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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Friday 11 July 2025

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

9.33 am

Katrina Murray (Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch) (Lab): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163).

The House divided: Ayes 1, Noes 58.

Division No. 266]

[9.33 am

AYES

Murray, Katrina

Tellers for the Ayes:

Alex McIntyre and
Catherine Atkinson

NOES

Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Anderson, Fleur
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Arthur, Dr Scott
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Cadbury, Ruth
Chope, Sir Christopher
Chowns, Ellie
Costigan, Deirdre
Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy*
vote cast by Joy Morrissey)
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Davies, Shaun
Dixon, Samantha
Eagle, rh Maria
Evans, Dr Luke
Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Falconer, Mr Hamish
Farnsworth, Linsey
Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Foody, Emma
Fuller, Richard
Gardner, Dr Allison
Hack, Amanda
Hall, Sarah
Harding, Monica
Harris, Carolyn
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Claire
Jarvis, Dan
Kinnock, Stephen

Lam, Katie
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lightwood, Simon
Mather, Keir
Mayhew, Jerome
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
McKinnell, Catherine
Mishra, Navendu
Morrissey, Joy
Narayan, Kanishka
Norris, Alex
Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
Owatemi, Taiwo
Peacock, Stephanie
Reynolds, Emma
Rushworth, Sam
Ryan, Oliver
Siddiq, Tulip
Slade, Vikki
Smith, Rebecca
Stafford, Gregory
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Timothy, Nick
Trickett, Jon
Uppal, Harpreet
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Yemm, Steve

Tellers for the Noes:

Gerald Jones and
Anna Turley

Question accordingly negated.

Unauthorised Entry to Football Matches Bill

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

9.46 am

Mr Speaker: Before we come to our proceedings, I remind Members of the difference between Report and Third Reading. The scope of debate on Report is the

amendments I have selected. The scope of the Third Reading debate to follow will be the whole Bill as it stands after Report. Members may wish to consider those points before deciding at which stage, or stages, they want to try to catch my eye.

Clause 1

OFFENCE OF UNAUTHORISED ENTRY TO DESIGNATED FOOTBALL MATCHES

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move amendment 1, page 1, line 6, leave out “or attempts to enter”.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 2, page 1, line 8, leave out “or attempted entry”.

Amendment 3, page 1, line 11, leave out “or attempting to enter”. Amendment 4, page 1, line 13, leave out “or attempted to enter”.

Amendment 5, page 1, line 15, leave out “or attempted entry”.

Amendment 6, clause 2, page 2, line 3, leave out from “force” to end of line 4 and insert

“at the end of the period of 2 months beginning with the day on which it is passed.”.

Sir Christopher Chope: Many people watching and observing proceedings in Parliament will wonder whether we have our priorities right. The Bill is about unauthorised entry to football matches in particular circumstances, but I think most people are much more concerned about the proliferation of unauthorised entry into our very country, and the failure of the Home Office and its officials to do anything effective about it. In my submission, the Bill is a trivialisation of legislation by Home Office officials who should be doing other things—but I will not dwell on that now, Mr Speaker.

The long title of the Bill states that its purpose is to

“Create an offence of unauthorised entry at football matches for which a football banning order can be imposed following conviction.”

However, it is about not just unauthorised entry but any attempt at unauthorised entry. My amendments are designed to exclude from the Bill provisions relating to attempts to enter. Such attempts are less important than actual unlawful entry, and to include them in the same category is disproportionate and unreasonable. When we come on to debate other parts of the Bill on Third Reading, points can be made about the Bill more generally, but it seems to me that someone attempting to enter a football match without authorisation should not be subject to the same penalties, as set out in the Bill, as people who actually succeed in getting into a football match.

Actually, 11 July is quite an interesting date. On this very day four years ago the 2020 Euros final at Wembley stadium resulted in the unauthorised entry of thousands of fans, which caused a lot of disorder. Baroness Casey, who is an expert on producing reports, was commissioned by the Football Association to look into that issue and come forward with recommendations. In her report,

[Sir Christopher Chope]

which spanned more than 100 pages, she emphasised the fact that much of the disorder was nothing to do with people coming in without tickets and tailgating; in fact, a lot of it was attributed to other failures to enforce the law, in particular the taking of drugs and alcohol on public transport in London, which is verboten, and the taking of drugs in the vicinity of a football match, which should also be forbidden but was allowed to proceed with impunity. She also made the point that unlike at many football matches, what happened at Wembley was largely exacerbated by the inadequacy of the stewarding arrangements.

As a result of Baroness Casey's report, the Home Office decided to bring forward this Bill. However, nowhere could I find in the report any reference to the fact that Baroness Casey wanted to treat attempts to enter in exactly the same way as entering, which is why I have put forward these amendments. There is no need to expand on that except to say that it is in common law. Normally, an attempt to commit a criminal offence is an inchoate action, which can itself be the subject of criminal proceedings; in those circumstances, there would be no need to have this provision written into the Bill.

It seems to me that the provisions would create a penalty that is quite severe; it could affect people's ability to go and watch football matches for many years into the future. The presumption under the Bill—as you will know, Mr Speaker—is that if someone is guilty of an offence, they will be unable to go to football matches again as a spectator. My assessment is that that is disproportionate and unnecessary. For those reasons, I strongly oppose this aspect of the Bill, and seek through these amendments to remove references to “attempts”.

Amendment 6 is another example of where we need to try to tighten up private Members' Bills when they are brought before this House, so that the Government do not have everything their own way. Members will know that there are four other Bills to be debated on Report this morning. All those other Bills have a commencement date, but clause 2(2) of this Bill says:

“This Act comes into force on such day as the Secretary of State may by regulations made by statutory instrument appoint.”

The question I ask is: why? Why is that necessary? Why can we not in this very simple Bill say that these provisions will come into effect either on the day of Royal Assent or within two months of that date? That would be the norm.

What sometimes happens, of course, is that the Government give themselves powers and do all the talk about supporting Bills such as this, and then never bring forward the regulations. The consequence of not having a specific timetable is that the ball is very much—to use that expression—in the Government's court, because they can decide whether they will implement the provisions of this Bill, which has been put forward by the Home Office. I hope that when the Minister responds to this debate, he will explain why the Bill has to be introduced by regulations on a date yet to be specified. Of course, the making of regulations is in itself a further unnecessary administrative burden. I would be interested to hear from the Minister as to why the Bill is being treated differently from the other Bills the Government are hoping will get through today.

Linsey Farnsworth (Amber Valley) (Lab): I rise to thank the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) for his careful consideration of my Bill, although I am somewhat saddened by his suggestion that this is a trivial matter. As he himself went on to say, we saw scenes at the Carabao cup final that were very troubling and warranted a full report from Baroness Casey. She made an excellent report, with some very good observations and recommendations. Indeed, she said that there should be a deterrent effect to any recommendations that are brought in. I submit that the Bill provides just that.

I also rise to oppose amendments 1 to 6. On amendments 1 to 5 and the issue of attempted entry, attempted entry places a particular pressure on stadium security and often requires police involvement. It is often extremely crowded outside stadiums, with scuffles, struggles and chases through the crowd when people try to enter without a ticket. Including attempted entry allows law enforcement to act before the breach of a stadium occurs and that provides an additional level of security.

I was at the Carabao cup final this year. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention and I were taken down to the turnstiles with the police. We witnessed tailgating almost immediately. We also saw an attempted tailgating incident, which involved a man in his 70s or early 80s standing at the turnstiles shouting to the stewards for help and assistance because somebody behind him was trying to push their way into the ground. It was frightening for him. He stood his ground—I pay tribute to him for doing so—but it could have been dangerous. Indeed, it was dangerous with the amount of people who were around.

I submit that it flies in the face of common sense to release people who have a clear intention to get into a stadium. The police told me that those sorts of attempts are made repeatedly, time and time again. At the moment, the police do not have the power to arrest them. They detain them, but then have to release them. People just go back and try to get in again. It is a constant cat and mouse, as it were, and throughout that period people are put in danger from that action. To omit the offence of attempting entry would take us no further from the current position that the police find themselves in. Including attempt in the Bill gives the best chance of equipping the police to deal with this issue and keep everybody as safe as they possibly can.

On amendment 6, regarding a timescale, my understanding is that the Bill is designed to come into force via regulations so that that can be aligned with the start of the football calendar. That will ensure that all relevant organisations have time to prepare, co-ordinate and train accordingly. As a Crown prosecutor for 21 years before I came to this place, I understand at first hand the importance of allowing sufficient time for changes in legislation to be implemented, for staff to be trained and for proper resources to be put in place by the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and, most importantly, by the stadiums themselves.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way and for the diligence with which she has approached this subject, including having discussed it on several occasions with me. She says that instead of a date being specified in the Bill, regulations will be passed to bring in the provisions at the beginning of the football season. When is that? Is there a particular date?

10 am

Linsey Farnsworth: I perhaps misspoke; my understanding is that it is to align with the football calendar rather than the start of the season. Perhaps the Minister can clarify that in due course. We are now on a countdown to the start of the football season. My husband, being a season ticket holder for Coventry City FC, is very disappointed that we will be on holiday at the start of the football season in August. Obviously it is unlikely that we will get the provisions in place by then, but the important thing is to get the legislation in place in time for when we co-host the next European finals, which is in 2028. I think we should be in good time for that. A fixed date of two months after Royal Assent would be sufficient time to get everything in place.

As I mentioned earlier, the Bill has a deterrent element to it. Baroness Casey's recommendation was to make sure that it is a proper deterrent. We need to be ready, and we need to make sure that as soon as the legislation kicks off, we send a clear message that this sort of behaviour will not be tolerated any longer and people will not be able to get away with it. I hope I have provided a thorough and detailed response that satisfies the hon. Member for Christchurch, and I respectfully urge him to withdraw his amendment.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I rise to support my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). It seems to me that the way that he introduced his very modest amendment to remove the word "attempts" was entirely proper. I support the Bill, but I think it is quite dangerous to introduce an offence into criminal law of just attempting to enter a football ground, because it is quite difficult to gather evidence of or police that.

I assure the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth) that I do not want to delay matters much. I will keep my remarks short, because I support the general principle of the Bill. I support making it a criminal offence to actually enter a designated football match; that is in the Bill's long title and is something we can all agree on. Widening the scope of the Bill to include attempts to enter a ground is quite dangerous.

I assume that the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch will be rejected, but I wonder whether it would unduly weaken the Bill if they were passed. After all, the Bill is about having a legal deterrent to crowds of people seeking to force their way into a football ground, but there may be many other ways in which people attempt to get into a football ground that are not riotous disorder and may be quite honest in intention.

When creating criminal law, it is dangerous to get into aspects of intention—*mens rea*, as lawyers call it—rather than, in this case, the actual legal fact of entering a football ground. If the law were not changed, someone engaging in this bad behaviour could be punished only by ejection from the stadium, but there are criminal laws of trespass and many other ways in which this very bad behaviour can be identified. When Baroness Casey identified in her review the absence of specific offences as a weakness in stadium enforcement, I am not sure whether she was referring to such minor infringements as attempting to enter a football ground. I will say more about that in a moment.

I know that the key motivation for the Bill was the Euro 2020 final and the chaos at Wembley when hundreds of ticketless individuals stormed the venue, overwhelmed stewards and endangered legitimate fans. That mass unauthorised entry posed real risks, but that was really a riot. That is quite a different situation from somebody on their own, or perhaps a father with his children, attempting to get into a football ground when they may not have a ticket. They may have been mis-sold a ticket—they may believe that they have a genuine ticket. They may have been sold, at vast cost, a ticket by a ticket tout, but apparently now they will face the full force of the criminal law.

Under the Bill, police and courts will be able to ban repeat offenders, as it makes offenders eligible for football banning orders. Those are quite serious consequences for people who may not be rioters at all; they may just be genuine football fans. We are talking about a fine of up to £1,000 and a trial in a magistrates court. I know that such cases will not go to a Crown court, but that is still a very serious matter for somebody who might just be attempting to enter a place.

We will be told by the Bill's supporters that its enforcement is practical. I understand how entry into a football ground could be enforced, but I am unsure about enforcing an attempt to get into a football ground. Surely police and stewards need clarity. There is no point in us introducing more and more laws when we have a whole slate of traditional laws against riotous behaviour. Laws that may be difficult to enforce just bring the whole system into disrepute.

I know that football clubs, police forces and fans' organisations largely support the Bill, but I am not sure whether they are aware just how widely it is framed. I am sure that if they could talk these matters through with my hon. Friend, they would think his amendment was a wise and moderate compromise, because people already assume that it is an offence to enter a football ground without a ticket; I agree that the Bill removes the gap between assumption and reality.

The other thing that slightly worries me is that while I can quite understand how such attempts could be dealt with by a premier league club, which has stewards and the whole panoply of a large football club, we should consider small clubs such as Gainsborough Trinity FC in my constituency. These small clubs have faced huge challenges, and we are just introducing more burdens on them. During covid, Gainsborough suspended season tickets and capped attendance at just 300.

Small clubs already have to deal with many regulations and with public health. Their finances are very marginal, and covid worsened already fragile financial situations. I hope that when we consider these undoubtedly worthy Bills—as we look at the Euros, Wembley and all the rest of it—that impose more obligations on football clubs, we remember smaller clubs.

The Football Association is not always as helpful as it can be with small clubs. Big clubs get attention and support, so it may well be possible for them to police attempts to enter, but it may be more difficult for a tiny club—a very worthy, important and wonderful club such as Gainsborough Trinity FC—to deal with the intricacies of the law and understand it.

We are talking about enforcement and police resources, and therefore the measures in the Bill should be very moderate. There would be £1,000 fines or long banning

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

orders. Are we going to drag people before the courts? I have already talked about the father attempting an entry. Could children or young people who sneak in without harmful intent face having a criminal record? Are we really going to do that? Is that the sort of country we want to create?

We do not have a lot of data on how many attempts there are or how much unauthorised entry there is. We should acknowledge that the Euro 2020 final was exceptional. It is unclear whether making this kind of permanent legislative change, and rejecting the amendments, will solve the problem.

Linsey Farnsworth: On the data, the FA reports that approximately 600 people regularly attempt to tailgate at matches at Wembley and other competitive games at grounds across the country. It is not the odd person every now and again; people are regularly trying, over and over again, to get into football grounds. That is why it is important that “attempt” is included. Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that?

Sir Edward Leigh: The hon. Lady makes a fair point, but I am making a point about smaller clubs. We are here because of a political reaction to the embarrassment created by one major failure, but we cannot base good law on one major failure that was on all our television screens. We have to look at all clubs and consider all the difficulties that they would have in implementing this change.

Sir Christopher Chope: There is a big issue with attempted tailgating to avoid paying fares on the London underground. What does my right hon. Friend think about the Bill, in comparison with what is happening on the underground?

Sir Edward Leigh: We know that there is an epidemic of lawlessness on the underground and elsewhere. No doubt somebody will try to bring in a Bill on that as well—and good luck to them—but we are talking about a very narrow amendment and a narrowly focused Bill.

I am worried about enforcement, which may vary between clubs or regions. Fans may lose trust if they see the law being applied unevenly, and I do not know how clubs will police these attempts. It is unclear whether banning orders will lead to frequent appeals. People would be tried just for an attempt. I know that that would only be in the magistrates court, but if they faced long banning orders, could there be appeals? We have to apply the law fairly and reasonably; otherwise, it risks being a blunt instrument. Surely we should try to make this sort of Bill tightly focused.

The amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch are sensible. They would better tool the legislation towards its rightful end. First, they focus on the actual harm. By removing attempted entry from the offence, the amendments would criminalise only completed unauthorised entries—clear facts that can be understood and proven. We should target behaviour that truly compromises safety and public order.

Secondly, the amendments would ensure that the Bill avoids over-criminalisation. Criminalising failed or minor

attempts could lead to disproportionate outcomes, especially for young people or first-time offenders. My hon. Friend’s amendments promote a more measured legal response.

Thirdly, the amendments would reduce ambiguity, and the great danger in law is ambiguity. “Attempted entry” is a vague standard and may vary in interpretation by stewards and police. If hon. Members try to imagine the policing of a crowded football match with people pouring in, I wonder whether they would start to agree that “attempted entry” is a vague standard and may vary in interpretation. We are talking about the criminal law. We are talking not just about somebody being ticked off or told they cannot enter the stadium but possibly ending up in court. The amendments would give a clear legal threshold for enforcement and prosecution, on the basis of which somebody can be tried and sentenced in the courts.

10.15 am

Fourthly, my hon. Friend’s amendments would protect civil liberties. I have spent many long years and Fridays in this place defending civil liberties. I do not believe in over-regulation and ever more laws restricting civil liberties. The amendments would guard against penalising individuals where intent or context is unclear. We are criminalising only intent; we are not criminalising an actual fact, and that is a dangerous legal proposition. If we start doing it now on this Bill, where will it stop? Will we criminalise an attempt to enter a cinema or theatre?

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is straying a little wide into different areas. As he rightly said, the Bill is quite narrow. I am sure that he will want to get back on track. This is about football, not cinemas.

Sir Edward Leigh: I am so grateful to you, Mr Speaker; you will be grateful to hear that having made those remarks, I am drawing to a conclusion.

We have a duty to ensure that punishment is based on actual misconduct in entering a football ground, not suspicion or misjudged behaviour. Fifthly, my hon. Friend’s amendments would allow for practical enforcement. Focusing on completed unauthorised entry would help police and clubs concentrate their resources on the most serious breaches, rather than chasing marginal cases. The amendments would provide necessary implementation time. The two-month delay before commencement gives football clubs, police and stewards time to prepare for the new legal framework, reducing confusion and aiding smooth enforcement.

Finally, the amendments would encourage proportionality. They keep the law from becoming an unnecessarily blunt instrument and instead preserve a proportionate, targeted response to genuine requests.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth) for bringing the Bill forward and my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) for his amendments. At this stage, is it correct that you wish us to speak only to the amendment, Mr Speaker?

[*Interruption.*] Yes. We the Opposition have nothing further to add to the debate that we have had this morning.

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister.

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): I thank the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) for tabling these amendments, which propose two changes. First, amendments 1 to 5 would remove attempted unauthorised entry from the scope of the offence. Secondly, amendment 6 would bring the Act into force two months after it receives Royal Assent, rather than by commencement regulations made by statutory instrument.

It is absolutely essential that the Bill explicitly covers both attempted and successful unauthorised entry. We have seen widespread issues involving ticketless fans at football matches attempting to force entry and tailgate at high-profile matches, including the 2024 champions league final, premier league fixtures and at the Euro 2020 tournament. These forms of attempted entry place significant demands on stadium safety and security personnel and, at times, require police intervention. Maintaining provisions for attempted unauthorised entry ensures that law enforcement can act before a breach occurs and thus maintain safety and security at football matches across the country. It also enables the imposition of preventive football banning orders against persons involved in attempted entry. Banning orders are an effective deterrent against those who may seek to compromise public safety.

I turn to amendment 6. The Bill is designed to allow the measures to come into force by regulation on a date shortly before the start of the domestic football season. This approach will ensure that all organisations involved in safety and security operations are prepared to implement the new offence. A fixed date two months after Royal Assent may not coincide with the football calendar or allow sufficient time for training, communication and co-ordination. I therefore respectfully ask the hon. Member for Christchurch to withdraw his amendments.

Sir Christopher Chope: The Minister says that the Bill will come into force before the start of the football season. We heard from the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth) that the season will start pretty soon, within four or five weeks. I assume that means the Bill will not be implemented until summer 2026—that is the clear implication of what the Minister said. If I am wrong in that interpretation, I hope he will intervene, because it is important to get it on the record that the Bill will not be in force until a year's time.

On the issue of attempts, listening to my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), I thought that I had under-egged the pudding a bit, because he adduced a whole lot of extra arguments that reinforce the case for removing attempts from the Bill. Apart from anything else, I fear that if we allow attempts to remain in the Bill, the people who are still outside the stadium and never got in will be the easy pickings—they will be the ones who get arrested and penalised, while the mass of offenders who got in without authority will get away with it—because in order for any of this to work, there has to be an arrest and a subsequent prosecution. I wish to test the will of the House in relation to amendment 1.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 0, Noes 47.

Division No. 267]

[10.22 am

AYES

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Sir Christopher Chope and
Sir Edward Leigh**

NOES

Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Anderson, Fleur
Arthur, Dr Scott
Atkinson, Catherine
Chowns, Ellie
Costigan, Deirdre
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Davies, Shaun
Dean, Bobby
Dixon, Samantha
Eagle, rh Maria
Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Falconer, Mr Hamish
Farnsworth, Linsey
Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Foody, Emma
Gardner, Dr Allison
Hack, Amanda
Hall, Sarah
Harding, Monica
Harris, Carolyn
Hughes, Claire
Jarvis, Dan
Kinnock, Stephen
Lightwood, Simon

Mather, Keir
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
McIntyre, Alex
McKinnell, Catherine
Midgley, Anneliese
Mishra, Navendu
Murray, Katrina
Norris, Alex
Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
Owatemi, Taiwo
Peacock, Stephanie
Reynolds, Emma
Rushworth, Sam
Ryan, Oliver
Siddiq, Tulip
Slade, Vikki
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Uppal, Harpreet
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Yemm, Steve

Tellers for the Noes:

**Gerald Jones and
Anna Turley**

Question accordingly negatived.

Third Reading

10.35 am

Linsey Farnsworth: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is an honour to stand in the Chamber today and present this Bill for its Third Reading, particularly as a lifelong football fan. I put on record that I am a proud Everton supporter—my staff have all too gleefully reminded me that this may be the nearest thing to football-related success that I experience for a long time. Our men's team last won a major trophy in 1995, and the women's in 2010, so I am sure Members can imagine my delight when I saw the Amber Valley Codnor Sapphires girls under-10s team win the plate in a tournament in Heanor last Sunday. I am told that two other teams from my constituency, Sleetmoor under-13s ladies and Heanor Junior Hawks, also won trophies that day. I live in hope that Everton can follow suit and get their hands on some silverware at our new ground next season.

Football has a rich and impressive history. It bridges communities and brings people together, cutting across generational, gender-based, geographical, cultural and class divides. It is a sport of opportunity and hope that sees girls and boys who began by playing on the streets of their home towns becoming superstars and role models with platforms from which they can enact real change, as we saw during covid with Marcus Rashford's free school meals campaign. The rules of modern football are thought to have been drawn up in 1863, not far from

[*Linsey Farnsworth*]

this place at the Freemasons' Tavern in London. There, among other things, the somewhat important rule that carrying the ball with hands is not allowed was agreed on. Sadly, the referee seemed to forget that in the infamous 1986 world cup quarter-final between Argentina and England, in which Maradona produced his "hand of God" moment. The introduction of the video assistant referee means that today, such a goal would rightly be ruled out—not that us England fans are bitter.

