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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 29 October 2025

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Farmers: Inheritance Tax

1. **Sarah Bool** (South Northamptonshire) (Con): What discussions she has had with farmers in Wales on the potential impact of planned changes to inheritance tax relief on the agricultural sector. [905986]

10. **Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): What discussions she has had with farmers in Wales on the potential impact of planned changes to inheritance tax relief on the agricultural sector. [905996]

Mr Speaker: Minister, welcome.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Anna McMorrin): Thank you, Mr Speaker. As a proud Welsh MP I am honoured to be here for my first Welsh questions.

We fully recognise the role of farmers and the agricultural community in Wales. That is why one of the first things that I did as Minister was meet members of the Farmers' Union of Wales at the farm of one of its members just two weeks ago. I will be meeting with the National Farmers' Union later today to discuss important matters for its members, including inheritance tax. This Government have also made sure to protect the farm budget for Wales, ensuring that the full £337 million has been allocated to the Welsh Government.

Sarah Bool: I welcome the Minister to her place. The impact of the changes to IHT goes far beyond just farmers. Last month, a Pembrokeshire farm gathered 57 businesses from vets, machinery dealerships, and milk processors, to electricians and fencing companies, employing almost 11,000 people. Almost half of those were totally reliant on incomes from local farms. Have the Government fully considered the ripple effect of that policy on farms in Wales and across the UK, including in my constituency?

Anna McMorrin: This Government want to strike a fair balance between supporting farmers and fixing our public finances on which our communities, including those important agricultural communities, rely so heavily.

The vast majority of farmers will not be affected by this change, and they will be able to pass the family farm down to their children. Welsh Conservatives voted to block the support reaching Welsh farms in March, which shows that the Conservative party just does not care for farmers and the agricultural community.

Jerome Mayhew: I welcome the Minister to her position at the Dispatch Box. I know she will be excellent at the job. I also refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Welsh farming is central to the Welsh economy—we can all agree on that—but it is now facing a double whammy from the mad sustainable farming scheme from Labour in Cardiff, and the frankly bad family farm tax that has been dreamt up by Labour in London. The Farmers' Union of Wales tells us that more than 85% of active farms in Wales will have IHT bills that exceed their incomes. That spells economic disaster. Why is Labour so deaf to the voice of farmers in Wales?

Anna McMorrin: As I said, the Government want to strike that fair balance, and that is what they are doing. Our reforms mean that the majority of those claiming agricultural property relief will not be affected. That is a fair approach that balances fixing our public finances after the chaos of the Conservative party, and maintaining much needed support for families, farms and the wider rural agricultural community.

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. Was she as shocked as I was last year that Plaid Cymru and Conservative Senedd Members voted against the £300 million funding for Welsh farmers? Will she join me in urging them to stop playing political games, put the people of Wales first, and work with the Welsh Government constructively to ensure that we do not have uncertainty for our farmers and our public sector, which we all depend on in Wales?

Anna McMorrin: I thank my hon. Friend and pay tribute to her work in this role prior to my appointment. I completely agree: the Welsh Government published their outline draft budget earlier this month, and are working with Opposition parties to ensure that it has broad support. The question everyone in Wales wants the answer to is whether the Opposition parties will vote against billions of pounds for public services, including vital support for Welsh farmers, just like they did last year.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): I note that it takes three women to take me on now, but I very much welcome the Ministers to their places. Charles Rees, a fifth-generation Pembrokeshire farmer, has bravely and movingly shared his battle with cancer on the BBC's "Countryfile", and I know this House will send him and his family our best wishes. His illness is not his only worry; he is also seriously concerned that his son, who is running his farm, could now be facing an unaffordable inheritance tax bill of £1 million, solely due to this Government's catastrophic family farm tax. Despite Ministers saying differently, Charles and many other farmers across the country are fearing for their

livelihoods, their way of life, their futures, and for food security. Will the Government scrap the family farm tax?

Anna McMorris: I reiterate that our reforms mean that the majority of those claiming the relief will not be affected. As confirmed by the Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle), there will be no change and no U-turn on inheritance tax. This policy strikes a fair balance and is fixing our public finances, after the chaos that the Tories left, while protecting our rural communities.

Economic Growth

2. **Alison Hume** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on increasing economic growth in Wales. [905987]

9. **Rachel Blake** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on increasing economic growth in Wales. [905995]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Jo Stevens): Economic growth is the No. 1 priority for this Government. The UK was the fastest growing economy in the G7 in the first half of this year. Wages are up, inward investment is up, inactivity is down on the year and interest rates are down. This Labour Government are delivering for working people all across Wales and the United Kingdom.

