delivers over 800 essential services that we all rely on, including to the most vulnerable in society. From shaping local places to supporting community wellbeing, councils directly impact the daily lives of local people, whether they feel safe, feel they belong, and whether they are satisfied with their local area and the facilities and services on their doorstep.

A strong and empowered local government is central to delivery of the national priorities we set out in the plan for change—building 1.5 million homes to supply

safe and high-quality housing which is accessible and affordable to all, partnering with the NHS to deliver a stable social care system, and breaking down barriers to opportunity.

Councils are responsible for spending billions of public money. This year the Government made available over £69 billion of funding through the settlement to support delivery. As the demand for local services and the complexity of need has grown, the Government have introduced hundreds of ringfenced spending pots with burdensome reporting requirements to micromanage local areas from Whitehall. This must end. Instead, central Government collectively should support and assess councils on what really matters—the most important outcomes focused on people and the places they call home.

I am therefore announcing today a new local government outcomes framework, which forms an integral part of this Government's reforms to ensure we have a sector which is fit, legal and decent. The framework sets 15 outcomes that the Government have collectively agreed we will work with local authorities to deliver, ranging from preventing homelessness and rough sleeping to community safety and satisfaction. The framework will measure progress towards outcome delivery, so we know that funding is achieving impact. This approach will help to put the right checks and balances in place to ensure value for the taxpayer and results for citizens to whom councils are ultimately responsible.

We will otherwise give local authorities the flexibility and certainty they need to make the right decisions for their local areas, and support public service reform and the move to prevention and early intervention. This represents a decisive move away from the needless red tape and micromanagement of previous Governments, which wasted taxpayers' resources, while failing to support service improvements and outcomes for residents.

We are today launching a period of engagement with the local government sector and interested parties on how best to measure delivery of each priority outcome and how the framework can complement existing systems of accountability and support. We welcome views during this process and expect to publish a final framework alongside the provisional local government finance settlement before using the framework to support outcome delivery from April 2026.

The framework, alongside our wider raft of reforms, will combine freedom and flexibility with accountability, creating the right conditions for local authorities to make their own decisions and best deliver for their local citizens.

[HCWS773]

Written Correction

Thursday 3 July 2025

Other Correction

ALISON TAYLOR

Spending Review 2025: Scotland

The following extract is from the Westminster Hall debate on Spending Review 2025: Scotland on 2 July 2025.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Member mentioned low growth. We know that growth has been hampered by our being outside the single market and the customs union—that is not just my analysis but that of most economists—so can she tell me why Scottish Labour

has abandoned the policy it adopted after the Brexit referendum of rejoining the single market and the customs union?

Alison Taylor: I completely disagree with the hon. Gentleman. In my view, low growth in Scotland has been related to the threat of a second independence referendum, and I would put the blame for the low growth firmly in the hon. Gentleman's hands.

[*Official Report*, 2 July 2025; Vol. 770, c. 119WH.]

Written correction submitted by the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Alison Taylor):

Alison Taylor: I completely disagree with the hon. Gentleman. In my view, low growth in Scotland has been related to the threat of a second independence referendum, and I would put the blame for the low growth firmly **in the hands of the hon. Gentleman's party.**

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**not later than
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