As these examples show, football is in a constant state of change and evolution. It is not only right that as the sport evolves and progresses, the regulations around it adapt to reflect and facilitate those changes—it is paramount. That brings me to my Bill, which considers the issue of unauthorised entry to football matches from a fan safety perspective. It aims to ensure that proper legislation is in place to protect fans and prevent overcrowding in stadiums. As we have heard, unauthorised entry often takes the form of tailgating, also called jibbing. That is where a ticketless person pushes through the turnstiles behind an unsuspecting ticket-holding fan. Currently, if caught, tailgaters will likely be ejected without facing any other consequences; therefore, ticketless individuals can and do repeatedly attempt to gain entry to a match until they give up or are successful.

This is not a trivial matter—it has significant consequences for the fans in the stadium, and for the stewards and security staff working there. According to the Football Association, unauthorised entry to football matches results in operational, safety and security problems at major events. There are regularly 600 tailgating attempts at major games at Wembley and at grounds across the country. Occasionally, there are also instances of mass entry, where large crowds of people try to push their way into the stadium. The potential consequences of this kind of mass entry are both dangerous and tragic.

In July 2021, during the Euros final, around 1,900 ticketless individuals entered Wembley stadium. It is estimated that around 1,200 to 1,300 of those individuals got into the inner areas of the ground. Two of my friends, Ross and Siobhan, were at the match that day. They are both extremely experienced supporters of many sports, and travel to attend games at many grounds around the world. They were excited that day to watch the game, to experience at first hand the charged atmosphere of such a significant match, and to get behind their team. Unfortunately, they did not have the usual experience that they rightly hoped for. Siobhan told me:

"We arrived Wembley around an hour before kick off...it was obvious that things were not as they should be...I felt very uneasy about the atmosphere...We went to the turnstiles, which were still very busy and there were people there without a ticket who had managed to get through the first ticket check and were asking people to let them push through with them...I've been to many events at Wembley that are sold out and have never seen it in such a mess. We went straight to our seats which we were able to reclaim from the people occupying them at the time and the rows were overfilled and the stairways were full of people...The place was clearly filled way past capacity...Overall I found it to be unpleasant and a potentially dangerous environment...It has put me off...attending England games and I haven't been to one since."

My friends were not alone in feeling like that. Baroness Louise Casey was commissioned to conduct an independent review into the events of the Euros final, which she described as turning

"a day of national pride into a day of shame".

The report finds:

"The drunkenness, drug taking, irresponsibility, criminality, and abuse of innocent people—including staff, families, and disabled ticket holders—was shocking and intolerable."

Baroness Casey also writes:

"There were a series of crowd 'near misses' which could have led to significant injuries or even death".

She concluded:

"The existing enforcement mechanisms available to the police and other enforcement officers do not offer enough deterrent against those determined to use the cover of football matches to commit criminal offences. Tailgating, for example, should become a criminal offence. Sanctions for those breaking into football stadiums and/or recklessly endangering lives is weak."

My Bill aims to rectify that by inserting a new specific offence into the Football (Offences) Act 1991, namely entering or attempting to enter a designated football match in England and Wales without a ticket that the person is eligible to use. The offence, as we have heard, is summary only and carries a maximum sentence of a £1,000 fine. It can be tried only in a magistrates court, which will help with the big core backlog in the Crown courts. A conviction is likely to lead to a court-imposed football banning order, preventing the person in question attending matches for between three and five years. There is a potential prison sentence if the banning order is breached.

The offence, and the banning order in particular, is intended to act as the long-term deterrent that Baroness Casey identified a need for in her report. If passed, the Bill would apply to matches set out in orders made under section 1 of the 1991 Act. As it stands, those are matches in the premier league, championship, leagues one and two, national league, women's super league, women's super league 2—previously called the championship—and Cymru premier league, and international fixtures held in England and Wales.

After I did an interview with Radio Derby about the Bill, I was touched to hear from my friend, and Amber Valley borough council's longest-serving councillor, John McCabe. Incidentally, he was also probably one of the longest-suffering Nottingham Forest football club fans. He has sadly passed away since he left me a voicemail message that morning, which I still have. He opened with his characteristic greeting, "Ey up, Linsey," before talking about unauthorised entry in his youth. He said,

"Well done...It's been happening for years—it used to happen when I were about eleven—they used to say 'lift him over, he'll be alright,' but it's been happening for years that Linsey."

That "Well done" sticks with me, and his words and reflections on witnessing unauthorised entry aged 11 further demonstrate the long-standing need for the kind of reform that the Bill proposes.

I will now turn to some queries that were put to me during the Bill's various stages. First, the Bill uses the word "premises" instead of "stadium", to allow for arrests to be made and prosecutions to be brought against people going through the first cordon where a ticket would need to be displayed, preventing danger to the stadium itself. In Committee, the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) raised a concern regarding the challenges of electronic ticketing and ticket duplication as a means to illegally provide entry to matches. I thank him for his concern and assure him that that would be

captured by section 166 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994—a provision that covers the unauthorised resale of match tickets, commonly referred to as ticket touting.

Also in Committee, the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Mr Kohler) asked about the change to the wording of proposed new section 1A(3) of the 1991 Act in the version of the Bill promoted by Lord Brennan of Canton, which fell at the general election. The provision outlines proposed possible defences. Proposed new section 1A(3)(b) in my version of the Bill has been edited so that it covers cases in which a person “reasonably believed” that they had a ticket for the match but in fact did not. That is to ensure that a person who innocently buys a counterfeit ticket is not criminalised under this offence, which is specifically about fan safety and preventing overcrowding. As before, the defence also applies in relation to a person using a genuine ticket that they are not eligible to use—for example, an adult using a child’s ticket. Again, because there would already be a reserved seat in the stadium, safety would not be an issue with respect to overcrowding. The Bill, it should be clear, is about safety and the safeguarding of football fans, not villainising genuine supporters.

The hon. Member for Wimbledon wondered whether that alteration might have the unintended consequence of allowing a defence if a person used a ticket that had already been used, regardless of whether they had done so deliberately. I promised that I would raise that with the Home Office legal advisers and the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, which I did. They confirmed that a person attempting to reuse a ticket could not be said to reasonably believe that they possessed valid authorisation to enter, meaning that the statutory defence under proposed new section 1A(3)(b) would not apply. Furthermore, in practical terms, the court is likely to interpret the provision as meaning that a person is not eligible to reuse a previously used ticket, consistent with the intent to prevent unauthorised access to football stadiums. I thank the Home Office legal advisers and the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for their help in clarifying that matter.

Finally, let me address why the Bill deals with football matches specifically. Of course, the danger posed by overcrowding is not limited to football and is prevalent in other highly attended sporting and entertainment events; however, this is a private Member’s Bill, and as we have heard, in many instances it is best to limit them in nature if one is to successfully change the law within the prescribed timeframe.

I visited Wembley to watch the Carabao cup final with the Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention. We witnessed tailgating taking place and when I spoke to staff in the police, they suggested that football specifically was an event at which unauthorised entry regularly happens and that it poses a serious risk at the most competitive games. In the light of the upcoming Euro 2028, which I am glad to say is being jointly hosted by the UK and Ireland, it is necessary that legislation to protect fans is passed as soon as possible, so that it can come into effect and be a proper deterrent beforehand. If passed, my Bill guarantees that that would happen.

Sir Christopher Chope: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Linsey Farnsworth: I will make some progress, thank you.

Staff at Wembley also had concerns about upcoming sold-out music events. It is clear that unauthorised entry and overcrowding could pose security and safety risks beyond football, and I hope that Parliament will consider legislation that expands the logic of the Bill to address those other areas, including other big music and sport events, on another occasion.

10.49 am

Katrina Murray (Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch) (Lab): I am pleased to support this Bill. A lot of the things I wanted to say have been highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth). It is clear that the numbers are stark, and there is an issue. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) asked why this legislation is important, and I will say why and why it is personal for me.

On 2 January 1971, eight teenage boys from the village where I grew up, Markinch in Fife, travelled to Glasgow to watch an Old Firm game at Ibrox. They walked together to Glenrothes to get on their respective supporter buses. Five of them went on the Rangers bus, and three of them went on the Celtic bus. Only three of them came home. Sixty-six people lost their lives that day in a tragic crush. Just like Hillsborough years later, the trauma of that event still reverberates. The grief never truly lifts for the families, for the communities or for those who were there. The names of Ronald Paton, Bryan Todd and Mason Philip, who were all aged 14, Douglas Morrison, who was 15, and Peter Easton, who was only 13, were ones I grew up with. Their lives and loss are remembered by the friends who came home that day, Shane Fenton and Peter Lee, who have dedicated their lives to this cause and to remembering them.

Those tragedies teach us a painful lesson. Stadium crushes do not start as disasters; they begin as overcrowding, as bottlenecks and as poor control at points of entry and exit. The Bill will not change the past, but it can prevent future risks. We can make football what we all want it to be: fun—about whether your team does well or badly, something to talk about with pals. It is a part of life, but we need to make sure that we keep it safe. This is about fairness. Most fans do exactly the right thing. They queue, they pay, they are searched, and they have their teeny tiny bag that means they are not taking things in. They deserve a system that does not reward those who flout the rules. Stewards—often low paid, often young—deserve to do their job without being overwhelmed or put at risk by hundreds of people surging in unlawfully.

This Bill is not heavy-handed. It is proportionate and focused. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley for bringing it forward and allowing me to represent and to record in this Chamber the names of those who my community have lost. I hope that no other community has to go through that again.

Sir Christopher Chope *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. If Members hope to contribute, they need to bob throughout. I cannot read their minds, if they only bob towards the end.

10.53 am

Sir Christopher Chope: It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. This Bill is an improvement on its predecessor, and I give credit to the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth) for that, because it allows the defence to which she referred in her earlier remarks, and that is better. I regret that she would not accept the amendments that would have removed the attempt issues, but I must say I was alarmed when she said that she hoped the provisions in this Bill would be replicated more widely in other Bills. Would that be in relation to Wimbledon or Twickenham? It seems to me that the mischief being addressed in this Bill is peculiar to soccer supporters. I am not sure about the suggestion that we need to go more widely to deal with this type of hooligan behaviour. I declare an interest as a debenture holder at Twickenham, and I have never experienced the sort of problems to which she was referring.

When I was at university, I can remember the first football match I ever went to, which was at Dundee United. I stood on the terraces, and I did not feel any danger inside the ground. The danger in Dundee was outside the ground after the event. Then, when I had the privilege of representing Southampton Itchen, I was a frequent visitor to the Dell. Again, I did not see any problems there. There were problems associated with the need to ensure crowd control, and the football club paid dearly for the costs of policing to enable that to happen. That seemed to me a sensible arrangement, because the burden of policing soccer matches was not borne only by the local constabulary and its taxpayers, but also by the club itself. As Baroness Casey's report makes clear, the Wembley incident that prompted the Bill was essentially a one-off incident caused by a set of different circumstances, including that we were still during the period of covid, which meant a severe restriction on the number of people who could attend such matches. Other problems were created due to the absence of experienced stewards and so on.

I remember asking the hon. Member for Amber Valley why provisions in this Bill would not be included in the Football Governance Bill, which was discussed earlier in the week. She said that although these provisions could have been included in that Bill, because of her legal experience she particularly wanted to have a Bill in her name on the statute book. I hope that in the end those dreams will be fulfilled, as that is an important matter for her.

I have reservations about how this Bill will work in practice, and I am concerned about unintended consequences for the police. If there is an incident similar to the one that took place at Wembley, how will we be able to arrest all those people? Every time somebody is arrested by the police, a policeman has to take that person away and put them in a black Maria or whatever, which means that they are no longer able to police the ground. I fear that what will happen is that an individual will be picked on every now and again, but when there is a problem of mass trespass, we will not be able to do anything about it because nobody will be able to police it. We will get a situation similar to the one in supermarkets, with blatant shoplifting and a failure of the police or security people to take any action because they choose not to do so.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) said on Report, there is a danger that bringing the criminal law into these areas will result in disappointment and, as a result, bring the law into disrepute; we put all these laws on the statute book, but we cannot actually do anything about them. As I said earlier, the Home Office has responsibility for all this, but every day we find that it is unable to fulfil its existing responsibilities, let alone new ones that will be placed on it as a result of this Bill. Most recently, the Home Office revealed that it is unable even to record the number of people who have entered this country and then left. Obviously, the way to find out whether people who come in on visas are complying with those visas is to check the visa records when people leave. The Home Office cannot even deal with that. We are talking about extending its role in the belief that some magic new Bill will control unauthorised entry to football stadiums, when the Home Office cannot even control our country's borders.

I am extremely sceptical about this piece of legislation. It is a pity, in a sense, that the private Member's Bill process is giving rise to this sort of legislation, which is—I return to the word I used earlier—relatively trivial compared with all the other problems with which this country is faced and with which this legislature should be dealing.

Carolyn Harris (Neath and Swansea East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman will correct me if I am wrong, but is he saying that the safety of those attending football matches and the likelihood of them being hurt and, in some cases, killed is a trivial matter?

Sir Christopher Chope: There are already laws against killing people at football matches. There are already laws against criminal damage. There are already laws against violent behaviour. I do not know whether the hon. Lady has looked at Baroness Casey's report on the incident at Wembley in 2021, but it says that the issue of tailgating highlighted by the hon. Member for Amber Valley was not the only problem. There was also lots of drunken behaviour—

Carolyn Harris *indicated dissent.*

Sir Christopher Chope: The hon. Lady is shaking her head, but that is in Baroness Casey's report—she finds that there was a lot of drunken behaviour and evidence of drug taking. Those are criminal offences. The expression on the hon. Lady's face makes it seem as though either she believes that Baroness Casey's findings were incorrect or she has some other reason for disagreeing with that.

I think that bringing the criminal law into this narrow and specific field when there are already a host of other criminal offences covering these issues is the wrong way forward, but I am obviously in the minority on that.

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): We will soon find out.

Sir Christopher Chope: Of course I will give way.

Luke Taylor: I have no interest in intervening.

Sir Christopher Chope: Pardon?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. A discussion should not be taking place while colleagues are seated.

Sir Christopher Chope: If the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Luke Taylor) says he has no interest in this Bill, then he does not have to attend. I thought he was seeking to intervene, but he was not; he was wanting to make some sedentary remark.

I have put on the record my opposition to and scepticism about the contents of this Bill, and I will leave it at that.

11.2 am

Katie Lam: I thank the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth) for bringing the Bill forward. For many in this Chamber, the Euro 2020 final was a rollercoaster of ecstasy and disappointment, though I appreciate that certain Members from other parts of our United Kingdom may have felt a little less devastated at the result. Beyond heartbreak on the pitch, the Euro 2020 final was a day that nearly ended in catastrophe. Thousands of ticketless fans forced their way into Wembley, creating chaotic and dangerous scenes. When disaster is so narrowly avoided, it is reasonable to ask whether anybody made a mistake.

Sadly, this was not a one-off incident. Tailgating was reported again at both the 2024 champions league final and the 2025 league cup final. Of the 91 arrests made on that day, 68 were related to fraud—people trying to get in without a ticket. We heard from the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch (Katrina Murray) about a particularly upsetting and fatal day. These incidents put genuine fans at risk and erode the trust that is necessary to police events of this scale properly.

For many people in this country, a trip to the football is the highlight of their year. For many families, it is a hard-earned outing or rare treat for their children—something they scrimp and save for. What must they think when they see hooligans jump the barriers and get in for free? They must think that they are the mugs for having paid and followed the rules in the first place. It is therefore right that we give police and organisers the tools they need, not just to remove people in the moment but to prevent repeat offences through banning orders. That builds on steps taken by the previous Government that saw drug-related offences in football stadiums likewise result in stadium bans.

I welcome the clear focus on intent. The defences included in the Bill are thorough. I hope that the Minister can confirm that enforcement will be directed firmly at dangerous deliberate entry, and will not affect fans who responsibly pass on spare tickets. Targeted, common-sense enforcement is exactly the right approach to tackling this kind of disorder.

Where new powers are necessary, the Opposition will support their introduction. The FA certainly seems to support the introduction of a bespoke offence for tailgating. However, all too often, we do not make enough use of existing powers. If I understood the sentiment expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who is no longer in his place, he was saying that the laws introduced in this place are often improperly enforced. Following the 68 arrests that I mentioned earlier, not a single person has been charged.

A bespoke tailgating offence will make little difference unless police and the Crown Prosecution Service are willing and able to secure convictions. We must support them in doing so, as well as in taking other steps, such as co-operating with stadiums to advise on cases in which stadium bans might be appropriate.

More broadly, many of us are concerned by the rapid erosion of the social contract. Across our society, we are witnessing a troubling disregard for not only law and order, but standards of behaviour. Whether it is people pushing through ticket barriers on the tube, as my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch mentioned and my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) has highlighted, or migrants working illegally as delivery drivers, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) has highlighted, the principle is the same: laws apply to everyone, or they apply only to those of us who are good enough stick to them, which is deeply unfair.

If we do not take action to uphold those standards, particularly when safety is at stake, public confidence inevitably suffers. The starting point must always be the enforcement of our existing laws, and we must give full support to institutions such as the FA as they take steps to improve safety and uphold standards.

In the light of all that, I am pleased to reiterate the support expressed in Committee and confirm our continued support for this private Member's Bill. I again thank the hon. Member for Amber Valley for introducing it.

11.6 am

Dan Jarvis: I warmly commend my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth) for bringing forward this private Member's Bill. As a lifelong football supporter, she has made a powerful case for her Bill, and I congratulate her on securing support for it from across the House.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed today, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch (Katrina Murray), who spoke movingly about her experience of these matters. My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley spoke about the rich history of football.

The Bill addresses a clear and pressing issue: the growing problem of unauthorised access to football matches, particularly at high-profile fixtures. It does so by creating a new football-specific offence of unauthorised entry to designated matches. It captures a wide range of behaviours, from tailgating and forced entry to the use of forged documents or the impersonation of match-day staff. Crucially, it will also enable courts to impose football banning orders on conviction, providing a strong deterrent and a vital tool to prevent repeat offending and protect public safety. The Bill responds directly to the recommendations of Baroness Casey's independent review into the serious disorder at the Euro 2020 final, where thousands of ticketless individuals gained access to Wembley stadium, many through mass forced entry or tailgating.

Let me be clear: this is a recurring problem. We saw further evidence of it at the 2024 UEFA champions league final, which was again at Wembley, where groups of ticketless fans made repeated attempts to breach security. Similar behaviour is seen at premier league matches, particularly if away allocations are limited. It

[Dan Jarvis]

is a wider pattern of behaviour that needs to be addressed. Such behaviour is not only selfish and dishonest, but fundamentally dangerous. It places enormous strain on stadium security, creates serious risks to public safety and undermines the experience of law-abiding fans. The Government are clear that it cannot and will not be allowed to continue. That is why we support the Bill.

Forced entry, tailgating and so-called jibbing are not victimless acts. Those involved are often aggressive, violent or threatening, and their actions can lead to overcrowding, blocked emergency exits and frightening conditions for innocent fans. In some cases, individuals have even attempted to bribe stewards or turnstile operators to gain access. That will be captured by the new offence. The offence will also apply to those who knowingly attempt to use a ticket, whether physical or digital, that has already been used.

Let me be clear: this is not about criminalising honest mistakes or punishing fans who have been misled. The Bill includes important safeguards to ensure that individuals with lawful authority, such as emergency workers or stadium staff, are not caught by the offence, and it will not apply to those who unwittingly purchase counterfeit tickets in good faith or breach the terms and conditions of a legitimate ticket. That was a point referred to by the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), and by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam)—I agree with the points she made about enforcement.

This is a proportionate, targeted and necessary measure. It reflects the unique public order challenges associated with football, which are not seen to the same extent in other sports or events. It is also consistent with the broader framework of the Football (Offences) Act 1991 and the Football Spectators Act 1989. The Bill has enjoyed cross-party support throughout its passage, and rightly so. It is a fan-friendly measure that protects the vast majority of decent supporters from the actions of a disruptive minority, and it will help to ensure that football remains a safe and welcoming environment for all. I once again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley for her excellent work on this Bill, and I commend it to the House.

11.11 am

Linsey Farnsworth: With the leave of the House, I associate myself with the tribute to the Ibrox victims given so movingly by my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch (Katrina Murray).

There are many people I would like to thank for helping to get the Bill to this stage, but first I will speak about footballer, vice-captain and much-loved daughter and sister Maddy Cusack, who lived in my constituency in Horsley and passed away tragically in September 2023. I dedicate this Bill to her, with the knowledge that she would approve of its contents, given her love for the game and for the safety of the fans who came to watch her light up the pitch week in, week out. The Maddy Cusack Foundation has been set up in her honour, with the aim of continuing her legacy. The foundation has done wonderful work, providing opportunities and inspiring young girls and women in football, including sponsoring local teams to ensure that the next generation of footballers is equipped to face the world in the fierce, determined and spirited manner that Maddy faced it. I encourage Members, in their own time, to look into the wonderful work that the foundation is doing.

I thank the Football Association and the Football Association of Wales, which have both supported this Bill; the Clerks and civil servants who helped to draft it and offered support throughout the process; the Members who took it through Committee; and my hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Danny Beales) and for Hartlepool (Mr Brash), who co-sponsored the Bill. I thank Baroness Casey for her report and the important work she has done around fan safety, and I thank my staff, who provide continued guidance and support. I must also extend my thanks to Lord Brennan, whose work as the original promoter of the Bill has been invaluable.

Football is a game of two halves. At the risk of creating an overstretched analogy, I believe it is fitting that the second half of this Bill and its journey should be played out under Lord Brennan's capable guidance and captaincy in the other place, should it pass today. If the Bill passes, I will happily pass the armband to him.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Rare Cancers Bill

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

Clause 1

REVIEW OF LAW ON MARKETING AUTHORISATIONS

11.14 am

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move amendment 1, page 1, line 5, leave out “and”.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 2, page 1, line 6, at end insert

“and

(c) set out a timetable for implementing any changes in the law recommended by the review.”

Amendment 3, page 1, line 7, leave out “in particular”.

Amendment 4, page 1, line 9, leave out “three” and insert “two”.

Amendment 5, page 2, line 3, leave out “in the opinion of the Secretary of State”.

Amendment 6, in clause 2, page 2, line 7, leave out from “are” to end of line 8 and insert “arrangements in place to”.

Amendment 7, page 2, line 12, after “appointed” insert

“within the period of 6 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed”.

Amendment 8, in clause 3, page 2, line 33, leave out “in the opinion of NHS England”.

Amendment 9, page 2, line 40, leave out subsection (4).

Sir Christopher Chope: This is certainly not a trivial Bill; it is a really important piece of legislation, which I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) on introducing and pioneering. It was not a Government handout; it was an idea that he thought needed to be the subject of legislation and he has pursued it. We had a fantastic Second Reading debate. There is tremendous interest in the Bill. May I therefore make it clear at the outset that my amendments are designed to try to strengthen the Bill rather than anything else?

I explained my position to the hon. Gentleman yesterday. He said, understandably, that to a large extent he was constrained, because he was trying to negotiate with the Government and with the Department of Health and Social Care, and unless he showed himself to be reasonably compliant, he would not have got the Bill to a state where it could be accepted by the Government.

I note the different positions on this, and I fully understand and respect the hon. Gentleman’s position. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh) basically said that if she had introduced such a Bill, she would have got so steamed up about it that she would have included a lot more strength and safeguards, and as a consequence it probably would not have got anywhere near being considered on Report. Those are two different approaches. I am, relatively speaking, neutral on the matter—I am a sympathetic supporter of the Bill—but I have a lot of background

experience of how Governments always try to give themselves wriggle room, in effect to maintain control over everything, and in my view the Bill could be improved by being amended, with the will of the House, on Report.

We could talk about taking some of my amendments to the other place, but the trouble is that the Government machine may say that there will not be any more sitting Fridays in this House, so if the Bill were to be amended in the other place it might fall completely, because it would need to be brought back here. That is why it is important that the House should consider these amendments now rather than leave them to the other place.

Amendment 1, which is to be read with amendment 2, is a prime example of the point I made earlier. We have a commitment from the Government that:

“The Secretary of State must...carry out a review of the law relating to marketing authorisations for orphan medicinal products that are for the diagnosis, prevention or treatment of cancer”—great—

“and...prepare and publish a report setting out the conclusions of the review.”

But what is the timescale for that, and what will happen after those conclusions are produced? There is no obligation on the Government to do anything else. The review and its conclusions could be just left on one side. We in the House are in a position to tighten those provisions up and say, “This is not good enough. There should be a timetable for implementing the changes in the law recommended by the review.” That is the essence of the two amendments.

To look at another gap that could be exploited by the Government, the Bill says that the report must be

“published before the end of the period of three years beginning with the day on which the Act is passed”.

I have tabled amendment 4 to say that the period should be two years.

In respect of both those points, I have had a helpful email from Diana Jupp from Pancreatic Cancer UK, who writes on behalf of more than 30 charities representing patients affected by rare and less common cancers. She comments on my amendments. On amendment 2, she says,

“We are keen to push for this change with the Department once we reach implementation stage of the Bill.”

With the greatest of respect to Diana Jupp, we can do this now. Instead of leaving it to her and her colleagues to try to pressurise the Department later, we in this House have the power to change the legislation in the way that I have suggested, so that there would be a timetable set out for implementing the changes in the law recommended by the review.

In response to amendment 4, Diana Jupp says that

“this timeline has been agreed with the Department and in our opinion would tie into the timelines of other developing cancer policy implementation, including the cancer plan.”

Obviously, the most important part of her comment is that the timeline has been agreed with the Department, because if it had not been, the Department and the Minister would not have taken the Bill forward in this way and agreed to it.

On the timeline, I draw the House’s attention to the evidence base set out in the impact assessment. It says that the whole process will take one year. The Department

[*Sir Christopher Chope*]

reckons that it will cost £130,000 and sets out how many full-time equivalent civil servants will be involved in it. If it will only take one year, why are we saying that it needs to have three years? That is an example of why we need to tighten up the Bill, because if this is a review that needs to and will be carried out, why do we not get on with it? To suggest that it will take longer than a year is to go against the Department's own evidence set out in the impact assessment.

The impact assessment says on page 6, under the heading "Mandating a Government review of the orphan drug regulations":

"This will place a duty on the Government to publish a review which will be a comparison of orphan drug Regulations (specifically Part 5 of the Human Medicines Regulations 2012) and international regulatory approaches to supporting the research and development of orphan medicinal products that are for the diagnosis, prevention or treatment of cancers. Since the review is concerned with orphan drug regulations it is by default covering rare cancers. The findings should be published within 3 years." On page 7, paragraph 19 on financial costs says,

"It is difficult to estimate the resourcing costs required for the orphan drug review, since the exact scope remains to be agreed. However, we estimate the cost to the Department of Health and Social Care to produce and publish a report on orphan drug Regulations to incur costs of approximately £0.14m in relation to staff resource. This reflects the cost of 0.3 x SCS staff, 1 x FTE Grade 6 or Grade 7 staff, 0.3 x Grade 7 staff and 0.5 x SEO staff for one year."

That is what the Government say: only one year will be necessary.

In that case, why is my generous amendment, which would restrict the period from three years to two years, unacceptable to the Government? There is a history of dragging of feet at the Department of Health and Social Care, I am afraid; we certainly heard about that on Second Reading. I give the House that specific example of why, on the Government's own evidence, they should accept the change from three years to two.

Amendment 3 would leave out "in particular" from line 7, which reads:

"In carrying out the review the Secretary of State must, in particular, consider regulatory approaches in other countries."

The amendment is intended to probe rather than anything else. Why do the words "in particular" need to be incorporated? Surely it would be simpler to say that the Secretary of State "must consider regulatory approaches in other countries"—full stop, period. But that is not how it is at the moment.

Amendment 5 would leave out the reference to the Secretary of State. This is to do with the definition of a rare cancer. Currently, clause 2 would add this wording to the National Health Service Act 2006:

"The research that the Secretary must facilitate or otherwise promote under subsection (1)(a) includes research into cancers that in the opinion of the Secretary of State are rare cancers."

Why cannot it not just say "that are rare cancers"? Indeed, clause 2 would also add this wording to the 2006 Act:

"In this section 'rare cancer' means a cancer that affects not more than 1 in 2000 people in the United Kingdom."

That is an issue of fact. The Secretary of State should not be able to basically have a veto over the interpretation of what is or is not a rare cancer.

This is just another example of the control freakery within the Department. I am sorry that so far the Minister does not seem to have stood up to officials who have persuaded him, no doubt, that we need the expression

"in the opinion of the Secretary of State".

Again, the argument is quite straightforward and the people from Pancreatic Cancer UK are on my side, but they are obviously very keen for the Bill to get on to the statute book. We all have to recognise that it is within the Government's power to prevent it from making any further progress. That is why it will be quite difficult, I suppose, to persuade the Minister to accept amendment 5.

Amendment 6 would leave out from "are" to the end of the line and insert "arrangements in place to" in this statement in clause 2:

"In discharging the duty under subsection (1)(a) in relation to those cancers, the Secretary of State must, in particular, ensure that there are such arrangements in place as the Secretary of State considers appropriate to".

Why can we not just say "arrangements in place to enable potential participants in clinical trials", and so on? Why do we need to give the Secretary of State discretion—a veto, essentially—over whether he considers those arrangements to be appropriate? It seems to me completely redundant, unnecessary and, indeed, oppressive. It is counter to the expressed wishes of this House on Second Reading, when there was impatience over the delay, because of the need to get on with this, and suspicion over the failure of the Department of Health and Social Care—under not just this Government but previous Governments, which I would be the first to accept—to actually deal with the crisis involving people who are subject to rare cancers. That is amendment 6. I am trying to beetle through these amendments quite quickly, Madam Deputy Speaker, so that other people can participate in this important debate.

11.30 am

Amendment 7 attempts to tie down when clinical trials will be able to be implemented. It relates to the research, and the requirement on the Secretary of State to ensure the appointment of a person to be known as the national speciality lead for rare cancers, but there is no timescale for that to be done, so I am proposing six months. There is a wider issue, though. There is no reason why the appointment could not be made now. There is no reason why it could not have been made when the Bill was first introduced. It is quite clear from the impact assessment that the speciality lead will be appointed by a quango, essentially, which already has speciality leads for a whole lot of other issues. Why can we not just appoint this person now? It is said that the cost of the appointment will be a mere £16,000.

I do not understand why it is necessary to include in the Bill a specific requirement that the appointment be made when we know that the National Institute for Health and Care Research has national speciality leads for research delivery within the research delivery network. Their role is

"primarily to support research delivery in their discipline within health and care settings, with knowledge and experience of the full scope of the NIHR and the wider health and care delivery infrastructure in England."

The leads work with patients, the public, health and care professionals including research and development communities within the NHS and wider care systems, academics and life sciences partners. They

“aim to ensure strategic oversight and a focus on continuous improvement of the research delivery portfolio.”

Such specialty leads therefore already exist. They do not exist courtesy of specific legislation requiring that they exist; they already exist under the NIHR. Why has the NIHR not appointed such a specialty lead to deal with rare cancers? Why is it necessary for us to legislate to require that, but in weak legislation that does not set out any timetable for the making of that appointment? That, in my view, is another reason for tightening up the Bill.

The impact assessment, under the policy objectives, states:

“This aims to ensure there is adequate oversight of research delivery for rare cancers, by appointing a named person in England to provide leadership and advice for the delivery of rare cancer research. It is envisaged this individual would be employed by the NIHR.”

It is accepted that that person would be employed by the NIHR, so why do we have to wait for that person to be employed? And it is said that the cost will be only some £16,000 a year. With my amendments, I am trying to emphasise the need for proportionality.

Amendment 8 would leave out

“in the opinion of NHS England”

from clause 3. As we know, NHS England is not short of opinions, but that is by the bye. Clause 3(3) states:

“After subsection (5) insert—

(5A) In subsection (5)(da) ‘relevant clinical trials’ means clinical trials in connection with the research and development of orphan medicinal products for the diagnosis, prevention or treatment of cancers that in the opinion of NHS England are rare cancers”.

Now, I have already referred to this. The Bill defines rare cancers as

“a cancer that affects not more than 1 in 2,000 people in the United Kingdom.”

So, what is it to do with NHS England? The definition of a rare cancer is already in the Bill. Surely, it is a matter of fact? It should not be the subject of qualification or second-guessing by NHS England, so why is it in the Bill? In my submission, it gives the Department more wriggle room. Perhaps it means that a whole lot of people in NHS England will have to work out whether a particular cancer complies with the definition of a rare cancer that

“affects not more than 1 in 2,000 people”.

There is another problem here. The Bill refers to the opinion of NHS England. As I understood it, NHS England is—to my great delight—about to be demolished. Or rather, abolished. Perhaps both—demolished and abolished! So, why are we seeking to include, in primary legislation, a reference to what, in the Government’s view, is already a redundant body? I would have expected the Government to have come forward with an amendment on that, but I am at their service, as always, and if they accept amendment 8, then they will leave out

“in the opinion of NHS England”

and remove NHS England, and any references to that organisation, from the Bill. I hope I am tempting the Minister to accept some of my amendments and tempting other Members to speak in support of them.

Finally, amendment 9 again relates to clause 3, and the “Disclosure of information for research purposes”.

Currently, subsection (4) states:

“After subsection (6)—

of the Health and Social Care Act 2012—

“insert—(6A) A power conferred by this section to process information does not authorise the processing of information which would contravene the data protection legislation”.

That is fine; we can understand that. But I would be grateful if the Minister expanded, when responding to the debate, on what is then in brackets:

“(but the power is to be taken into account in determining whether the processing would contravene that legislation).”

If somebody could explain what that means, that would be extremely helpful. We know from the notes that the common law duties of maintaining privacy still apply. They are not removed as a result of this provision, so what do those words mean? This is very much a probing amendment to try to obtain more information.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is a succinct summary of the points I am making and why I tabled those amendments. One or two people—out of ignorance, frankly—have written to me suggesting that I have something other than their best interests at heart. I do have their best interests at heart, which is why I am putting forward these amendments. I hope I will get a positive response from the Government.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I rise to oppose the amendments, but I thank the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) for tabling them, for engaging with the Bill and for our conversation yesterday, which I really appreciated. I understand the stated intent of the proposals, although I am not minded to support them.

Over the last 10 months, I have held dozens of meetings with families, survivors, sufferers, charities, clinicians and legal experts, all with the aim of delivering meaningful change in this field. Those meetings were not so that I could tell people about the Bill, but so that those people could shape the Bill. I fear that if we were to pass these amendments, they would upset the delicate balance of hopes and aspirations that underpins the Bill. It is not just about the Minister, as the hon. Member suggested; there is a whole coalition of people who have different opinions about the Bill, and I do not think any one person has a right to change it in that way, including me. That would be hugely disrespectful and a disappointment to that coalition, but I understand the hon. Member’s points.

The Minister will go through the amendments in turn, so I will focus on three key ones. The review of orphan drugs was one of the hardest-fought things in the negotiations with the Department and charities, but we found a point that we could all agree on. I appreciate that the hon. Member wants it to go further, and perhaps we could speculate about the outcome and better prepare for it, but it is much awaited by the charities and they are grateful for it. I do not want to speak on their behalf, but that is what I have heard from them. That covers amendments 1 and 2.

Amendment 5 is about the definition of a rare cancer, which is an aspect of the Bill that I have not spoken about in any great detail, so it is worth touching on here. The Bill sets the definition of a rare cancer in

[Dr Scott Arthur]

statute and aligns it with the definition of a rare disease, which is a useful simplification. In future, let us hope that some conditions fall out of that “rare” specification and need less emphasis, and let us also hope that people in the Department look at the treatments that are being developed inside and outside the UK. It is right that there should be a bit of flexibility at the edges of what the Department considers a rare cancer.

The timeline of the review is three years. Again, we spent a great deal of time talking about that. For some while, it was going to be much longer than three years, and all of us want it to be much shorter, but that was the compromise we reached—it was like “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”. We reached that compromise together, so I urge the hon. Member to respect our negotiations on that issue.

Sir Christopher Chope: I hear what the hon. Member is saying, but why does the impact assessment say that the costs are for staff for only one year? If the review will take three years, why are the staff funded for only one?

Dr Arthur: I thank the hon. Member for that question. Of course, the review will not start on day one after passing the Bill. It will take time to get up and running. The existing workload of those staff members will have to be reallocated, and I hope and expect there to be some initial engagement with the sector—both charities and pharmaceutical companies—so a bit of flexibility is required. To be honest, I would love more money to be spent on that review so that we can get more depth and it can have a greater impact. I am sure other hon. Members present would agree.

I hope the hon. Member for Christchurch understands my position and recognises the strength of cross-party and sector-wide support that has brought the Bill this far. I regret not inviting him to take part in the Bill Committee—we would have benefited from some of these comments at that stage—but some of the points that have been raised were discussed in Committee. It was a reasonably long discussion; it did not last for hours, but it was not as short as some. I remain committed to working constructively with colleagues as the Bill progresses beyond today—let us hope it gets beyond today—but I respectfully ask, in the strongest possible terms, that these amendments are not pressed. If they are, I hope Members will oppose them.

11.45 am

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): To your delight, I am sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the delight of the whole House—especially that of the Government Whips—I am not going to speak for very long on Report, although I am not promising not to speak for some time on Third Reading. I wish to briefly speak to amendments 5 and 8 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). Before that, though, I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) on the Bill. I am generally supportive of it and think it is entirely necessary.

Turning to the amendments, my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch is right. It does concern me that the words

“the opinion of the Secretary of State”

are included proposed new subsection (2) of section 1E of the National Health Service Act 2006. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, proposed new subsection (4) of section 1E and proposed new subsection (5A) of section 261 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 set out the definition of a rare cancer, and if the Bill passes, that definition will become law. I therefore think there is a contradiction within this piece of legislation: it contains an absolute definition of a rare cancer, but adds some ambiguity by referring to the “opinion” of the Secretary of State. I ask the Minister to explain how both those things can be true. If the Secretary of State decides that there is some other definition of a rare cancer, how can that possibly be in line with the definition that is written into the law?

As the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West has said, the definition that has been included in the Bill—that a rare cancer is

“a cancer that affects not more than 1 in 2000 people in the United Kingdom”—

aligns it with the UK rare diseases framework, which was published by Lord Bethell in the other place in 2021. It seems to me that that is an effective and suitable definition, so again, I ask the Minister whether he expects there to be some other definition. If he does not expect that, why is it necessary to include the words

“the opinion of the Secretary of State”?

The Bill is not even consistent. Proposed new subsection (2) of section 1E of the National Health Service Act 2006 refers to the opinion of the Secretary of State, but proposed new subsection (5A) of section 261 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 talks about

“the opinion of NHS England”.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch has pointed out, NHS England is fortunately going to be abolished very soon. When that happens, will we have to pass either primary legislation or secondary legislation to delete those words from the Bill? Would it not be better if we deleted the words “the opinion of NHS England” now? Why will the Minister not consider removing them? If there is some reason why he thinks the Secretary of State might have to change the definition, why are those two clauses of the Bill not consistent?

I hope hon. Members will see that what the hon. Member for Christchurch and I are trying to achieve—certainly through amendments 5 and 8—is to establish a clear definition of a rare cancer. We are aiming to ensure that there is no ambiguity in that definition, and if there is to be ambiguity, we want to at least ensure that the body or authority that is going to make any changes is consistent in the legislation.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Minister.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): I rise to speak on behalf of His Majesty’s official Opposition in support of the Rare Cancers Bill, and to welcome its thoughtful and necessary intervention on behalf of a group of patients who have been under-researched, under-represented, and under-acknowledged for too long. I commend the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) on bringing this Bill forward, and on his ongoing dedication to the issue.

The case for the Bill is clear: rare cancers—defined, in line with the UK rare diseases framework, as conditions affecting fewer than one in 2,000 people—are individually uncommon but collectively account for more than 20% of all cancer diagnoses. However, as we know, patients with rare cancers routinely face delayed diagnosis, limited treatment options and far fewer opportunities to participate in clinical research.

The Bill does not claim to be a silver bullet, but it does mark a significant step forward in how we think about and legislate for research, regulation and data access in rare cancer care. It is focused, proportionate and strategically aligned with the existing NHS and National Institute for Health and Care Research frameworks.

Clause 1 places a duty on the Secretary of State to carry out a review of the law relating to marketing authorisations for orphan medicinal products that are for the diagnosis, prevention or treatment of cancer. It also rightly requires that the review includes comparisons with regulatory approaches in other countries. This is vital. The explanatory notes rightly observe that research into rare cancers is often commercially unattractive because of small patient populations and high developmental costs. If our regulatory environment creates further barriers to entry, patients suffer—not because the science does not exist but because the system does not support it.

The UK's current approach to orphan designation lacks the pre-authorisation incentives found in systems such as the European Medicines Agency and the US Food and Drug Administration. The review required under the Bill is the opportunity to ask whether we are doing enough to attract the research and development that rare cancer patients deserve.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am not quite sure whether my hon. Friend is responding to the amendments or making a Third Reading speech. I hope he will address the amendments I have tabled, including those that relate to clause 1, about which he has just spoken.

Dr Evans: If my hon. Friend bears with me, I will turn directly to his amendments. It is important to first set out the context, because we must understand the clauses if we are to debate the amendments to them.

Clause 2 makes crucial changes to the Secretary of State's duty under the National Health Service Act 2006 by stating explicitly that it must include research into cancers that, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, are rare. Although this matters, the research agenda is often driven by numbers and funding scales. By mandating that rare cancers be part of the agenda, the Bill begins to shift the culture towards inclusion, equity and long-term thinking.

I particularly welcome the creation of the national specialty lead for rare cancers, modelling the NIHR's existing structure of research delivery leaders. This individual will be tasked with promoting and facilitating research, advising on trial design and convening collaboration. The success of this role will depend on it not just being symbolically supported but having a clear remit, adequate funding and a strategic alignment with the wider NIHR research delivery network.

Clause 3 amends section 261 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to allow NHS England to disclose information from cancer registries for the purpose of identifying and contacting potential clinical trial participants. This is a significant and necessary step. The Bill distinguishes between a disease registry, like the National Disease Registration Service, and a contact registry, such as Be Part of Research. Making sure that these systems can speak to each other will be of significant benefit when it comes to matching patients with opportunities. Importantly, the clause reaffirms that any such data sharing must remain compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018. As proposed new subsection 6A to the 2012 Act makes clear,

“A power conferred by this section to process information does not authorise the processing of information which would contravene the data protection legislation”.

This is a safeguard that we must preserve, not weaken, if we are to maintain public trust in the system.

At this point I turn to the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). He approaches private Members' Bills in the way that a jeweller examines diamonds—with a magnifying glass, a steady hand and absolutely no tolerance for flaws. We may grumble as the clock ticks on, but deep down we all sleep better knowing that he is reading the footnotes. This Bill is no different; he has approached it with rigour, and I thank him for his commitment to precision and improving clarity and accountability. As he pointed out, the Bill is not trivial. Therefore, it is not only right, but indeed the duty of this House, to scrutinise closely legislation and amendments laid before us.

To that end, several of the amendments aim to tighten the Bill's drafting or introduce firmer deadlines. For example, amendment 4 would reduce the timeframe for the review under clause 1 from three years to two. Amendment 2 would require the Secretary of State to

“set out a timetable for implementing any changes in the law recommended by the review.”

I understand the concern that reviews can drift, but the three-year period reflects the complexity of the subject: a UK-wide review of the Human Medicines Regulations 2012, including benchmarking against other jurisdictions and engaging multiple agencies. Compressing the timeline might jeopardise the depth or quality of the analysis. Likewise, a statutory timetable for implementation could constrain the Government prematurely, before the review's conclusions are even known.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his unprompted comments. He will know that the funding is sufficient to staff the review only for one year. If there is only funding for one year, why does it take three?

Dr Luke Evans: My hon. Friend knows, far better than I, not to look at legislation in isolation. The Government will at some point bring forward the cancer plan, which will have a direct crossover with the Bill, so it is right to give the Government the freedom and space to implement the legislation. If we rush it, we could get it wrong, which would be even more detrimental for those who suffer with rare cancers.

[Dr Luke Evans]

Other amendments address definitions and discretion. For example, amendment 5 would remove “in the opinion of the Secretary of State”

from the definition of rare cancer, and amendment 8 would remove similar wording in relation to NHS England’s discretion. At first glance, the amendments may seem like matters of tidy drafting, but retaining discretion is important, especially as regards rare cancers. Prevalence data can be uncertain or lagging, and flexibility allows for expert judgments about edge cases in which rigid definitions may unintentionally exclude patients from trials or research that could benefit them.

On top of that, there are concerns even about simple definitions. We are still exploring the difference between, for example, pre-cancerous and cancerous cells. If someone goes for a smear, that is what they are told. This is a new area. Who knows what will come up in the future? Simply defining rare cancers on the basis of lagging prevalence data is a risk, and it is therefore right that the Government and the Secretary at State have discretion to direct in one way or another.

However, I would be grateful if the Government would answer the question, which has been rightly posed, of who or what will fill the role when NHS England is abolished. It is not clear exactly what that will look like. I have asked the Minister this question several times, in relation to the Mental Health Bill and other areas, and it is a question that this House should rightly ask. Who will be responsible for what, when and why?

That said, amendment 7, which would ensure that the proposed national specialty lead is appointed within six months of Royal Assent, deserves serious consideration. Patients have waited long enough. If the Government are confident that the post can be established promptly and resourced effectively, I would welcome that ambition being stated at the Dispatch Box today.

Finally, I must express my concern about amendment 9, which proposes to remove the data protection safeguard in clause 3(4). Although the provision may be declaratory, in that it reaffirms existing legal obligations, it none the less offers clarity and reassurance. In an area as sensitive as health data, such clarity matters, and the subsection’s removal could cause unnecessary concern, even if the underlying law remains unchanged.

In conclusion, this Bill is not about grandstanding. It is modest in financial cost, careful in its drafting and realistic in its scope, but its impact could be significant. For patients living with rare cancers, and clinicians and researchers striving to support them, the Bill offers real hope—hope for faster access to innovation, hope for more inclusive research and hope for a regulatory system that works for the many, not just the minority. Every patient matters, whether they are one in two or one in 2,000. As we stated on Second Reading and in Committee, we support the Bill, and I thank the House for giving me the chance to explain why.

12 noon

The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) for bringing this Bill before the House, and I congratulate him on getting it to Report. Amendment 1 allows amendment 2 to be inserted into the Bill.

Amendment 2 would require the Secretary of State, having carried out the review described in clause 1, to set out a timetable for implementing changes to the law recommended by the review. However, it would not be appropriate to presume the outcome of the review of orphan drug regulations that is outlined in clause 1. Amendment 2 presupposes that the review will recommend changing the law, and that there are changes the Secretary of State would be willing to support, following a legal consultation. That is not considered appropriate at this stage.

Amendment 3 is unnecessarily restrictive, introducing wording that confines the review unnecessarily. We want to ensure that a thorough review is conducted, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Secondary Care will be working with her officials to ensure that that happens. For amendment 4, the three-year timeframe to prepare and publish the review and the necessary resourcing requirements have been discussed with officials in my Department and at the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. I remind Members that the text in the Bill reflects the statutory deadline, but we will endeavour to publish a report ahead of the three-year timeframe, which has been put forward to be consistent with the MHRA’s overall workplan.

On amendment 5, there are different definitions of a rare cancer, and we worked with my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West to agree the definition in the Bill as a cancer that affects not more than one in 2,000 people in the UK. However, a level of discretion for the Secretary of State is required over what falls within that definition, since the facts underlying and the data on diagnoses are constantly changing. The amendment would make it difficult to implement the clause in practical and operational terms.

Amendment 6 would remove the ability of the Secretary of State to exercise discretion as to how their duty would be discharged. This is not considered appropriate, since it makes the operation of clause 2 less workable in practice, and would lack the Government’s assessment of what in all the circumstances would be the most appropriate manner of implementation. Amendment 7 would introduce a specific timeframe—just six months—to allow the appointment of the specialty lead. Although I agree that we will need to appoint the specialty lead promptly, introducing a statutory timeframe is not considered workable for practical reasons. There could be unforeseen delays; for example, recruitment processes might delay the appointment beyond six months.

On amendment 8, as mentioned previously there are different definitions for a rare cancer. That is because the data on cancer diagnoses is constantly changing, and decisions on whether the criteria for a rare cancer are met will inevitably involve an element of judgment. The amendment would make it difficult to implement the clause in practical and operational terms.

I turn finally to amendment 9. It is essential that information relating to people’s health and care is shared appropriately, lawfully, and in line with their reasonable expectations. Amendment 9 would remove the provision confirming that any sharing of information pursuant to the powers created by the Bill, and under NHS England’s existing powers, must be in accordance with data protection legislation. That includes compliance with key principles

such as lawfulness and fairness. That layer of assurance is essential for the protection of patients, and clause 3 is a standard provision that makes that explicit.

For those reasons, I ask the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) to withdraw all nine of his amendments.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Sir Christopher, is it your pleasure that amendment 1 be withdrawn?

Sir Christopher Chope: Is it possible to respond, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Very briefly. I was asking whether amendment 1 would be pushed to a vote or withdrawn, so if you could alert me to that it would be very useful.

Sir Christopher Chope: I will respond briefly to the debate. In so doing, I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans) and for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford) for their contributions.

I listened for what the Minister would say in response to my point about NHS England, but I did not hear the expression “NHS England” come from between his lips, and I wonder whether that was an oversight or whether it was left out of his brief deliberately by officials from NHS England. Amendment 8 specifically deals with NHS England, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hinckley and Bosworth referred to it. Does the Minister’s reluctance to intervene at this stage show that he is in denial about the policy in relation to NHS England? I presume that he is in such denial.

We have had a classic example from the Minister of why the civil service is ruling okay, because it can come forward with a valid objection to every possible suggested alternative and amendment. I do not think that this attitude will be very helpful to the people we are trying to help through the Bill—namely, those who are suffering from rare cancers and who want us to make progress in this area. I will not press any of these amendments to a vote, but I hope that when the Bill gets to the other place there will be more persistent probing, particularly on the issues around NHS England and the definitions.

To give credit where it is due, I was pleased with what the Minister said about the specialty lead. As discussed, we do not need legislation for this anyway. He said he wants to have that dealt with promptly but is fearful of accepting an amendment that requires it to be done within six months because of the possibility of unforeseen delays. I take it from that that he is going to get on with that aspect, and let us hope that that goes faster rather than slower. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Third Reading

12.6 pm

Dr Arthur: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

What a joy it is to say that! Madam Deputy Speaker, it has been 10 months since you pulled my little ping-pong ball out of the goldfish bowl and I started this journey. It is worth remembering that part of the reason behind this Bill was the death of my father-in-law to a rare

cancer type called glioblastoma. I am forever grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh) for the information she gave me about that condition and how it impacts so many people, because I had always just been focused on my father-in-law.

When the ping-pong ball was pulled out of the goldfish bowl, I got so many emails, many of which were about glioblastoma. The reality is that someone who was diagnosed that day with glioblastoma would more than likely be dead by now—that is how serious the condition is. They would face treatments that were out of date, and their future would be dominated by uncertainty. We should not forget why we are here: to change that reality for people and their families.

This Bill has resonated with many Members of this House and with many people in my constituency. On Second Reading, I shared the tragic stories of a young constituent called Tilly, who passed away from neuroblastoma, and Kira, who has lived with the same condition for a decade—half of her life. I am proud to wear the Solving Kids’ Cancer badge, which Kira’s mother Aud gave me when I last met her.

Today, I also want to acknowledge the many people from across the UK—not just voters in Edinburgh South West—who have contacted me to voice their support and share their stories. One lady travelled quite far to meet me at my constituency surgery in July in Tesco in Colinton Mains. Her daughter was diagnosed with a sarcoma. In Tesco, next to the bleeping self-checkout aisles, she told me about the uncertainty she had faced after that diagnosis and how she had found it impossible even to understand which trials were available, let alone access them. I could see that she had felt powerless and had lost hope. The other reason she was in Edinburgh—perhaps the most important reason—was that she was meeting her ex-husband to scatter her daughter’s ashes in a local park. What is happening to people who face these conditions is quite incredible, so it is right that we seek to address them.

It has been incredible to hear these stories, and when I reflect on them, I can see that there are three recurring themes. The first is frustration. As things stand, our NHS is ill equipped to deal with these patients. Awareness levels are often low among clinicians, which leads to the scourge of late diagnosis. I know that will be addressed in the cancer plan. Families and patients are also frustrated by the limited access to cutting-edge trials—I have already given an example of that. As a result, many rare cancer patients understandably feel like they have to battle not just against the cancer but for attention.

The second key thing that unites these stories is perseverance. Rare cancer patients continually push back and advocate for the changes that they believe must happen—often fundraising or even setting up and running their own charities to help to achieve those goals. Thirdly, each and every story concludes with an offer of help. Rather than asking what I can do for them, because often rare cancer patients know that their options are limited, they want to know what they can do to help with the Bill, help others with the same condition, and help to make this legislation a reality. I believe that is a testament to the transformational role that the Bill could have, and I thank Members who have already made that point.

[Dr Arthur]

For far too long, rare cancer patients have been left behind—as medical science makes significant progress in many other complex fields, we have not seen enough progress in this one—but they feel this piece of legislation could mark a meaningful shift for many and turn out to be life-altering, perhaps even lifesaving, for some. There is one statistic that I often mention: rare cancers are not really rare, as they account for 47% of all cancer diagnoses in the UK each year. That equates to 180,000 people. If you are one of those 47%, two things are true: you are more likely to face outdated treatments and you are more likely to die.

The Bill is about justice and creating a more level playing field for those patients and their families. It will achieve that by placing a duty on the Secretary of State to promote research into rare cancers, including appointing a national specialty lead to co-ordinate efforts across the sector. If anybody doubts the need for that, I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden can talk about what has been happening in recent years. The Bill will also increase patient access to clinical trials by strengthening and streamlining the Be Part of Research registry and building a central database of willing patients to help researchers to find trial participants more easily. That is key to attracting trials to the UK.

Lastly, the Bill will trigger a Government review into orphan drugs—I really dislike that phrase; this is about rare conditions—to explore new pathways to incentivise pharmaceutical companies to trial repurposed and innovative treatments for rare cancers. Together, those steps will reduce the barriers to research and attract more trials to the UK, and ultimately lead to faster and fairer access to lifesaving treatments.

I am a humble person, and do not want to be accused of overstating the impact of the Bill, so I will take the liberty of quoting others, if Members do not mind. The Brain Tumour Charity, which has been so helpful, says that the Bill will be transformative and help to “improve access to clinical trials for people living with rare and less common cancers”.

Another helpful charity, Brain Tumour Research, said that the Bill

“could significantly improve research and treatment pathways for patients.”

Pancreatic Cancer UK, which has been at the core of what we are doing—and, it turns out, has been in correspondence with the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope)—says that if the Bill

“becomes law, it has the potential to improve survival rates for pancreatic cancer and other cancers that have been left behind.”

I know the hon. Member for Witney (Charlie Maynard) wanted to be here today but could not be. Instead, his sister Georgie left a message on my social media. She lives with glioblastoma and is a fantastic campaigner in this field. She said:

“Your Bill will make a significant difference, helping tens of thousands who desperately need more research to find a cure.”

No pressure, therefore, for me or us in the Chamber today.

There is also a strong economic argument for introducing this legislation. By creating the conditions for more rare cancer trials to take place in the UK, we can attract

investment, stimulate innovation and create new jobs in research, science and healthcare. This is an opportunity to give British science and institutions a global leadership role in tackling some of the most challenging diseases of our time.

I recently had the pleasure of visiting Edinburgh University researchers based in an NHS hospital, the Western general in Edinburgh. I was invited along to see a thing called a robotic microscope. It sounded exciting, and I was looking forward to getting my picture taken next to it, but it is actually a very ordinary piece of instrumentation. I got my picture taken in the end, but I do not think I used it.

It is a fantastic piece of equipment, and it is coupled with a supercomputer. It does what would previously have been a lifetime of analysis in just a few days. It is fantastic that in this House, we have all agreed that Edinburgh University should get a new supercomputer. Analysis that used to take a few days will take just a few hours, moving us closer to finding cures. The United States has shown how investment in this area can stimulate growth through its cancers Act. It would offer a real step change in the UK if we could do the same.

I will draw to a conclusion, because I know others want to speak. There is a strong moral and economic argument for this Bill, and the progress within it is long overdue.

12.16 pm

Gregory Stafford: Once again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) on bringing this essential Bill before us and thank him for the hard work he has done to make sure we get to this place. As I have said many times in this House, early detection saves lives, but without meaningful progress in research we will fall behind other countries making major advances in cancer care.

We call these rare cancers, and they are rare in their individual components, but I have been amazed by how many constituents across Farnham, Bordon, Haslemere, Liphook and the surrounding villages have contacted me in support of the Bill and to share their experiences. Despite rare and less common cancers receiving more than half of UK cancer research funding in recent years, a staggering 82% of patients surveyed by Cancer52 said that they were never offered the chance to participate in a clinical trial. That is not because there is no public support or because the science is not there, but because persistent structural barriers are in the way. The Bill addresses those barriers directly.

If enacted, the Rare Cancers Bill will appoint a national specialty lead for rare cancers within Government, creating accountability, facilitating research and collaboration, and embedding co-ordination across NHS England—while it still exists—the National Institute for Health and Care Research and cancer alliances. Secondly, it will mandate a review of the UK’s orphan drug regulations, aligning incentives such as marketing exclusivity and reduced regulatory fees with international best practice. Thirdly, it will adapt the NIHR’s Be Part of Research platform to create a dedicated, proactive registry that directly links patients with relevant clinical trials.

Let us be clear: this Bill aims to deploy smarter systems, harness the power of artificial intelligence, expand fair access to treatment, end the postcode lottery and ensure that every patient, no matter the type of cancer, has the opportunity to benefit from research and high-quality personalised care. Let us also be clear about the need. Rare and less common cancers account for 47% of all UK cancer diagnoses, yet they are responsible for 55% of all cancer deaths. That means that more than half of those who die of cancer in this country do so from conditions that receive disproportionately less investment, less attention and less hope.

The disparity in survival is stark. For some rare cancers, five-year survival rates languish in the single digits. Only 16% of people diagnosed with cancers of the pancreas, brain, oesophagus, liver or stomach survive beyond five years. By contrast, the five-year survival rate across more common cancers is more than 55%. This is not a marginal issue; this is mainstream cancer care, but it is neglected.

Our international peers are taking action. In countries such as France, Germany and the USA, regulatory frameworks are actively incentivising clinical trials for rare cancers. The UK, meanwhile, has fallen from second to 10th in Europe for access to orphan medicines. We must reverse that decline. We must unlock the potential of our research base, and this Bill gives us the legislative structure to do so.

The NHS 10-year plan, launched with the ambition to modernise our health service, is a wide-ranging document. It rightly champions early diagnosis, innovation and personalised care, and there is no doubt that many of its pillars, particularly those on genomics, digital access and therapeutic innovation, can benefit people with rare cancers, but “can” is not the same as “will”, and “should” is not the same as “must”. The plan sets out a national goal to diagnose 75% of all cancers at stages 1 or 2 by 2028. That target explicitly includes rare and less common cancers. That is an important and necessary ambition but, as campaigners have rightly pointed out, without specific structural action on rare cancers, we will not hit that target; even worse, we will leave some of the most vulnerable patients behind.

As I have said, these are not fringe diseases: these are mainstream conditions that are under-researched and under-resourced. The 10-year plan includes a number of relevant commitments, such as the whole genome sequencing of newborns, supported by £650 million of investment, which could revolutionise early detection of genetic cancer syndromes. Of course, there are some safeguarding issues around that sequencing—I do not want to pre-empt my column in *PoliticsHome* on Monday, but please read it for more about my concerns over those safeguards.

Likewise, the plan includes the expansion of genomic and pharmacogenomic services in the NHS, giving us the potential to offer targeted therapies for rare cancers. It has a pipeline for advanced therapy medicinal products, including CAR T-cell treatments, which are already being rolled out for certain rare blood cancers. It also streamlines the regulatory pathways through a proposed innovator passport to bring treatments to patients faster.

Those are steps in the right direction, but let me be frank: the plan does not go far enough for people with rare cancers. There is no dedicated rare cancer taskforce, despite repeated calls from Cancer52, Sarcoma UK and

the Brain Tumour Charity. There is no specific ringfenced funding for rare cancer services, despite the complex multidisciplinary care that these conditions require. There are no rare cancer-specific training pathways or fellowships, despite clear evidence from clinicians that a lack of expertise is hampering outcomes. The England rare diseases action plan, published alongside the NHS strategy, takes some welcome steps on collaborative networks and data integration, but rare cancers are again folded into a general framework, rather than given the targeted attention they so desperately need.

Uma Kumaran (Stratford and Bow) (Lab): I am here today on behalf of my young constituent, Imogen, and all young people facing tongue cancer. It is a rare cancer, with frightening and disabling treatment options. I am also here on behalf of my constituent Ros, who lost her mother to pancreatic cancer just 24 hours after diagnosis. Does the hon. Member agree that this House should be united in its support for practical, targeted reforms to advance rare cancer research, which are supported by more than 30 expert charity partners and which so many of our constituents desperately want to see passed into law?

Gregory Stafford: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention. She is absolutely right—I hope this matter has cross-party support in the House. As she points out, a significant number of charities across the country hope that the Bill will pass today, as do I.

That brings me nicely on to what Jane Lyons, the former chief executive of Cancer52, has said:

“Rare and less common cancers make up a massive part of the cancer burden in this country. They need proper structural attention—not just well-meaning inclusion in generic plans.”

She is right. We need dedicated leadership and a single accountable individual or office for rare cancer research and care. We need smarter data platforms, such as the adapted Be Part of Research system proposed in the Bill, and we need a clear strategy for delivering orphan drug access, so that the UK becomes a destination for innovation, not a detour.

When the NHS 10-year plan speaks of transformation, we must ensure that that transformation is inclusive. When we talk about prevention, early detection and innovation, we must be honest about who gets access and who does not. If we are serious about improving outcomes for all cancer patients, rare cancers must not be treated as an afterthought. They must be recognised for what they are: a major public health challenge hiding in plain sight.

The 10-year plan gives us the tools, but it is now up to this House and to Ministers to ensure that those tools are used equitably, strategically and with urgency. That is why I was incredibly saddened to hear that Dr Susan Michaelis, the founder of the lobular moonshot project, died a couple of days ago. Susan’s life and legacy exemplify why this Bill matters. Lobular breast cancer affects 22 women every single day in the UK and more than 1,000 globally. It is not rare in the strict legal sense—more than six per 100,000 are diagnosed annually—but due to the severe lack of research, awareness and tailored treatment, it deserves to be treated as such by our systems.

Susan was due to meet the Secretary of State on 14 July—this coming Monday—to discuss how to accelerate the vital five-year research project she helped to initiate.

[Gregory Stafford]

Thankfully, that meeting will still go ahead. The campaign will not stop. The lobular moonshot project will continue—for Susan, and for every woman still facing this disease without the research-backed options that she deserved.

Susan is far from alone. A constituent recently wrote to me about their mother, who died in 2011, just three years after her diagnosis with glioblastoma multiforme, an aggressive and incurable brain tumour. The average glioblastoma survival time is 12 to 18 months; only 25% of patients survive more than a year, and just 5% live beyond five. Another campaigner spoke movingly about the delays she faced before being diagnosed with a rare kidney cancer—initially misdiagnosed, postponed by covid, and ultimately caught too late.

There are so many rare cancers, and the stories repeat. Rare cancers are not rare to those living with them; they are rare only to the system. According to Jane Lyons, the former CEO of Cancer52,

“Something like 47% of all cancer diagnoses are for rare and less common cancers, but they account for 55% of all cancer deaths...That’s a massive number of challenges—and a huge opportunity for impact.”

Sarcoma UK’s recent report found that one in three sarcoma patients waits more than six months to be diagnosed. Referral pathways are frequently misapplied, and this delay is not a minor inconvenience; in cancer care, it can be fatal.

The Brain Tumour Charity has called the Bill

“essential for any real hope of progress in finding a cure.”

The Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce has declared that this legislation is

“crucial for early diagnosis and equity of access.”

The Urostomy Association, in its rare cancers manifesto, calls for urgent structural change to improve data, screening and outcomes, and Lynch Syndrome UK has spoken powerfully about the opportunities to accelerate genetic-led, AI-informed cancer prevention if rare cancer research is properly funded.

I believe that the Rare Cancers Bill will help to achieve that. It has three core provisions: first, a named lead for rare cancer research so that this agenda has a home in Government and a voice at the top table; secondly, a review of the orphan drug regulations to create better commercial incentives for new treatments and trials; and thirdly, a patient-focused data system built into the Be Part of Research platform so that people are no longer left in the dark about trials that could change their lives. This is not just about saving lives; it is about improving them. It is about ensuring that families are not left with grief and regret when better systems might have given them hope.

Today, as we consider the Rare Cancers Bill, let us remember people like Susan Michaelis and the countless families who have campaigned for change they may not live to see. Let us recognise that rare cancers are not someone else’s problem, but a public health injustice hiding in plain sight. Let us pass the Bill—not just for the scientists and clinicians, but for every patient, and for every parent and partner who has watched a loved one suffer from a cancer few people can even pronounce. This is our chance to correct the imbalance, drive innovation and deliver real, lasting change. If we seize

this moment, we can ensure that every patient—no matter how rare their cancer—can access trials, treatment and the possibility of life.

Let us not waste this opportunity. Let us be clear-eyed about the gaps and build an NHS that genuinely serves every patient, with every type of cancer, in every part of this country. Together, let us leave a legacy worthy of those we have lost, and transform care for those still fighting.

12.28 pm

Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I rise to support the Bill, which will make a real difference by improving the detection and treatment of rare cancers. We heard really moving contributions on Second Reading, particularly from my hon. Friends the Members for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh) and for Calder Valley (Josh Fenton-Glynn).

With permission from my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur), I will take this opportunity to press the Minister on research into lobular breast cancer, echoing the comments of the hon. Member for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford). Twenty-two people a day are diagnosed with lobular breast cancer in the UK; at around 30 in 2,000, it falls outside the scope of the Bill. However, with a UK population of 70 million, 22 a day would popularly be deemed to be rare. More importantly, it has unmet clinical need, and that is what really matters.

Lobular breast cancer was first identified as a separate type of breast cancer 50 years ago, and while breast cancer survival rates have generally improved, research specifically into lobular has been rare and grossly underfunded, and the basic biology of the disease remains mostly unknown. That has led to two effects. First, it is difficult to detect as its web-like structure means that it does not have the typical lump, so it often spreads before it gets detected. Secondly, there is no bespoke treatment, so doctors will throw the kitchen sink at it—radio and chemo—and hope for the best.

Scientists say that a treatment for lobular can be developed; the only reason it has not is lack of funding for research. In May 2023, Dr Susan Michaelis, who had been diagnosed with lobular 12 years earlier, launched the lobular moonshot project. One of the moonshot campaigners is my constituent Katie Swinburne: a mother of three and a popular local school teacher. I met Katie recently in her home, along with Susan and her husband Tristan Loraine.

Susan had deteriorated since we had met on Zoom. She explained that her cancer was terminal—it was too late to save her—but she was determined to spend her last years campaigning for change. We hoped that she would have years to come. Katie, however, still has a hope for treatment and a cure in her lifetime. She hopes to see her children grow old and to carry grandchildren.

This coming Monday, as has been said, we were due to meet the Secretary of State to press the case for £20 million for the lobular moonshot project, which is just £240 for every person diagnosed. We will still press ahead with that meeting, but two days ago Dr Susan Michaelis, the founder of the moonshot project, sadly passed away 14 years after her initial diagnosis. She died peacefully at 5 pm, proudly wearing her lobular moonshot project T-shirt. She was surrounded by her husband Tristan Loraine and some close friends.

The lobular moonshot project is the most bipartisan, politically supported campaign in the nation right now, with 370 MPs from across all parties having called on the Government to fund this vital research. During her 14 years' suffering with this cruel and brutal illness, Susan was given eight different forms of breast cancer treatment, but none of them was able to stop the disease progressing. None of the treatments she received was based on the basic biology of lobular breast cancer because, as I said, it has not yet been explored.

In the last couple of years, Susan and a team of campaigning women who have been touched by the disease have already raised £125,000 to set up the infrastructure to carry out research at the Manchester breast centre led by Professor Robert Clarke. Her remarkable campaign has touched women across the country. If I may, I will share a few comments about Susan.

As a young girl, Susan always dreamed of being a pilot, but there were few opportunities for women to become commercial pilots in Australia at the time so she completed a degree in marketing and saved up the money to become a private pilot. After teaching people to fly, she finally became an airline pilot, starting off in the challenging Northern Territory of Australia flying to remote communities.

In 1994, when she was 32, Susan started flying the British Aerospace 146 and immediately noticed a strange smell in the aircraft. The breathing air supply was being contaminated with jet engine oil decomposition products. Despite being told that there was nothing to be concerned about, she suffered increasing health effects from those exposures, and three years later in 1997 she collapsed after a flight. She felt like she was having a stroke. Three years of exposure to a complex mix of chemicals including organophosphates, carbon monoxide and endocrine disrupting chemicals had seriously affected her health, and she lost her airline pilot medical certificate. She never flew as an airline pilot again.

Two years later, Susan was partly responsible for the Australian Senate carrying out a year-long investigation into the problem, which concluded that the chemical exposures were affecting flight safety and crew and public health. She was determined that the aviation industry should resolve the problem so she undertook the first ever PhD into the subject, and later qualified as an air accident investigator. She published numerous scientific papers on the subject, and briefed airlines, oil manufacturers, Governments and countless others on the topics.

In 2007, 10 years after her first flight as an airline pilot, Australian Senator O'Brien revealed a secret agreement between British Aerospace, the aircraft engine manufacturer, and two Australian airlines, in which a large sum of money and aircraft parts were given in a settlement for problems relating to oil contaminating the breathing air supply on the aircraft model that Susan flew. After her injuries, sustained as an airline pilot, Susan completed Half Ironman triathlons and became the first Australian to receive the British citizen award for her and Tristan's work on aviation safety. Last year, the Dr Susan Michaelis rose was launched by Harkness Roses at the Chelsea flower show. Susan has appeared or been portrayed in numerous documentaries and films. She will be greatly missed, but the campaign that she founded will live on.

12.36 pm

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): I once more thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) for all he has done to bring the Bill forward. We, along with thousands of families throughout the UK, all owe him a huge debt. I am proud to have supported the Bill from the very beginning. I also pay tribute to the ongoing work of the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh), whose inspirational advocacy has set the example on these issues, particularly for new MPs like me.

I do not think I need take up much time restating why the Rare Cancers Bill matters; every hon. Member who sat alongside me in the Bill Committee knows that already, which is why we reported it to the House unamended. The Minister also knows, which is why the Government have repeatedly pledged their support, and organisations working with rare cancers know too. The Brain Tumour Charity describes this legislation as "a Bill of hope" and Pancreatic Cancer UK talks of its potential to transform survival for rare cancers. That potential sits with us today.

The Rare Cancers Bill takes concrete and common-sense steps to facilitate research into rare cancers, to improve the speed and quality of necessary clinical trials, and to help get orphan drugs—medicines often neglected because they target uncommon conditions—to those patients who so desperately need them. I urge the House to advance the Bill and ensure that its provisions become law as rapidly as possible. So much depends on getting this one right. To that end, I briefly remind the House what exactly is at stake today for families, including my own, throughout this country.

When I spoke on Second Reading, I told the story of Group Captain Pip Harding, my brother-in-law, who was diagnosed with an aggressive stage 4 glioblastoma in February 2024. His prognosis was such that he should not be here today. Pip is married with five children. He has served in the Royal Air Force in the Indo-Pacific, in Afghanistan and in Iraq. I am immensely proud of him, not least because of his battle against this devastating diagnosis.

Pip's family, friends and those who loved him rallied around him. More than 600 of them set up a GoFundMe page to cover the cost of an experimental cancer treatment, oncothermia, which uses radio frequencies to target and treat malignant cancer cells. I am happier than I can say to be able to tell the House that Pip is alive and well, and that the tumour has shrunk from 7cm to less than 1 cm as a result of that treatment. For Pip's loved ones, of course, that means the world—oncothermia is winning it for him. It means that there is more time for his family and more time for more treatments to come online to get his health back.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): It is a matter of delight that the hon. Lady's brother-in-law is still well and that the tumour has shrunk. But I should say to the House and all Members that that machine, which my late sister campaigned and raised funding for, is currently situated in a private hospital in London because it would get nowhere near an NHS hospital. That is the tragedy of the circumstances that we find ourselves in: our system is so restrictive that we cannot look for new innovations within our NHS.

Monica Harding: I thank the hon. Member for all her advocacy on the issue. She makes an important point, which was made previously: rare cancers are not rare for the victims and their families. That is why we need to bring such treatments into the NHS so that they are available for all, not just for those who set up GoFundMe pages that win tens of thousands of pounds.

Of glioblastoma, Pip said:

“This is a very sad disease of which the cause is...unknown and seems to randomly strike individuals. It would be just amazing if the policy to support these people was changed by this vote and I am personally so grateful to all of you who are so kindly driving this forward.”

His successful story and the challenge of accessing oncothermia underscore equally the importance of the legislation. In sum, innovative new treatments for rare cancers must be brought to patients as fast as possible.

My constituents in Esher and Walton, particularly those whose lives have been scarred by cancer, also feel that very deeply. In the last few days, many have written to me about the legislation to share why its success matters so much to them. One told me of his very young son, who was diagnosed last year with a rare brain tumour that has turned their lives upside down. One told me about his own battle with brain cancer, the excellent care that he has received in the NHS and the fundamentally limited treatment options available to him based on the current state of research and drug development and marketing. Another constituent whose daughter has glioblastoma offered me an important reminder about our work today when they said that

“every important issue or gain has to be fought over fiercely before anything is achieved.”

They are absolutely right.

I will take this opportunity to highlight some other people who have fought and for whom the Bill is vital. My constituent Kate Ford has been campaigning for the lobular moonshot project since she was diagnosed with lobular breast cancer two years. We have already heard how research for that disease has been entirely insufficient and how necessary that project is right now. I am proud to be one of hundreds of MPs on both sides of the House calling on the Government to support it, as we have heard. Like the hon. Members for Farnham and Bordon (Gregory Stafford) and for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth), I was deeply saddened to hear of the death of Dr Susan Michaelis, the project's founder, this week. My constituent Kate is now carrying forward Susan's torch and will be at the meeting with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on Monday. I call on the Government to answer Susan's call and finally back the project.

While I have the Government's attention, I will raise one more important issue. Pip was an RAF helicopter pilot. There are a growing number of veterans who served as aircrew on military helicopters and were exposed to exhaust fumes during their time in the forces, and who have now been diagnosed with rare cancers, including blood cancers. That issue has been raised in recent months by hon. Members on both sides of the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) and the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham).

I understand that the Ministry of Defence is currently working to test engine exhaust emissions and to develop a clearer understanding of the health challenges facing

veterans, including rare cancers related to their service. Those are welcome steps, but they are insufficient. Although I am conscious that the MOD does not unequivocally recognise the link between exhaust fumes and such cancers, and that I am not addressing the Minister for Veterans, I urge the Minister to do all he can to accelerate the collation of veterans' health data, which is an essential project that could otherwise drag on, and to support the development of cancer screening programmes for veterans who may be at risk due to their record of serving this country.

Cancer can touch any life. It can come unexpectedly, and it can come cruelly. The Bill offers hope to all those whose cancer has been neglected and disregarded in drug research and clinical trials, but has upended their entire life. It offers us the chance to say to all those people, “You are not alone and you are not forgotten.”

Winning the battle against rare cancers requires us to advance on many fronts at once, so I gently push the Minister, even as he supports the Bill becoming law, to consider the vital calls from the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden to improve outcomes for brain cancer patients, which have shown too little improvement for too long. Will the Minister commit to a target of getting 200 glioblastoma patients on to promising new clinical trials every year? Will he engage with the private sector to urge pharmaceutical companies to more rapidly make their drugs available for those trials? Will he consider mandating training in brain cancer specific oncology for all doctors seeking to become medical oncologists? Will he also ensure that all neuro-oncology multidisciplinary teams have as a core member a medical oncologist able to contribute their expertise to a patient's care?

Finally, even as we advance the Bill today, we must not lose sight of the need to do far better by patients with cancer, rare or not. One of the most reassuring aspects of this Bill has been its cross-party support, but while I am here, I want to ask the Minister whether he will listen to Liberal Democrat calls and turn the current target of starting treatment within 62 days of an urgent cancer referral into an iron-clad guarantee? Will he also consider our call to expand the capacity of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency as another way of ensuring that innovative drugs are not snarled up in red tape and that they reach patients faster?

There is much work left to do, but today's legislation is a real step in the right direction. I take note of the humbleness of the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West, so I will speak about the reach of the Bill and his work. Good politics changes lives and the best politics saves lives. All of us here in this place are committed to do that. I am proud to support this Bill, and I urge Members to vote for all those lives that the Bill could help save and for those families whose lives it will change.

12.46 pm

Amanda Hack (North West Leicestershire) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) for his tireless work on the Bill. If anyone gets the opportunity to listen to the podcast he did a few weeks ago, it is well worth listening to—really insightful. He offers the opportunity to address the deep inequalities faced by people diagnosed with rare and less common cancers. In fact, this is the second

debate on rare cancers that I have attended this week. The hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding) mentioned the previous debate; I had the pleasure of sitting alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) in that debate on myeloma—a rare blood cancer that affects just a few thousand people a year in the UK. However, there is a concern of the link between the condition and people flying helicopters in the military.

As we have heard, around 180,000 people are diagnosed with a rare or less common cancer every year. Last year, one of those was my constituent Isaac Wilton, and his story will be the basis of my speech. I had the pleasure of meeting Isaac last year. He was diagnosed with a grade 4 glioblastoma brain tumour at just 21—he had a seizure during a workout at the gym. His sister Harriet set up a fundraiser to pay for immunotherapy, and within the first six days they raised £144,000. Isaac and his family have organised various events to support the cause, including charity football matches and community events. Last October, family and friends joined Isaac to walk from Leicester City football club to Coalville clock tower, covering 13 miles—an extraordinary feat. The campaign is now at an incredible £193,000, just shy of its £200,000 goal to pay for Isaac's treatment. His fundraising not only helps him access life-altering treatment, but raises vital awareness about the urgent need for more brain tumour research, which receives around just 1% of national cancer research funding.

Isaac's voice matters much more than mine in this debate, and I would like to share something he has written with the House:

"The disease I'm fighting, that gives every single person diagnosed such a poor prognosis, only allows for a little hope. Living a life day to day almost waiting for the bad news. I'm one of the lucky ones. One of the lucky ones who was able to see a community of over 15,000 people come together. Some of which I knew and some from overseas...to raise enough money for me to at least explore other options that I cannot be given through the NHS. Options that might just give me a second chance. But me and others in this fight should be given a fair chance to win this battle because the chances right now are heartbreaking."

This Bill will give hope to Isaac and others in his position. As we have heard, we are not talking about a minority. In the UK, 47% of cancer diagnoses and 55% of all cancer deaths are from rare and less common cancers. A system that leaves nearly half of cancer patients behind is not a fair system—not for Isaac, not for the father-in-law of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West, and not for many others we have heard about today. I will support the Bill today, and I thank my hon. Friend for his incredibly dedicated hard work in bringing forward this change.

12.49 pm

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) for his work on the Bill, and all those who have supported its progress.

I rise briefly for two reasons. First, to speak for a constituent, Kate, who is only 40 years old and has an inoperable brain cancer. Kate contacted me this week to tell me about her case and to encourage me to support the Bill. She is under the care of 10 consultants and specialists as her condition worsens. Research on brain cancers and glioblastomas has hardly progressed in

50 years, yet it is the biggest cancer killer in children and adults under the age of 40. The Bill should improve the rate of cancer patients who are offered trials; currently, 82% are not and that is not good enough. The Bill should improve those chances.

I also rise to join the tributes to Dr Susan Michaelis, who passed away on Wednesday, for her campaigning for the better treatment of lobular breast cancer. I met Dr Michaelis in October last year, and was moved by her advocacy for improvements in treatment, and subsequently, by her support for the Bill.

For Kate, Susan and many others, it is important that the Bill passes today. Please do support it.

12.51 pm

Dame Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I do not want to detain the House too long. I just want to put on record my admiration for my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) in guiding the Bill to this point and now hopefully forward—with a former Member of this House, Julie Elliott, now Baroness Elliott, in the House of Lords. When I met my hon. Friend to berate him about why he should take up this issue, I did not know about his father-in-law, but I have to say how proud his family must be of what he has done here. I mention that point because it is a motivator for all of us. When we understand the true desperation of facing these problems, it can often be the driver to make us work harder for achievement.

I am delighted to say that 10 days ago, with the kindness of Mr Speaker, we launched the first glioblastoma drug trial in memory of my late sister. It will be run by Dr Paul Mulholland, who is, regrettably, too well known to many Members. He is Europe's leading consultant on glioblastoma, based out of University College London, and the trial will include 16 patients at University College hospital who are newly diagnosed. They will have had no treatment and no surgery, and will be treated with immunotherapy. We are excited and delighted by the trial. It opened last Friday and Dr Mulholland met the first recruit last Monday.

This could be the start of great things, but it is the start of a journey. It is a journey that is incomprehensibly difficult and requires a wonderful set of circumstances: Europe's leading consultant at a big teaching hospital in London, next to a world-leading university; a group of my sister's friends who campaigned tirelessly to raise funds, raising over £1 million in the last year—the trial will cost something in that order; and a Secretary of State for Health and Social Care who gave us excellent support and intervened to help us to get to the point of starting the trial.

Those efforts are not available to everybody. We need to change things to get more trials. Without trials, there will be no progress, and I know from my own experience that there will be no progress, even with this brilliant Bill, unless we all, as Members, insist on progress and keep an eye on it. I am so thrilled that so many people, on the Labour Benches and in all parties across the House, are united in their commitment to see progress on glioblastoma. We want to see hope not only for glioblastoma victims but for the victims of all rare cancers. By starting with glioblastoma, we start with the worst. We will not cease our campaign until everybody has a fair chance of a cure.

12.55 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh), and I thank her for everything she has done on this issue. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) for taking up this Bill and getting it to this stage.

As I suspect many Members did, I rearranged my diary at short notice to be here, because we thought there might be a risk of the Bill not going through, but I am glad that that does not appear to be transpiring. I am here for three reasons. One is obviously the merits of this Bill, which recommend themselves entirely to all sides of the House. The second is the excellent whipping by my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden—I think most of the London parliamentary Labour party are secreted around the building just in case they should be needed. Thirdly, and above all, it is because of my experience of what constituents of mine have gone through, and I am sure that goes for all Members here; the emails were pinging in yesterday saying, “You need to be there tomorrow”.

I want to briefly mention two cases. The first is that of my Chiswick constituent Rob King. I will read a few words of his, because he says what needs to be said more eloquently than I could:

“During early 22 my wife Marie felt extremely tired. We thought three children, busy life. Weeks later she had a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and we were faced with no treatment options beyond chemotherapy to possibly extend her life by a short while. We didn’t know timeframe, but she had just six months of life remaining. The chemotherapy was brutal. Relentless. She died aged 39 in October 2022, just days off her 40th birthday. What she endured, nobody should have to endure. How she endured this is still beyond my comprehension.

What this misses is the impact on those around her. The parents in their 70s who lost their daughter. The siblings left without a sister, without an auntie for their children. Her husband, me, left dealing with things never planned, never envisaged in life. And most importantly three little children, aged at the time one and a half, five and seven. Having the conversation to say mummy is never coming back will haunt me forever—explaining to an infant what is a rare cancer and why it cannot be fixed because there is no treatment. The impact of this rolls on as they get older.

Rare cancers are not rare. They hugely impact everyone around individuals affected. We urgently need some direction from Government to focus on these, give those affected some hope, and longer term see some results.”

The second case is of Katie Bernard and her son Alex. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden knows this case because she helped with it. Alex suffered from a brain tumour so rare that I think there have only been 100 cases diagnosed around the world. His parents went to extraordinary lengths to get drugs delivered. Almost on a daily basis we were monitoring the pharmacies and hospitals, ensuring that he had treatment. He did get the treatment and it did prolong his life, but sadly Alex passed away on 30 January this year, aged just 23.

There are many more cases like Marie and Alex, and it is for them that the Bill has been brought forward. It is not the only thing that needs to be done, but it is an important step forward. I hope that, by passing it through the House today and it being enacted later this year or early next year, we will make a change. I thank

all Members who have contributed or been here today. I know that my constituents and theirs will be listening to this debate and hoping for the Bill’s success.

12.59 pm

Dr Allison Gardner (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Stella Gilbert, née Forster, was a much-beloved wife, mother, grandmother and sister to my partner, Jim. She died of a rare cancer. Stella was great—my partner’s only sibling, a huge matriarch and, as we found out at her funeral, given to bossing her local vicar about. She had bile duct cancer, which affects approximately 2,000 people a year in the UK.

In the Bill’s terms, bile duct cancer is a rare cancer; the Bill classes rare cancers as those that affect no more than one in 2,000 people, and bile duct cancer affects 0.06 in 2,000. Worryingly, research suggests that that incidence is increasing. I am grateful that the Bill allows for some flexibility, because if bile duct cancer were to pop over that cut-off of one in 2,000, it would go into a different category. That flexibility is appreciated.

Guts UK states that the cause of bile duct cancer is unknown in six to seven out of 10 patients. It is a rare cancer that is increasing in prevalence, often with causes unknown, and nearly 3,000 people a year die from it. Would it not be better therefore not only to prevent this cancer from increasing in prevalence, but to make it even rarer and more curable? The Bill opens the door to that. It will allow for more focus on rare and less survivable cancers.

Research is crucial in tackling cancer, and I am heartened by this Government’s commitment to tackling all cancer types. A national cancer plan is due to be published following the NHS 10-year health plan, and the DHSC has committed more than £1.6 billion for research to the National Institute for Health and Care Research, which is quite rightly treating cancer as a major priority and allocating funding accordingly.

As an officer of the all-party parliamentary group on the less survivable cancers, I am particularly grateful for the commitment to tackling brain cancer, which I have heard a lot about in this place today, in partnership with organisations such as the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission and Brain Tumour Research. I also welcome the funding call for the brain tumour research consortium, which I read about recently.

I cannot stand in this place and debate a Bill on rare cancers and not mention pancreatic cancer, which is a relatively rare cancer and a less survivable one. It is the fifth biggest cancer killer in the UK. My mum, Breeda, died of pancreatic cancer. She fell ill on a Saturday, was diagnosed on the Sunday and was dead by the following Saturday. One week after that, my father died of oesophageal cancer—not a rare cancer, I believe, but a less survivable one. My sister’s mother-in-law, Doreen, also sadly passed from pancreatic cancer after a year-long battle. We are, indeed, surrounded by cancer. The APPG has addressed the issue of the early detection of such cancers, so we hope to one day hear fewer stories like my mum’s. I thank Pancreatic Cancer UK for its support.

I welcome the Bill, which offers an entirely reasonable set of steps for researching, reviewing and, I hope, enabling the development of so-called orphan drugs—like

my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur), I dislike the term intensely. The appointment of a national specialty lead for rare cancers will be so helpful in and of itself.

In passing the Bill today, we will start the journey to a world where wonderful people, like Jim's sister Stella, my mum Breeda and my sister's mother-in-law Doreen, do not hear the words, "It is inoperable. It is too late to treat. There is nothing more we can do." I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West for introducing the Bill. I will vote for it today, in memory of Stella, Breeda and Doreen.

1.3 pm

Harpreet Uppal (Huddersfield) (Lab): There have already been some emotional speeches, which are already making me cry. I thank everyone who has spoken today. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) for introducing this important Bill. *[Interruption.]* I have started crying already. The Bill is particularly important to me, because my mum died of a brain tumour. Too many families face a diagnosis that often comes too late, with limited access to specialised care and clinical trials.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill's mechanism relating to orphan drugs is essential? Unless we can get the pharmaceutical industry to find it in its financial interest to start trials, we will not make any progress.

Harpreet Uppal: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I agree with everything she said.

There is no doubt that, for patients and their families, an additional challenge of a rare cancer is navigating the systems themselves, many of which are not built with rare cancers in mind. I know from conversations with residents and organisations in Huddersfield just how isolating that can be. Being told that you have a rare form of cancer, and struggling to get answers or the standard of treatment that others receive, is really difficult. This Bill will play a part in extending the lives of people facing cancer, and it will help their families. Getting targeted research and clear care pathways will be really important, and I have no doubt that improving patient recruitment into clinical trials for rare cancers will mean so much to those families.

Again, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West, as well as the Ministers, my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh), and all the charities that have pushed this Bill forward.

1.5 pm

Anneliese Midgley (Knowsley) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur), and congratulate him on bringing this crucial Bill before the House. I pay tribute to him and to every Member who has spoken so powerfully today. When this Bill becomes law, it will ease pain, save lives, and ensure justice and fairness in relation to a disease that is indiscriminate. A number of constituents have contacted me, urging me to support the Bill today. They all have their own stories—their own first-hand

experience—each one so moving and powerful. Today, though, I want to relay the story of one of them: Chelsea.

Chelsea is a 31-year-old mother to a 10-year-old boy. She was diagnosed with a rare, aggressive form of sarcoma in April 2024. For more than a year before her diagnosis, Chelsea did everything right—she made repeated visits to the GP and to A&E, clearly presenting with symptoms that should have been checked out, but time and again, her concerns were dismissed. She was not listened to; she was ignored, and that failure led to a devastating delay in diagnosis. By the time she was taken seriously, her cancer had progressed to stage 4. She has endured two major surgeries and has now been on oral chemotherapy for over a year, and will remain on it for three more. Her risk of recurrence is extremely high.

Chelsea's story is heartbreaking, but it is not unique. I am just thankful that she is still here for her son and loved ones, and I will do everything I can to ensure she gets the best treatment available as quickly as possible. Too many people with rare cancers are forced to fight not just the disease, but the system—a system that fails to recognise the symptoms early, under-invests in research, and leaves patients feeling unheard and alone. I am so proud to support this Bill, and I am so thankful to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West for bringing it before the House today.

1.7 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent West) (Lab): Like everyone else, I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) for bringing this important Bill before the House. I had not intended to speak in this debate; I was simply going to intervene on my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh), but she spoke so comprehensively that it would have been wrong to interrupt her. She spoke about the personal motivation that has brought so many of us to the Chamber today. I have just been listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Anneliese Midgley), who spoke about her own situation, as have many other Members.

This year, it is 60 years since my father died of oesophageal cancer and 50 years since my mother died of stomach cancer, both of which are rare cancers. If I said that the treatment in those days was rudimentary, I would be lying; it was cruel. What they went through was awful, and it is appalling that only now, 60 years later, are we in this House trying to change that. This is an historic Bill, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden—I know what this campaign has meant to her, and to all who loved her sister. I ask the Minister to make sure that everything in this Bill is done as swiftly as possible. We cannot wait any longer.

1.9 pm

Sir Christopher Chope: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brent West (Barry Gardiner). I echo his tribute to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh), who continues to be a pioneer in this campaign and is what I would describe as a no-nonsense lady. She has been in this place since 1997, and she has made and continues to make an enormous contribution.

[*Sir Christopher Chope*]

This Bill will hopefully be an exemplar for Members who are successful in the private Members' Bills ballot. So often, those who are successful in the ballot are told, "Here's a handout Bill—we need to fill a little niche here in a bit of legislation." The hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) has used his good fortune in having success in the ballot to bring forward something that he wanted to do and that meant a lot to him, but he did not do it selfishly; he did it after listening to a whole lot of other people and realising that this is a subject on which there is deep-seated consensus, unrest and concern among parliamentarians. Full marks to him for doing this.

I was only once successful in the private Members' Bills ballot, and it was just after the rules were changed, so even though I came third out of the hat, I was No. 17, because it was done in reverse order so that it looked better on television. I think the previous Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means was responsible for that change. I have never had the good fortune of having a Bill that has been able to make progress; it is something I still look forward to and yearn for.

This is a really important subject. When we look at the Second Reading debate, in which I was briefly able to participate by way of an intervention, we can see the strength of feeling.

I go back to the Minister's response to my amendments on Report. I hope he will be a bit more helpful on Third Reading about the role of NHS England and what will happen. I have paid tribute to him for agreeing that priority should be given to getting on with setting up these research bodies and looking into these issues. It is asking too much for the Government to agree to put those things on the face of the Bill, but I think it is clear from the pressure that is already on the Minister that his Department—however much it may have dragged its feet in the past—is now intent on rectifying that.

Most important of all, we will get the Government's cancer plan. Let us hope that it will not be on the slow burner—we are promised it before the end of the year, and I hope it will be nearer this end of the year than next year. That could be very important, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans) said, it links in with a lot of what we have discussed today.

Cancer needs to be taken more seriously in this country. We need to invest more. We need to get back to the top of the international league table, where we should be, as a leading nation with a very strong economy. I see in today's news that the economy is shrinking, but that should not be a reason not to campaign to get these cancers shrunk.

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

1.13 pm

Dr Luke Evans: I again thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) for his tireless work on this important Bill. It has united the House, and rightfully so, because it speaks to something fundamental: the need for people with rare cancers to be seen, heard and addressed.

The Opposition have supported the Bill from the outset, and as the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Melton and Syston (Edward Argar), and my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) have said, we will continue to do so today. We would like to thank the charities and campaigners who have worked tirelessly to bring this issue forward: Pancreatic Cancer UK, the Brain Tumour Charity, Cancer52 and many more. Their work has helped to put rare cancers firmly on the agenda, and this Bill is part of their legacy.

I have been on the other side of this, delivering the news, particularly when I worked on an upper gastrointestinal hospital ward as a junior doctor. Delivering the news that someone has pancreatic cancer is one of the toughest things I have ever had to do, and it is worse still for the relatives who have to receive that news. I long for a day when no doctor has to deliver a death sentence to a patient, and this Bill brings that a step closer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham spoke in Committee about the repurposing of drugs, and I want to highlight its importance. Treatments that were developed for other conditions may be lifesaving for people with rare cancers. It is vital that the Bill's scope allows for innovation to thrive. Conservative Members urge the Government to embed the provisions of the Bill in the forthcoming national cancer plan. I hope the Minister will confirm that that will happen, and hopefully he will tell us when it will be published.

Finally, as the expert jeweller, my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) said on Report—his keen eye for a flaw is important—there is the glaring problem of the pending abolition of NHS England, which poses practical questions about data sharing and, of course, oversight. Conservative Members will do all we can to ensure that the legislation remains workable under the new structures, and I hope the Government will do that too.

The Bill will not solve everything overnight, but it is a serious step forward and a statement that even the rarest conditions deserve our fullest attention. As Maya Angelou said,

"when you know better, do better."

The House knows better, thanks to the tireless work of the hon. Member for Edinburgh South West, and the Bill will help ensure that we do better too.

1.16 pm

Stephen Kinnock: I again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur). It is a huge achievement for a colleague who has only served in this place for just over a year to have got a Bill this far. I thank hon. Members across the House who have spoken in the debate so powerfully and movingly, as well as all those who sat on the Bill Committee. We welcome effective scrutiny from Committees, and we value the vital role that Parliament plays in holding us to account. I pay tribute to the charities that are backing the Bill, many of which we are engaging with on the development of our national cancer plan.

The Government want to go further for everyone diagnosed with a rare cancer, and the Bill will act to incentivise the recruitment to, oversight of and accessibility of rare cancer research, so that NHS patients are at the

front of the queue for cutting-edge treatments. We know the benefits of embedding clinical research across the NHS and beyond. It leads to better care for patients and more opportunities for our workforce, and it provides a huge economic benefit for our health and care system.

On 3 July, we published our 10-year health plan, which sets out the vision to distribute power to patients and revitalise our NHS, making it fit for the future. The plan will deliver three shifts in care to ensure that the health service can tackle the problems of today and tomorrow, all of which will be key to tackling cancer. Through the 10-year health plan we will ensure that patients receive the most cutting-edge treatment, and that everyone can search for research studies through the Be Part of Research service on the NHS app.

That is why we welcome the Bill, which is aligned with our commitments. It raises the profile of rare cancer research, ensures our international regulatory competitiveness, and allows rare cancer patients to be contacted as quickly as possible about research opportunities. That innovation will be delivered through Be Part of Research, our flagship research registry delivered through the National Institute for Health and Care Research, which allows people from all walks of life to sign up and get involved in research across the UK. I urge everyone watching this debate, and Members in the Chamber who are interested, to sign up to Be Part of Research, and see what research opportunities are relevant to them.

The Government want to give all rare cancer patients access to clinical trials, and greater choice and control over their healthcare. That is why we are delighted to pledge Government support for the Bill. As we set out in our manifesto, the Government are committed to ensuring that the clinical research ecosystem is more efficient, competitive and accessible, and the provisions in the Bill align with that. We want the UK to lead the world in this space as the prime destination for clinical research.

The Government also want to give patients greater choice and control over their healthcare, and rare cancer patients should have access to vital research if they choose to. Once again, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West for presenting the Bill, and those Members who served on the Committee. I pay tribute to all the charities that are backing this important Bill. The Government support the Bill, and I look forward to working with Members across the House to improve outcomes for rare cancer patients across our country.

1.19 pm

Dr Arthur: With the leave of the House, I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. I will not thank them all as I want to keep an eye on the time, but I will single out my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame Siobhain McDonagh) for helping me to start out on this journey. When I first met her, I thought she was driven by grief at the loss of her sister, but I now know that she is driven by her love for her sister. That is

an important difference. I also thank the many people who used the debate to celebrate the life of Dr Susan Michaelis and who continue to support the lobular moonshot project that she left behind. We wish them well. I am sure that we will keep her family in our minds today.

I thank the DHSC civil servants, some of whom are with us today, for their support throughout the Bill's passage. I must also pay tribute to the Minister for his support, as well as the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Ashley Dalton)—we all know who she is—for the comprehensive backing that she has provided throughout. I was at an event on Monday with both the pharmaceutical industry and some of the charities supporting the Bill, and they all have huge respect for the work she is doing.

I really thank the hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans) for his supportive comments on behalf of the Opposition, which went well beyond what I thought was reasonable. *[Interruption.]* I was trying to phrase that in the proper way. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) for whipping us all on these Friday mornings and helping us along the way—just as he enters the Chamber.

I must also thank the many charities who have been at the centre of this process. There are somewhere between 30 and 40 of them, and I mentioned the key ones earlier. Many hon. Members said—quite politely—that they had received quite a lot of emails over the last few days, perhaps stimulated by the submission of amendments to the Bill. I think that the charities sent about 120,000 emails this week, which is incredible. As hon. Members can imagine, my inbox is a bit of a mess just now, but that tells us how important the Bill is for them. They have waited a long time for this opportunity, and I really thank them for urging me along.

I must also thank Sonia from H/Advisors Cicero for her help in recent weeks as we approached Committee and as we have started to think about the transition to the Lords with some optimism. She and her husband Dan have been fantastic. I must also thank my team in my office for the support they have given me. I thank in particular Noel and Tommy but also Lucie, Hannah, Salim, Maisie, Joe, Xavier and Evie—that is quite a long list of names because we have a slightly complicated situation with our interns just now.

I look forward to the Bill's continued support. I hope that it will pass today. As has been outlined, when it—hopefully—reaches the House of Lords, it will be in the safe hands of a formidable woman; I have great confidence in her.

First and foremost, I thank residents in Edinburgh South West for electing me and giving me the chance to bring the Bill forward. I did not know it at the time, but without their electing me, I would not be standing here to champion the Bill. I look forward to it receiving support today and to continuing to champion it as it moves to the other place.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Secure 16 to 19 Academies Bill

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

Clause 1

SECURE 16 TO 19 ACADEMIES (FUNDING, IMPACT AND CONSULTATION)

1.23 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move amendment 1, page 1, line 12, leave out subsection (4).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment 2, to the title, line 4, leave out from “Academy” to end.

Sir Christopher Chope: Some people may be unfamiliar with the detail of the Bill because it did not receive a Second Reading debate. It went through on the nod on 16 May. It then went into a quite truncated Public Bill Committee on Wednesday 2 July, and it has now come back to the Chamber on Report.

I tabled amendment 1 to highlight my concern about the consultation arrangements proposed in subsection (4). Amendment 2 is a consequential amendment. As people will have noticed, in the Bill’s long title, it states:

“expand a secure 16 to 19 Academy; and to alter the consultation question required when it is proposed to establish or expand a secure 16 to 19 Academy.”

If amendment 1 were successful, the long title would need to be amended, and in anticipation of that, I tabled amendment 2. As ever, I am most grateful to the Public Bill Office for having ensured that I was on the right lines with that and that such an amendment could be tabled.

Amendment 1 arises from the fact that section 10 of the Academies Act 2010 states that before entering into an academy arrangement, the provider

“must carry out a consultation on the question of whether the arrangements should be entered into.”

Clause 1(4) would insert into that provision an exception that

“where the educational institution, if the arrangements are entered into, is to be a secure 16 to 19 Academy...the person is not required to carry out a consultation on that question”.

In other words, it is an exemption from the requirement for a consultation on the question of whether the arrangements should be entered into. I do not see that as a reasonable thing to do.

In the short debate on this matter in the Bill Committee, there was a bit of a misrepresentation when it was stated that

“secure schools do not compete with other schools.”—[*Official Report, Secure 16 to 19 Academies Public Bill Committee, 2 July 2025; c. 4.*]

That may be true, but they can compete with other institutions, particularly those providing alternative provision.

Clause 1(4) adds to section 10 of the 2010 Act that for a secure 16 to 19 academy, the person is not required to carry out a consultation on that question, but

“must instead carry out a consultation on the question of how they should cooperate with potential local partners in connection with the establishment and carrying on of the Academy.”

Those local partners are described as “potential local partners”, meaning

“persons exercising functions of a public nature”—

I think the Bill has in mind organisations such as the health service, the local education authority, councillors and so on—

“and...so far as not falling within paragraph (a), proprietors of educational institutions...with whom the person carrying out the consultation thinks it appropriate to cooperate.”

Again, that discretion is left with the person carrying out the consultation.

I do not understand why we are abandoning the much more fundamental issue of the consultation.

There might be no competition between a secure 16 to 19 academy and an ordinary school, but there may well be competition between that secure academy and another such academy that is already in existence or that may be proposed.

The 2022 legislation on secure academies was introduced in the previous Parliament. At the time, nobody thought there was any problem with having the same arrangements for secure 16 to 19 academies as for other academies. This short debate on amendment 1 will give the Minister an opportunity to explain why that change is necessary, how it is justified, and why there needs to be a deletion of the existing consultation arrangements rather than an addition to the existing arrangements of being subject to consultation, which is the subject of proposed new subsection (2A)(b) to section 10 of the Academies Act 2010, as in subsection (4).

1.30 pm

While it is quite a short point, I think it is important. What was previously thought to be useful in terms of consultation is now regarded as being of secondary importance. It seems to me that proposing to establish or expand a secure 16 to 19 academy is a big decision—a big step—and that it should be the subject of the consultation as originally set out in the Academies Act 2010.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Sir Nicholas Dakin): The hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) focuses on the specific question of why this change should be made. It is very much a technical change. We have one secure school, the Oasis Academy in Kent, which I have visited. These secure schools are for young people who are sentenced to custody; they join the rest of the youth custodial estate, which includes three young offenders institutions and a secure training centre, as well as a YOI in Wales and some secure children’s homes.

It is a very discrete landscape. There is no competition with alternative provision or any other provision locally, because it would be inappropriate for a young person who was sentenced to custody to go into alternative provision, as they have to go to secure provision—that is, a young offenders institution or one of the other secure provisions, one of which is the secure school.

It was a bit of an oversight in the original legislation to use the term “consultation” about whether it should go ahead, because there is no competition in the locality.

A more useful consultation would be about how, because there are issues about working with other partners, including partners that might provide alternative provision, and that is the most appropriate way of doing that.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) has brought this Bill before us today. It seeks to make more sense of the legislation, so that it will be more effective for these particular young people and these particular places.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am so grateful to the Minister. What a breath of fresh air that a Minister has actually answered my challenge and given an explanation! In the light of those circumstances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Third Reading

1.34 pm

Emma Foody (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time. I am grateful to hon. Members for their contributions and to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) for tabling the amendments. In the interests of time, I commend the Bill to the House.

1.35 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I now have the chance to talk about the Bill. I did not have a chance on Second Reading, because the Bill went through on the nod, and I was not on the Bill Committee. I am the loser as a result; I was not invited. The hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) steered it through Committee quickly, and now it has come back to the House and she does not feel the need to expand on it in any way.

I will take up one particular challenge, because my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Lincoln Jopp) asked a question in Committee and the Minister said:

“I thank the hon. Members who have contributed so far. On the issues just raised by the hon. Member for Spelthorne, they are for the Bill as it makes progress. Assuming that it does progress, however, I am happy to write to him with an answer to those points, as they are pertinent.”—[*Official Report, Secure 16 to 19 Academies Public Bill Committee, 2 July 2025; c. 6.*]

I do not know whether such a letter has been sent but, if so, I have not seen the contents as I was not a Committee member. When the Minister responds in his usual helpful way, I hope that he will share his answer to my hon. Friend's question. That is a relatively detailed point.

My greater concern about the Bill comes from being a great supporter of academies and what they have done to transform education provision in our country by removing that provision from the dead hand of so many local authorities. I speak as someone who, early in my political career, succeeded in persuading Margaret Thatcher to abolish the Inner London Education Authority, which was one of the great success stories of my campaigning.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 dealt with this issue and set out the secure 16-to-19 academies. I cannot understand whether it was an oversight that the legislation was not changed then to ensure that there was a guarantee of only two years' funding.

Under the Academies Act 2010, an academy was guaranteed seven years of funding after being set up, and if that was curtailed, there would essentially be compensation for the academy.

More importantly, setting up an academy is an expensive job, as I know from the setting up of what became Parkfield school as an academy in my constituency. It transferred from a free school that started in Bournemouth and did not have premises; it was basically on the third floor of an office block. It could not get planning permission because of hostility from the local education authority, which did not relish the prospect of competition. It then found some premises in my constituency that already had an educational use, because they were the training school for NATS—the national air traffic services—in Christchurch.

The cost of converting those facilities into a premises suitable for an academy was significant. It was time consuming, and critics of the academy system used the fact that so much money was being spent on this provision against the then Government. It was time consuming, and critics of the academy system used the fact that so much money was being spent on this provision against the then Government. However, it was made more secure by the fact that there was a guarantee that the academy could stay in place for seven years.

I am sorry to say that, at the end of this term, the academy known as Parkfield school will no longer exist, because the academy trust that took over the running of it has decided to pull out. The original notice was given a year ago, and last year the school dealt solely with people who are waiting to complete their GCSEs. The buildings there will now revert to the Department for Education. What will happen to them, who knows? The investment is there. Maybe it will be used by the local authority for alternative education provision. Maybe it will be used as a secure 16 to 19 academy.

The point is that an academy would never have been able to get started in the premises at Parkfield school had it been given only a two-year lease of life. Members of this House who were elected one year ago this month think that a five-year duration is pretty short. They cannot really get their feet under the table and invest to be fit for the future if they have a guaranteed existence of only up to five years. If we are talking about premises taking on staff, and everything that goes with that—even more so if we are talking about secured premises—I cannot understand why the minimum notice period under a funding arrangement will be reduced from seven years to two.

The argument put forward is that a two-year termination period will enable the Government to prioritise value for money for the taxpayer and have more flexibility, should there be a need to terminate a funding agreement with a secure school provider. That has not been expanded upon in any of the debates that I have heard or in the explanatory notes. It is just a statement, and a mere repetition of it cannot be a substitute for a justification of it. How will lowering the termination period to two years prioritise value for money? It may well mean that short-termism prevails because the academy says that it cannot do this or that, and invest for the future, because it has only a two-year potential lifespan.

[Sir Christopher Chope]

In articulating the Government's case, the hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth went on to say in Committee:

"Reducing it to two years strikes a balance between avoiding a lengthy exit period in which Government would be committed to continue funding the secure school longer than necessary"—

this is exactly the system for academies: if an academy fails, there has to be an exit period, as has happened in Parkfield school—

"while ensuring that secure school providers have the certainty of funding to avoid issues with recruiting and retaining the specialist staff required to work in this environment."—[*Official Report, Secure 16 to 19 Academies Public Bill Committee*, 2 July 2025; c. 4.]

I would suggest that having only a two-year contract is hardly encouraging for potential members of staff. I do not think the number of people aspiring to be Members of Parliament would increase if the knowledge was that there would be an election every two years and they might find themselves retrospectively on a two-year contract.

The hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth then went on to justify the disapplication of section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 in this Bill. That was not the subject of an amendment from me, but she said that it would

"remove the requirement that the Secretary of State considers the impact of entering into a new academy funding agreement on other educational establishments in the area for secure 16 to 19 academies. Although it is important that secure schools are established as academies, in order to ensure they mirror best practice in the community, they are fundamentally different, as secure schools do not compete with other schools."

They do not compete with other schools, but they could potentially compete with other organisations. The hon. Lady then said:

"As such, we do not expect them to have an impact on the viability of other local mainstream schools."

That is fine—I do not expect that—but what about schools that are not mainstream? That is used as an argument to say that this Bill would

"disapply that duty for this particular type of school, to help any future secure schools open with minimal delay."—[*Official Report, Secure 16 to 19 Academies Public Bill Committee*, 2 July 2025; c. 4.]

I come to this Bill in a slightly suspicious state of mind, because we know that the Government are not really enthusiastic about academies. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but if the academy programme—I will not call it an experiment, because it has succeeded—had been in a position to have been brought forward under a Labour Government, I do not think they would ever have done it. This Labour Government are reluctant and realise that they cannot really abolish academies, but I am concerned that what is proposed in this Bill may be the starting point of facilitating the making of academies less financially viable and their withering on the vine by removing that all-important seven-year guarantee of funding or indefinite funding with a seven-year notice, which has to be given under the legislation. Those are my concerns.

The fact that this Bill seems to have consensus across the House makes me even more concerned. When we look at lawmaking in this House, we see that many of the worst laws are those that were introduced with cross-party consensus.

The hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth refers to the issue of time. There is no constraint on us being able to debate this Bill today, which is what we are doing. This is the last sitting Friday that has been allocated by the Government, but I am assured by the Government Whip who deals with these things that this Session of Parliament is likely to continue well beyond the autumn and that there will doubtless be further sitting Fridays. If there are further sitting Fridays and some of the business on the Order Paper today is not reached, we will be able to reach it on the next sitting Friday chosen.

As you will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, although there is a limit of 13 days for private Members' legislation, where a Session of Parliament has been extended significantly there has by convention been an addition of sitting Fridays to compensate for that—in the same way that additional time is provided for Opposition days by convention. Otherwise, strictly speaking, under the Standing Orders there would not be sufficient Opposition days.

I am not suggesting we go on debating this Bill into the next Friday, but I hope that when the Minister responds, he does not feel that he is inhibited by time constraints imposed by the Whips, because those time constraints are artificial in the extreme and can be altered. I look forward to having my concerns addressed. I am open to being reassured, and I look forward to the Minister pursuing such a course.

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

1.50 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I rise to express the Opposition's support for the Bill. I thank the hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) for bringing it forward. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) was not so keen for me to make the most of the time available, so I do not intend to.

As was noted during the earlier stages of the Bill, this legislation largely mirrors a previous Bill introduced before the election by my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson)—my office neighbour, as it happens. Although the previous Bill did not complete its passage, I pay tribute to her dedication and clear commitment to improving outcomes for children in custody. She laid the ground work for the Bill we are debating today, and I have no doubt that she will be pleased to see it return to the House with the support of the hon. Member for Cramlington and Killingworth.

Secure 16 to 19 academies, also known as secure schools, are a new form of custodial provision, with education and rehabilitation at their core. They represent a much-needed shift in how we support and care for young people in custody. The last Conservative Government introduced the first secure school, Oasis Restore in Medway. The evidence shows that smaller units that focus on education, health and the root causes of offending are the most likely to reduce reoffending. By helping these children—and they are children—to turn their lives around, we can make sure that everyone is safer in the long run.

Secure schools are not typical educational institutions, and it is both appropriate and necessary that different legal and procedural requirements apply to them. The Bill makes a number of changes to funding and consultation requirements, which are all eminently sensible. Although we agree with the Bill's provisions, we would welcome reassurance from the Government that the schools will be properly funded and supported, and that appropriate steps are being put in place to ensure that young people in custody are properly supported to reduce their reoffending. If secure schools are to succeed where other parts of the youth estate have historically struggled, they must be properly resourced, effectively led and rooted in strong local partnerships.

We would be interested to hear more in due course about the Government's long-term vision for the youth estate. What further plans do they have, if any, to open any new secure schools? What future role do they see young offender institutions and secure training centres playing? How will the Government ensure that partnerships with health and education providers are strengthened to maximise the impact of this reform? I would be grateful if the Minister could make some remarks along those lines. This is a practical and proportionate Bill. The Opposition support it and look forward to seeing its progress.

1.53 pm

Sir Nicholas Dakin: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth (Emma Foody) for the excellent work she has done in bringing forward this important Bill and navigating us to this point. I am also grateful to the shadow Minister for his support and for his comments. I assure him that we will take forward the issues he rightly raises in due course.

In answer to the welcome scepticism from the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), I can confirm that I wrote to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Lincoln Jopp), and indeed copied in the rest of the Committee, pointing out that Oasis Restore had agreed to the rationale for reducing the notice period from seven years to two and for this change to be applied to their funding agreement. As a result, there will be no financial impact on the taxpayer. I picked up exactly the point that the hon. Member for Christchurch rightly raised; it has been dealt with.

Academies were first introduced by the Government of Sir Tony Blair, but the issues raised by the hon. Member for Christchurch about academies generally are matters for the Department for Education rather than me. I commend the Bill to the House and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cramlington and Killingworth for bringing it forward.

1.54 pm

Emma Foody: With the leave of the House, I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Members across the House. I thank the Clerks, the Minister and the shadow Minister for their support, and the contributions and welcome challenge from the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope). It was brilliant to see such consensus on this important issue. I also want to say a quick thank you to my team for the work they have done to support me in bringing this Bill forward in my first year in the House, along with officials from the Ministry of Justice. Without their support, I would not have been able to do so. I look forward to—hopefully—the continued support of hon. Members for the Bill as it progresses through further stages.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Courts (Remote Hearings) Bill

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

1.55 pm

Clause 1

AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION ABOUT COURT HEARINGS

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move amendment 1, page 1, line 22, leave out subsection (4).

This amendment would exclude an amendment to paragraph 8(1A) of schedule 4 to the Local Government Finance Act 1992. It would reduce the Bill from covering four areas, to covering only section 47 of the Family Law Act 1996, section 9 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, and section 43 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009.

Why am I concerned about removing provisions relating to local government? Well, I have been instrumental in discussing, in the House and elsewhere, the costs and burdens of council tax ever since it was introduced, consequent upon the failure of the legislation for community charges. I was privileged to help take through this House that legislation on the community charge in the late 1980s. I still meet people who think it was a big mistake to abandon the community charge, which would have ensured that everybody in receipt of local government services, if they were over 18, would have made a contribution. That is all history. It was changed. We introduced council tax, and with it council tax administration and enforcement regulations.

It is those regulations that would now be altered by clause 4 of the Bill. Instead of what is already set out on the ability of the courts to deal with council tax administrative and enforcement problems, it is suggested that those court hearings should be able to be held remotely. In other words, there would not be any proper ability for people to see what was going on. In my view, the deterrent value of such hearings would be lost, because they would be remote hearings, rather than in-person hearings in the local magistrates court.

Let me also mention the extent of the problem we already have with the enforcement of council tax arrears. They are now in the order of £6 billion, as the Minister will know—some £6 billion in council tax arrears. I think almost 10% of that total is attributable to just four local authorities. It will not surprise hon. Members to know that those local authorities are Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Brent. Between them, those four local authorities are responsible for more than 10% of the £6 billion in council tax arrears at the moment.

What are we doing? Why are we trying to reduce the pressure on council tax payment miscreants by enabling them to hide behind remote hearings instead of having to face the music in a proper court of law, where justice can not only be done but be seen to be done? Why should a council tax debtor not be required to attend a court hearing in person? The court can then make inquiries about the person and discuss means of payment. It can all be done with witnesses. The magistrates can see aspects of the demeanour of the defendant in person and take those into account. Most importantly of all,

they can ensure that the court process acts as a deterrent against people thinking that paying their council tax is essentially a voluntary activity.

A real debt crisis is building in this country, and not just on council tax. I serve on the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee; we have heard evidence that the arrears on energy payments are now £4 billion or more. Why are we seeking in this Bill to reduce the pressure on people who almost make paying council tax seem voluntary? Why do we not put more pressure on the local authorities responsible for a lot of the council tax arrears?

I am lucky enough to live in the New Forest district council area; it is 286th in the council tax arrears league table; that amounts to about £69 per council tax payer. By contrast, in Liverpool the arrears are £194,721,000, which means that for every council tax dwelling £869 is owing. What is being done to put pressure on Liverpool city council to do something about the situation? The same applies to other councils, including in the area that I am privileged to represent. BCP council is 109th in the league table with more than £45 million of council arrears, amounting to £249 per council tax dwelling. Dorset council, in the other half of my constituency, has £53 million in council tax arrears, amounting to £290 per council tax dwelling. I have tabled the amendment to ask the Minister this: why we are proposing to facilitate remote hearings for issues relating to council tax?

The council tax administration and enforcement regulations enable a council to issue a reminder notice and a final notice. If the debt remains unpaid for more than 14 days after a reminder notice is sent, the council can apply to the magistrates court for a liability order. There will then be a hearing, and if the magistrate finds that the taxpayer has failed to pay council tax, they will order the taxpayer to pay the outstanding sum as well as the council's costs—that is set out in regulation 34. Once a liability order is granted, the council can use several different enforcement methods to collect the debt. It can instruct an employer to deduct money under an attachment of earnings order, it can make deductions from benefits, it can take control of goods, or it can issue a charging order. In extremis, the council can even initiate bankruptcy proceedings, and ultimately, it can apply to commit the taxpayer to prison if bailiffs have been unable to find goods belonging to the taxpayer that cover the debt.

Given that local authorities possess all those powers under the council tax administration and enforcement regulations, why are they not being used effectively? Why do we think that creating remote hearings is going to improve matters? That seems absolutely ludicrous to me. If ever there were a good use of a magistrates court's time, it is to ensure that conscientious payers of council tax in the area covered by that court do not have to subsidise people who do not pay their council tax, resulting in the enormous arrears to which I have referred. That is why I am concerned about this proposal.

Remote hearings were introduced during the pandemic and have been used in other circumstances, but the consequence of a remote hearing is that the press and the public are in the dark. One of the best deterrents to council tax non-payment would be for people who are in receipt of liability orders in the local magistrates court to have their names and addresses published in the local paper. That is going to be made much more

difficult if the Bill contains references to council tax when it becomes law, so on behalf of all those people who are suffering as a result of the more than £6 billion owed in council tax, I urge the Government not to proceed with this particular part of the Bill. That is why I have tabled my amendment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Sir Nicholas Dakin): The hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) raises important concerns, but this Bill is not about reducing the pressure on miscreants—it is about dealing with them as effectively and efficiently as possible. The Bill does not mandate the use of video; it allows the courts flexibility. Instead of the police being used as taxi drivers, moving people around when they should be dealing with other miscreants, cases will be able to be dealt with in a much more effective way when a magistrate or a judge needs to be found at short notice. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that this measure will benefit justice, and will assist in dealing with the miscreants that he and I are both concerned about. The current situation makes it more difficult to do that.

Sir Christopher Chope: I thank the Minister for his response. Perhaps the logic of what he says is that, instead of my amendment to remove the provisions relating to council tax, we should add to the Bill a provision about shoplifters and fraudsters, so that they are subject to remote hearings, on the basis that this will assist in the administration of justice. I was too slow to table amendments to such an effect in order to draw out the Minister further, but it is implicit in what I have said that I do not accept the explanation he has given. Were that explanation to be correct, I urge him to add categories to the Bill when it reaches the Lords, so that justice can be done, as he would see it. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn. Third Reading

2.11 pm

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Ind): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We covered the Bill extensively in Committee, and there been a fairly wholesome debate about amendment 1 on Report. This is a sensible and proportionate Bill. It is slim and sophisticated, and I ask the House to approve its Third Reading.

2.11 pm

Sir Christopher Chope: Madam Deputy Speaker, it will not surprise you that, in the light of the Minister's response to my amendment, I am very unhappy about the Bill. Unamended, it incorporates the provisions on local government non-payers that I described on Report. I cannot get my head round the argument put forward by the Minister, and it is replicated in the explanatory notes on the Bill, which say:

"This Bill creates a more efficient process for handling these matters, removing the need to move people from police cells to courts and for judges/magistrates to travel to attend courts in person to hear the cases at the weekend or public holidays."

That certainly does not refer to cases involving local government debts. It may well apply to some cases relating to other aspects of the Bill.

The explanatory notes also say:

"The use of remote link in Criminal proceedings is relatively common and has delivered significant benefits. It is also common in Civil and Family proceedings. In those proceedings, the appearance of a defendant by remote link is permitted at the direction of the court, including cases of far greater sensitivity or gravity."

Of course, family proceedings are in camera anyway, so Joe Public of the local *Daily Echo* will not get access to that. I am not suggesting that they should, but if they cannot access information about who is in council tax arrears and is being brought before the court, that will become much more difficult.

The explanatory notes go on to say:

"The lack of legal power to order that these cases are heard by remote link means that all arrested defendants must be transported from the police station to court"

Earlier, I went through all the stages that people have to go through before they find themselves threatened with imprisonment for debt. If they go through all those stages, surely it is important that they should be brought to court, and we should not be concerned about the fact that they will have to be transported from the police station to court or that the judge may have to travel to court. Of course, all that has been made more difficult because we have closed so many magistrates courts that the travelling distances are longer.

Sir Nicholas Dakin indicated assent.

Sir Christopher Chope: I see that the Minister agrees. We have so few courts now compared with before that people have to travel further, with all the inconvenience that that leads to.

The explanatory notes continue:

"This leads to delay in dealing with the case and is not an effective way of using resources."

I just do not think that that applies in the case of the council tax provisions. If there were a sunset clause, and we could see whether putting more pressure on councils to take action against those who do not pay council tax reduced overall arrears, then we might be getting somewhere.

Oliver Ryan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his considered contribution to the debate. I will be brief. He is making some reasonable points, but he is answering his own question. We currently have a bottleneck in the court system, and by being against the measures in the Bill, he is, probably inadvertently, making it easier for these people not to be seen by the court system. The Bill is reasonable and small, as I have said. If we can release some pressure in that bottleneck—the points he made about council tax debtors and others are quite right—more debt will be recovered and more miscreants will be seen in the criminal justice system, and that is always a good thing. He is making reasonable points, but he is answering his own question through the explanatory notes.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point, but I am not sure that I agree. In essence, the criminal justice system is there to ensure that there is a level playing field, that everybody is equal under the law and that the rule of law applies. The figures that I have given show that the rule of law is not being consistently applied across the

[Sir Christopher Chope]

country when it comes to the duty to pay council tax, and quite a lot of enforcement authorities seem to be rather cavalier about enforcement.

I just do not think that allowing remote hearings will suddenly rectify a situation in which council tax arrears in Birmingham and three other authorities amount to well over £1 billion. Indeed, some of the areas where council tax arrears are highest are the areas where we have seen complete failures of administration, Birmingham city council being one such example. As a direct result of Birmingham city council's failure to operate effectively, the Government had to intervene, put the council into special measures and essentially allow the council to increase council taxes far in excess of the 5% threshold that normally applies. The same is true in Croydon and Thurrock.

If the hon. Member for Burnley (Oliver Ryan) looks at my list of local authorities and council tax arrears, he will see that failures to deal with council tax arrears are a very good indicator of a local authority's failure, although I have yet to do the work on linking that proposition with the salaries that the chief executives of those local authorities pay themselves. I do not believe that those large, inflexible authorities will be motivated by the Bill to have remote hearings when they are not even prepared to use the existing structures.

It may well be—this point supports the hon. Gentleman—that small councils like New Forest district council are quick on those who do not pay their council tax or do not pay it promptly. The possibility of having remote hearings instead of those councils having to issue court summonses might save administrative costs and save the burden. However, in my submission, that potential small benefit is more than outweighed by the problems I have been describing. It would have been so easy for the Government to put forward this Bill on the basis that it would not apply to council tax.

Having said that, section 47(7)(a) of the Family Law Act 1996 requires that a person in breach of an occupation order, where that order contains a power of arrest, must be brought before a court within 24 hours of the arrest. That is why the argument is made that courts have to be available over the weekend and so on. As is so often the case when we are faced with legislation like this, it would perhaps be sensible to change that provision, so that the person does not need to be brought before a court within 24 hours of arrest if that period includes a Saturday or Sunday. That would be a much more direct way of dealing with this issue, in my submission.

Again, it is an easy cop-out for the Government to say that because the person has to be brought before a court within 24 hours, we have to go for remote hearings. If we did away with the need to bring the person in within 24 hours if it was the weekend, we would not need this Bill. Section 47(10) of the Family Law Act states that the court can remand a person in breach of a non-molestation order who has been brought before a court pursuant to a warrant for arrest, and the matter is not disposed of forthwith. That is another example of where this situation applies.

Section 9 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 requires that a person arrested following a breach of an antisocial behaviour injunction, where that injunction contains a power of arrest, must be

brought before a court within 24 hours of arrest. Why are we not amending section 9 of that Act to ensure that in the circumstances that the arrest takes place over a weekend, the 24 hour timeframe does not apply? Similarly, section 43 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 requires that a person arrested following a breach of a gang-related violence or drug-dealing injunction must be brought before a court within 24 hours of arrest. Again, that could easily be amended to avoid the need for these remote hearings, which is what we are concentrating on in this Bill.

I am a lawyer by background, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker. When I was at university doing my law degree—or my jurisprudence degree, to be precise—I can remember our law class going to the local assizes when a rape trial was taking place. As one might imagine, there was a lot of interest from these embryo lawyers in what was happening. In that rape trial—I remember it to this day—the defending counsel got up and asked, essentially, that the House do sit in private. The High Court judge put his feet up on the bench in front of him and said—really, he was speaking to the law students, who he knew were in the gallery—that, “Justice must not only be done, but must be seen to be done.” That was a message that I learned very early on as a law student, and I still think it applies.

Remote hearings could be justified during the covid crisis—fine—but now they are being used as an excuse. We already have some examples of where they are permitted, but the Bill goes too far in extending that. The hon. Member for Burnley, who introduced the Bill, may feel it is rather sad that it is being picked at by Members of the House—

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): Not Members—just one.

Sir Christopher Chope: Well, I do not know; I am sure that I speak for many.

Oliver Ryan: The hon. Gentleman has made some reasonable points throughout the debate. When I did my graduate diploma in law, we did a similar exercise and went to court to see big trials, but that is not what the Bill would cover. It is for small, mass cases that, as has been mentioned, deal with things like council tax arrears.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, we are short on time, so I will quietly throw myself on his mercy and ask him whether we can get to the end of this before half-past 2. The Bill would be of great benefit to the legal system. He will know from his days as a lawyer in the system that some modernisation is required. It is not always a good thing, but I believe that this is a measured approach. If we can please get through to the end of the debate by half-past 2, we can make some progress.

Sir Christopher Chope: The hon. Gentleman has a disarming smile and approach—dare I say, it is almost seductive? May I put to him an alternative proposition? He is in a position to influence the Government Whips to ensure that extra sitting Fridays are provided. Because his Bill is on its Third Reading, assuming that its Third Reading is not completed today, it would take priority over other Bills when additional sitting Fridays are put on.

The fact is that we have not yet even had an announcement about the sitting days for next year. A year ago, after the general election, the Leader of the House gave us the sitting days for the whole period through to the end of this July, and I congratulated her on that at the time. She has not done that in relation to next year, but I understand it is likely that this first Session will go on, perhaps even beyond Christmas. In the meantime, we could have another sitting Friday where the hon. Gentleman's Bill could be dealt with on Third Reading.

The question now arises as to whether I should reflect on the points that the hon. Gentleman made in his intervention or just rely on the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Dr Mullan) on the Opposition Front Bench to put in their three-pennyworth. I recognise that unfortunately we are always time-limited and regret that so many of the Report stage Fridays were taken up with one Bill. We are dealing with the consequences of that today. We are now debating the fourth Bill of the day on Report, which, if one looks at the records, is a pretty good strike rate for a Report stage Friday.

We are now in the middle of debating this important Bill, which would affect lots of people. I do not see any reason at all why this important debate should not be able to continue on the next sitting Friday. One has very little power in this place as a Back Bencher, but one thing one does have is power over the time.

We want to come on to another important Bill about controlled drugs. I am sure the powers that be will know that if we are to get on and discuss the hon. Member for Burnley's Bill and the Controlled Drugs (Procedure for Specification) Bill, we will need an additional sitting Friday. At the same time, we would then be able to deal with the Bill on homelessness by the chairman of the 1922 committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), which went through unopposed at Second Reading, but has been blocked by the Government ever since. That is intolerable—

2.30 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 11(2)).

Ordered, That the debate be resumed on Friday 12 September.

Business without Debate

CONTROLLED DRUGS (PROCEDURE FOR SPECIFICATION) BILL

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move amendment 1.

Hon. Members: Object.

Consideration to be resumed on Friday 12 September.

HOSPICES AND HEALTH CARE (REPORT ON FUNDING) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

BANK OF ENGLAND (INFLATION TARGETS) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

RULE OF LAW (ENFORCEMENT BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

EUROPEAN UNION (WITHDRAWAL ARRANGEMENTS) BILL

Resumption of adjourned debate on Question (6 December 2024), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 12 September.

CLIMATE AND NATURE BILL

Resumption of adjourned debate on Question (24 January), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 29 May 2026.

ELECTIONS (PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 29 May 2026.

DEBT RELIEF (DEVELOPING COUNTRIES) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

ANIMAL WELFARE (RESPONSIBILITY FOR DOG ON DOG ATTACKS) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 29 May 2026.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION (RELIGION OR BELIEF SYSTEM) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

LETTER BOXES (POSITIONING) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

**HUNTING TROPHIES
(IMPORT PROHIBITION) BILL**

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

FIREWORKS BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

HERITAGE PUBLIC HOUSES BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

**INTERPERSONAL ABUSE AND VIOLENCE
AGAINST MEN AND BOYS (STRATEGY) BILL**

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

TERMINAL ILLNESS (RELIEF OF PAIN) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

PLANNING (FLOODING) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 17 October.

PUBLIC AUTHORITY (ACCOUNTABILITY) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

CHILDREN'S HOSPICES (FUNDING) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

**EQUITABLE LIFE POLICYHOLDERS
(COMPENSATION) BILL**

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

REGULATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

**SALE OF TICKETS (SPORTING AND
CULTURAL EVENTS) BILL**

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

**RIVERS, STREAMS AND LAKES
(PROTECTED STATUS) BILL**

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

**DOMESTIC BUILDING WORKS
(CONSUMER PROTECTION) BILL**

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

ANIMAL SHELTERS (LICENSING) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

PETS (MICROCHIPS) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

IMMIGRATION AND VISAS BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY (SOVEREIGNTY AND CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 12 September.

Colne Valley Regional Park: Protection

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Keir Mather.)

2.38 pm

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is an honour to be here on one of the warmest Fridays of the year to enjoy and extend our time in the House for the final Adjournment debate of the week. I am delighted to discuss the Colne Valley regional park, which straddles London, Slough, Buckinghamshire, Windsor and Maidenhead—so many different constituencies. Its importance for infrastructure and as a strategic geographical location is second to none, which is why I secured this debate.

The beautiful south Bucks villages of Denham, Fulmer, Richings Park, Iver Heath and the Ivers are all part of the Colne Valley regional park. Its national significance is mainly due to its geographical location: it is in proximity to Heathrow; High Speed 2 goes right through it; and we have all the motorways. It provides the lungs of London, and the vital break of green belt between London and the counties outside it.

We get zero benefit from the ultra low emission zone—the Mayor's restrictions on how we can go in and out of London—or from Transport for London. All we have is a bit of green space that gives us a buffer between London and Buckinghamshire. That is true for all the counties that straddle London along west London and the M25.

Our issue is that that little bit of green belt—some of which, Madam Deputy Speaker, is as small a divide as the area between the two sides of the House—which is our last remaining bit of green belt, and which separates us from London, is under attack. It is under attack from overdevelopment, the expansion of Heathrow, HS2 and motorway expansion.

Jack Rankin (Windsor) (Con): The proposals for a third runway at Heathrow would take 900 acres of the regional park directly, not to mention the indirect consequences, including Colnbrook and Horton in my constituency, which would be irreparable. Does my hon. Friend condemn the Chancellor pressing the panic button and inflicting this irreversible damage on the Colne Valley park?

Joy Morrissey: I thank my hon. Friend, who has long been a champion of the Colne Valley regional park and the green belt in that area. It will impact us in such a negative way. I have fought to stop the third runway at Heathrow and to champion and protect our green belt. The problem is we have very little green belt there, and the expansion would increase the impact on that green belt, both with cars coming into Heathrow and planes taking off. The amount of green belt that would be consumed would be devastating to my area, as I am sure it would be to my hon. Friend's.

This is a time for the Government to do something incredible. They can preserve the green space of the Colne Valley regional park, which provides the vital lungs for London, while allowing their infrastructure to flourish around it. It is important that this green-belt land is preserved. That is what must happen now.

There is no protection of this because it is an area whose ownership has passed between London, Buckinghamshire and Slough over the years. There are

[Joy Morrissey]

parts of it that have been owned by London councils and then by Buckinghamshire council, and vice versa. It has been going on for quite some time. Right now, there is no additional protection. It is not common land or an area of outstanding natural beauty; it is simply land that is green and that provides vital green corridors for wildlife and farmers and for wildlife conservation across the west London and Buckinghamshire areas. All that is under threat from overdevelopment.

Today, I want to focus on the wonderful landscape and countryside diversity that is at risk. In the words of the Colne Valley regional park itself, our countryside is in crisis. The team at the park have set out a call for action, and in this debate I want to set out my unwavering support for that call. I am grateful for all the community support for the Colne Valley regional park I have seen across Denham, Iver, Iver Heath, Richings Park and all the south Bucks villages.

Given its proximity to London, it is one of the most pressurised green-belt areas. It is the very epitome of the lungs of London, but it also epitomises why we must take action now. An avalanche of developments are being proposed across the park, which would divide it and cause the closing of the wildlife corridors. They would cause detrimental impacts for wildlife and for those who use and access the park. All that is happening while the park sits between two of Europe's biggest infrastructure projects: HS2 and the expansion of Heathrow. All that development is happening while the Colne Valley regional park lacks any of the protections of an AONB. This is a cross-party issue, because the park crosses into London, Buckinghamshire, Windsor and Slough, and into Labour, Lib Dem and Conservative constituencies. It touches many political parties, because it impacts so many constituencies across the west London area.

The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) could not be here, but he wanted to show his support for the Colne Valley regional park, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Jack Rankin), who is rightly in his place to support it today, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), who has long been a champion for this area. Many other MPs would have liked to be here today; they told me to pass on to the Minister that this issue matters across the parties. It is not a political issue, but it is an issue that many Members from across this House care about deeply.

Without a plan, the development will happen around the park, and vital green corridors will be lost forever. The Colne Valley regional park has set out a five-point plan to influence local planning, restore the landscape, reform national planning, establish its status and protect nature. I will focus on two areas that explicitly matter to this House and the Government, and will touch briefly on funding.

Since arriving in Parliament, I have been advocating for stronger protections for the Colne Valley regional park. There is a real and urgent need to look at extending the Chilterns AONB to include the park. If there is not an extension of the Chilterns AONB, a specific designation for the park itself needs to be progressed. Will the Minister work with me to explore that opportunity urgently?

The Colne Valley regional park also represents an opportunity to show how we can plan for green spaces around the edges of cities. Any big infrastructure project will require the input of green space. Please will the Minister make sure that the green space that is required for any such infrastructure expansion is put into the Colne Valley regional park, so that we can work in tandem to provide what the residents and wildlife need, while the Government are still able to put in their infrastructure projects where they choose?

At the moment, our approach to national planning does not address the strategic risks, opportunities and problems that face the Colne Valley regional park. We have a unique opportunity to address that. The Colne Valley regional park spans many local authorities, yet is of national importance for the reasons set out. We have to think beyond boundaries and integrate areas such as the park, which lack national park status or AONB protection, into our national strategic planning. Will the Minister explore using the Colne Valley regional park as a case study and test case to explore just how we might do that?

We have an opportunity to plan strategically for our countryside in our national planning policy. For major developments around the Colne Valley regional park, and areas like it, the park should be an integral part of the planning process, not treated as something for side consideration. We can plan how green corridors for people and wildlife can sit alongside the major developments of infrastructure and housing that are planned around the London area. Will the Minister consider how the national planning framework can be developed urgently for just that purpose?

Finally, I will touch briefly on funding. The Colne Valley regional park relies on local authorities, grants and the generosity of corporate donors to fund its operational costs. I hope that I have set out clearly how effectively those resources are used for the good of our landscape, biodiversity and communities, but given the strategic development challenges that the park faces to its very existence, it needs funding support to enable a plan and to develop a response. Will the Minister consider ways in which bodies such as the Colne Valley regional park can be better supported financially in the context of a dramatically changing planning landscape?

Will the Minister speak to the Mayor of London to see whether some of the ULEZ contributions being made by drivers could be used for the park's upkeep and protection? The park is very much impacted by infrastructure projects that are happening in London but receives no funding from London, so will the Minister speak to the mayor about some of those resources being reallocated to the park?

There are many more points that time has not allowed me to cover, so will the Minister agree to meet me, the hon. Member for Slough, my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and others from across the House to discuss the issue of Colne Valley regional park in depth? The Colne Valley regional park matters to me and my constituents. It has importance nationally, for our wildlife and as a case study for how green spaces can exist alongside our major cities. It means something that matters to us all. It is time now to listen and act before it is too late.

2.50 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): I congratulate the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) on securing this important debate. She and I disagree on many aspects of politics and policy, but no one can doubt the strength with which she speaks on behalf of those she represents.

The Government recognise the vital role that the Colne Valley regional park plays in providing access to countryside and green space for the millions of people who live in close proximity to it. We appreciate fully that it is highly valued by local communities. We also recognise its importance for biodiversity; as the hon. Lady knows, the park contains part of one special protection area, part of one national nature reserve, 13 sites of special scientific interest and seven local nature reserves.

I assure the hon. Lady that I share her desire to ensure that the Colne Valley regional park is protected for current and future generations to enjoy, and I hope that I can reassure her today that the Government's commitment to delivering the housing and infrastructure growth that our country so desperately needs is not at odds with safeguarding the park for future generations.

It might be useful for me to set out the protections already afforded by existing national planning policy. As set out in paragraph 7 of the national planning policy framework, the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of homes, commercial development and supporting infrastructure, in a sustainable manner. The framework makes clear that sustainable development should be pursued through both the preparation and implementation of local development plans and the application of policies in the framework.

Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. To support its environmental objective, the NPPF sets out that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and sites of biodiversity or geological value in a manner commensurate with their statutory status—as the hon. Lady has made clear, the Colne Valley regional park does not have such status at present—or their identified quality in the relevant development plan.

To support its social objective, the NPPF sets out strong safeguards to prevent the loss of open space, making clear that such space should not be built on unless there is clear evidence that it is no longer required; unless equivalent or better provision is secured in a suitable location; or unless development of the site is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

I turn now to green-belt policy, an issue on which the hon. Lady has strong views which she has expressed forcefully in the past. The Government are committed to preserving green belts, which have served England's towns and cities well over many decades, not least in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas and in preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another. As the hon. Lady mentioned, the Colne Valley regional park occupies the “inner” green

belt on the western edge of London; I am well aware of how important the designation is to its integrity and future.

It is important to note that this Government have not changed the five purposes of the green belt set out in paragraph 143 of the NPPF, and we do not propose to alter its general extent. Nor is green-belt policy altered, in any way, by provisions in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which is currently in the other place. We did, however, act quickly to replace the piecemeal and haphazard approach taken by the previous Government to green-belt designation and release with a more strategic and targeted approach.

I emphasise that Ministers do not determine what, if any, green-belt land is released in any given local planning authority area. It is for local planning authorities themselves to determine whether exceptional circumstances justify doing so, and we expect them first to demonstrate that they have fully examined all other reasonable options for meeting identified need for development, including making as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land; optimising the density of development; and working with neighbouring authorities to assess whether identified need might be sensibly accommodated elsewhere.

National planning policy and our recently published guidance on green-belt assessment are clear that release of, or development on, green-belt land should not fundamentally undermine the ability of the remaining green belt across the area of the plan from serving all five of the green-belt purposes. National policy makes it clear that, where it is necessary to release green-belt land for development, local development plans must take a sequential approach, first prioritising previously developed land, and then low-quality grey-belt land that has not been previously developed, before considering other green-belt locations.

Under our revised approach, the sustainability of green-belt sites must be prioritised, and local planning authorities must pay particular attention to transport connections when considering whether grey belt is sustainably located. It is because we recognise the value that the public places on the green belt that we have taken steps to ensure that any necessary development on land released from it must deliver higher levels of affordable housing, the provision of new green spaces or improvements to existing green spaces that are accessible to the public, and the making of necessary improvements to local or national infrastructure. Our new golden rules, which are the mechanism by which we will deliver that public gain, will apply where a major housing development is proposed on green-belt land released through plan making or subject to a planning application.

Although the hon. Member for Beaconsfield did not mention it, I want to touch briefly on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which is pertinent to the environmental issues that she raised. When it comes to development and the environment, we know that we can do better than the status quo, which too often sees both sustainable house building and nature recovery stall. As she will know, part 3 of the Bill will introduce a new nature restoration fund, which will unlock and accelerate development while going beyond neutrality to unlock the positive impact that development can have in driving nature recovery.

[Matthew Pennycook]

Environmental delivery plans, as proposed in part 3 of the Bill, will address any potential negative effects of development on protected sites and species, whether located in national parks, national landscapes or elsewhere. EDPs can be put in place only where the Secretary of State is satisfied that the delivery of conservation measures is likely to outweigh the negative effects of development. Where that is not the case, existing environmental obligations, including those arising under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, will remain in place.

In addition, EDPs and the conservation measures they propose must be evidence-based and properly scrutinised before being put into place. EDPs may include back-up measures that can be deployed if monitoring shows that the environmental outcomes are not being delivered. Policy safeguards relating to the protection of national parks and national landscapes, including those set out in the national planning policy framework and relevant national policy statements, remain in place.

Having listened the hon. Lady's contribution, I think that the bulk of her concerns stem from the fact that Colne Valley regional park does not have any statutory status. That is not something on which I can give her a commitment from the Dispatch Box today. She will know that, in other cases, such as the Lee Valley park, a specific Act of Parliament brought forward statutory status. However, I am more than willing to sit down with her and other hon. Members—I take the point that there is cross-party value attributed to the park—to discuss further how we can ensure that it is protected for current and future generations to enjoy. Although I have noted the concerns that the hon. Lady has raised, will reflect on them and look forward to that meeting, I am clear that appropriate protections are in place to safeguard the country's parks and green spaces, and that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill will unlock a win-win for the economy and nature.

2.58 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Friday 11 July 2025

DEFENCE

Lancaster House 2.0

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): We are in a new era of threat which demands a new era for defence. Yesterday I, together with my French counterpart Minister Sébastien Lecornu, agreed on implementing the detailed direction for rebooting the Lancaster House defence and security treaties between the United Kingdom and France. With the Lancaster House treaties originally signed in 2010, this reboot will modernise and build on our bilateral defence and security relationship in order to affect a generational shift in both our bilateral co-operation and our joint contribution to the defence of Europe, of its citizens and of its interests. It fulfils a commitment from the countries manifesto and the SDR which states that the UK's defence relationship with France is "fundamental" to our security.

The UK and France, as Europe's only nuclear powers, share a special responsibility for European and international defence and security. Our two nations represent nearly 40% of the defence budget of European allies, and more than 50% of the European spending on research and technology.

This reboot of the Lancaster House treaties builds on this strong foundation between the UK and France, reflecting the continuation of our shared values and strategic interests. It will enable us to continue to protect our shared interests, values, partners in Europe and beyond, and, fundamentally, our democratic way of life.

The reboot will deepen our long-standing and resolute commitment to co-operation on nuclear deterrence. Since 1995, we have stated that we do not see situations arising in which the vital interests of one could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened. Thirty years on, the Northwood declaration, signed by the Prime Minister and the President at the 2025 UK-France summit, states for the first time that our respective deterrents are independent, but can be co-ordinated, and that there is no extreme threat to Europe that would not prompt a response by our two nations. Any adversary threatening the vital interests of our nations should know that they could be confronted by the combined strength of the nuclear forces of both nations.

The UK and France will improve co-ordination across defence nuclear policy, capabilities and operations, and strengthen our ability to make joint decisions if needed. We will also deepen co-operation on nuclear research and technology, building on the 2010 Teutates treaty. A new UK-France nuclear steering board will be established to provide political direction for our collaboration. Both the UK and France remain committed to article V of the North Atlantic treaty and are dedicated to burden-sharing on wider nuclear deterrence. Only the Prime Minister can authorise the use of the UK's nuclear weapons. The UK's strategic nuclear forces remain fully operationally independent and sovereign, but we are able to co-ordinate with France should the situation

demand it. Our deterrent remains declared to the defence of NATO. We remain committed to our obligations under the NPT to pursue effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament, and to the long-term goal of achieving a world without nuclear weapons.

The reboot will overhaul the existing Combined Joint Expeditionary Force into the Combined Joint Force to refocus it on the Euro-Atlantic and warfighting at scale to deter, placing it on an operational footing for the first time. This will be done through increasing the declared joint force capacity for a deployment of a combined corps capability as the land component of a broader joint force combining all military functions, as part of NATO or on its own. This will also provide for the creation of a joint operations cell, refreshed governance structure and a new strategic alignment process to better co-ordinate our forces.

The reboot will establish an "Entente Industrielle" to enhance capability and industrial co-operation, bringing our defence industries and militaries closer than ever before to strengthen NATO and grow our economies. We will develop capabilities such as the future cruise anti-ship weapon, acquire new Storm Shadow and Scalp missiles, strengthen our co-operation on complex weapons and include other European allies where appropriate. We will expand our co-operation across the new domains of space and cyber and we will also reinvigorate and expand our co-operation on wider science and technology and innovation co-operation, including on artificial intelligence.

In the land domain, we will develop together the UK and French combined corps concept in order to better jointly support NATO defence, and strive to facilitate aligned training at brigade, divisional and corps level to drive interoperability. In the maritime domain, we will expand our existing global maritime security dialogue at defence ministries level and global maritime domain awareness co-operation to better deter maritime hybrid threats, as well as continue to co-ordinate our carrier strike group deployments, including with other European carrier nations through ECGII and NATO. In the air domain, we will increase the complexity of our training exercises and enhance development of counter unmanned aerial systems.

The UK Government remain steadfast in their commitment to the defence of the United Kingdom and our allies; we are confident that the reboot of the Lancaster House treaties will contribute to the security, growth and prosperity of both our nations and the wider European region. We look forward to working closely with France to ensure its successful implementation.

As with the original 2010 treaties, this reboot will continue to serve as the cornerstone of our defence and security relationship with France and will be implemented by both the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. This reboot of our defence and security relationship marks a significant milestone in strengthening co-operation with France, particularly in a time where the threats we face have changed fundamentally. It is ever more crucial for us to work closely with our allies and partners to strengthen the security of the Euro-Atlantic region, as well as wider global arenas.

TREASURY

Major Projects and Programmes: Business Case Publication

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Darren Jones): Business cases form the basis of UK public spending decisions. They underpin the allocation and approval of billions of pounds of public expenditure and are essential for ensuring this expenditure demonstrates value for money.

At autumn Budget 2024, the Government committed to increasing the transparency of investment decisions by publishing business cases for major projects and programmes. Greater transparency around investment decisions can support the evaluation of projects and programmes, inform subsequent analysis, and enable better allocation decisions over time. Sharing best practice also helps to build capability, which in turn leads to better outcomes for project delivery and the public.

As of 11 June 2025, all projects and programmes on the Government major projects portfolio are required to publish a summary business case, full business case or programme business case within four months of HM Treasury approval. The Treasury has published guidance to support Departments in meeting this requirement.

To facilitate transparency and ease the process of ensuring these important documents are made available to the House, I am making a commitment on behalf of Government that all business cases published as a result of this requirement be placed in the House of Commons Library. This commitment will allow Departments to meet their obligations to Parliament easily and promptly.

I have also asked the Treasury Officer of Accounts to write to all accounting officers to instruct them to ensure that all relevant business cases are properly deposited. The public will be able to access these documents via gov.uk or the relevant body's website.¹

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/business-case-publications-collection>

[HCWS810]

HOME DEPARTMENT

UK-France Migration Co-operation

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): Yesterday, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the French Republic announced a first-of-its-kind agreement, which will be operationalised in the coming weeks, between the UK and France to return people who have arrived on small boats as part of a new one-for-one pilot agreement to prevent small boat crossings.

The initiative will help undermine the organised criminal gangs business model. This pilot will enable the readmission of small boat arrivals from the UK to France and, in return, an equal number of people will be able to come to the UK from France through a new legal route. These will need to be fully documented, subject to strict security checks and only those who have not attempted illegal entry to the UK will be eligible.

This controlled and managed pilot will be reviewed and refined over the course of the pilot.

This groundbreaking initiative is a pivotal moment in a new phase of UK-France co-operation and comes alongside the French maritime review on operations in French waters.

The UK and France recognise there is no single silver bullet to tackle illegal migration and dangerous boat crossings and this pilot forms part of a multi-step strategy—starting with our upstream co-operation, our two countries are working together through the new joint upstream working group, chaired by the Border Security Commander and the Minister of Interior's special representative on migration. We will scale up operations, enhance intelligence sharing, and explore how we can strengthen our returns procedures. We are targeting from source to transit countries to deter people from making these perilous journeys. We are strengthening our law enforcement partnership to disrupt the criminal gangs and enhancing our joint maritime effort.

Law enforcement will be bolstered to be at the heart of our activities in France, this includes a new specialist unit—Compagnie de Marche; a new specialist judicial and police unit in Dunkirk and Lille—the Groupe d'Appui Operationnel to speed up arrests and prosecutions; and increased capacity in Police Nationale.

As part of this transformed approach, we have also been working closely with France on enhancing maritime co-operation and supporting their review through resources, equipment and expertise. The ongoing maritime review is a big step, and this shift will make it increasingly difficult for smugglers to launch boats and put lives at risk.

No one should be making these dangerous boat crossings which undermine our border security and put lives at risk.

This new co-operation with France goes to show how this Government are taking action to secure our borders and deliver our plan for change.

[HCWS811]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Private Parking Code of Practice

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris): The Government have today published the private parking code of practice consultation. The consultation www.gov.uk/government/consultations/private-parking-code-of-practice sets out the Government's proposals and seeks views on raising standards across the private parking industry. This consultation will inform the preparation of a code of practice and compliance framework for private parking operators.

The private parking industry plays an important role in supporting our local economies and high streets. But we continue to hear reports of poor behaviour by parking operators that make it difficult for motorists to comply with the terms and conditions and leave them open to parking charges and escalating costs.

The proposals we are announcing today will deliver on the Government's legal obligation in the Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019 to lay a code. The proposals seek to raise standards to better protect and support motorists who make every effort to comply with the car park's terms and conditions, thereby allowing motorists to park without fear of receiving a parking charge while balancing the legitimate needs of operators to run their car parks in a way that benefits all motorists.

The consultation covers issues including standards in relation to signage, the duration of the parking period, including consideration periods and grace periods, the design and language of parking charge notices and the handling of complaints. It also seeks views on the levels at which parking charges and debt recovery fees should be capped. The current industry cap for parking charges is £100, with a 40% discount for early payment, while the cap for debt recovery fees is £70. The consultation seeks views on the retention of the existing £100 parking charge cap, and on the appropriate level for the current £70 debt recovery fee cap. It also, importantly, proposes new data collection requirements for private parking operators and trade associations, which will build a stronger evidence base to inform any future changes to the code.

We are consulting on improvements to the second-stage appeals service that motorists can use if they are not satisfied with a parking operator's response to their first appeal. We also plan to produce non-statutory Government guidance for motorists. This will provide clear and easy-to-understand information to inform the motorist of their options throughout the process once a parking charge has been issued.

Alongside the code, we propose a transparent and robust framework for ensuring compliance with the code. The compliance framework comprises an independent scrutiny and oversight board and a United Kingdom Accreditation Service approved certification scheme to oversee the compliance of private parking operators with the standards in the code. This means that the parking industry will no longer be enforcing its own standards, and this will improve public perception of private car parks as well as ensuring fairness for motorists.

We are keen to hear views from as many people affected as possible, especially from users of private parking facilities and those who manage and operate them, so that we can create a new framework that works for both motorists and operators.

[HCWS809]

Written Correction

Friday 11 July 2025

Ministerial Correction

DEFENCE

Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy

The following extracts are from the debate on Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy on 5 June 2025.

Luke Pollard: What we have done with the ARAP scheme is implement as a nation, under the last Government and this one, probably the most generous Afghan relocation scheme of any of the allies that served in Afghanistan, and we have drawn a set of eligibility criteria that—with the exception of the Triples, which I will come to in a moment—have broadly remained the same under this Government and the preceding Government.

[*Official Report*, 5 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 575.]

Written correction submitted by the Minister for the Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard):

Luke Pollard: What we have done with the ARAP scheme is implement as a nation, under the last Government and this one, probably the most generous Afghan relocation scheme of any of the allies that served in Afghanistan, and we have drawn a set of eligibility criteria that—**although we addressed how they are applied to the Triples**, which I will come to in a moment—have remained the same under this Government and the preceding Government.

Luke Pollard: Under the criteria in the scheme we inherited from the previous Government, which we have continued, we have made the decision, with the exception of the Triples, to keep the eligibility decisions the same.

[*Official Report*, 5 June 2025; Vol. 768, c. 577.]

Written correction submitted by the Minister for the Armed Forces:

Luke Pollard: Under the criteria in the scheme we inherited from the previous Government, which we have continued, we have made the decision, with the exception of **how these criteria are applied to the Triples**, to keep the eligibility decisions the same.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

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WRITTEN CORRECTION

Friday 11 July 2025

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
MINISTERIAL CORRECTION	11WC	MINISTERIAL CORRECTION — <i>continued</i>	
Defence.....	11WC	Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy	11WC

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**not later than
Friday 18 July 2025**

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Not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed

Rare Cancers Bill [Col. 1257]

Not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed

Secure 16 to 19 Academies Bill [Col. 1291]

Not amended, considered; read the Third time and passed

Courts (Remote Hearings) Bill [Col. 1299]

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Colne Valley Regional Park [Col. 1310]

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