Alison Hume: It is brilliant that last month a total of £214 million was invested in communities across Wales as part of the Government's pride in place scheme. In my patch, I was delighted that earlier this year Scarborough was awarded £20 million through the plan for neighbourhoods. These initiatives will give local people the power to decide how funding will transform our towns. Will the Secretary of State update the House on how funds such as these will boost local economic growth and restore pride in our communities?

Jo Stevens: Through the pride in place initiative, we are putting power and resources directly into the hands of local communities, from Conwy to Carmarthenshire, giving them the ability to decide the priorities that matter most and the funding to pay for visible and lasting change. In Wales, 14 communities will benefit from £20 million of investment, alongside a further £34.5 million benefiting every single local authority across Wales. Together, the investments will help revitalise high streets and improve public spaces and community facilities, which is a central part of our mission to boost the economy and break down barriers to opportunity.

Rachel Blake: As the MP for the centre of London, including Paddington station, I know how interconnected our countries and our economies are. In stark contrast to the nationalist parties of Reform and Plaid Cymru, the Labour Government are focused on job creation. Will the Secretary of State update us on the impact of Plaid Cymru's damaging independence plans?

Jo Stevens: Plaid Cymru's disastrous plans for independence will cost Wales £21.5 billion every year—over £11,000 for every working-age person in Wales or over £7,000 for every adult and child in Wales, every

single year. The people of Wales deserve to know what public services Plaid Cymru will cut or what taxes it would raise to pay for its divisive, separatist plans?

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is not just farmers but lots of other family businesses who are terrified for their future. Under the business property relief, a company worth £20 million would have to pay £4 million in tax, yet that responsibility falls not on the business but the person who inherits it, so they will have to extract another £4 million to pay that tax, crippling family businesses, crippling investment and hurting growth in Wales. That is true, is it not?

Jo Stevens: It is certainly not. The right hon. Gentleman will have heard of tax planning, and so will the people he has been talking about. Investment is up in Wales and we have had record inward investment in Wales, with a 23% increase on the previous financial year and a 30% increase in jobs created. The UK was the fastest growing economy in the G7 in the first half of this year. Businesses are growing, developing and creating jobs under this Government.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): Under the watch of the current Secretary of State, opportunities for young people are now unbelievably dire. Despite what she says, unemployment is rising and employment is falling, and that situation is not good enough for the next generation in Wales. Last week, my colleague, Darren Millar, who is the Conservative leader of the Senedd group, met the Welsh First Minister—does anyone know who that is?—offering to potentially support the Welsh Government's budget, provided Labour Ministers agree to scrapping Welsh stamp duty. That would help young people on to the property ladder in Wales, where it is the hardest to achieve that, and boost the Welsh economy. Will the Secretary of State confirm that she agrees with scrapping Welsh stamp duty? If so, what measures is she taking to persuade Baroness Morgan of Ely to scrap the tax in Wales?

Jo Stevens: I am very glad that the hon. Lady knows the name of the Welsh Conservative leader in the Senedd, because clearly her colleague the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), does not. They must have ended their fight about who is the actual leader.

We are delivering for the people of Wales. We have ended Tory austerity, and we have the largest budget settlement in the history of devolution, with nearly £5 billion extra to spend on public services over the next three years. We are creating jobs, and we have increased the minimum wage and the national living wage for 160,000 Welsh workers. We are fixing the foundations and the chaos that the hon. Lady's party left behind.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Allow me first to congratulate Lindsay Whittle on his seismic victory in Caerphilly. In doing so, I pay tribute to the late Hefin David, whose service to his community was deeply respected. As Mr Whittle has said:

"He will be a hard act to follow. I will never fill his shoes but I promise you I will walk the same path that he did".

The result shows that people in Wales seek real change. In her capacity as Secretary of State at the Wales Office, what is she doing to press the Labour Chancellor to include measures that benefit Wales in the autumn Budget?

Jo Stevens: I thank the right hon. Lady for her words about our late colleague Hefin David. I congratulate Lindsay Whittle on his victory and on becoming a Senedd Member; I am sure that he will work very hard for his Caerphilly constituency for the next six months. As she will know, I am not going to comment on discussions between myself and the Chancellor ahead of the Budget. She will have to wait and see what the Chancellor says on 26 November.

Liz Saville Roberts: None the less, I think we all know that the autumn Budget risks falling short of tackling the deep poverty and lack of opportunities that still scar far too many Welsh communities. We need to tax income from wealth fairly, scrap the two-child limit and ensure that families have the support they need to cope with rising costs. The Secretary of State tells me to wait for the Budget. Perhaps she is therefore prepared, for once, to meet with me to discuss Plaid Cymru's proposals for a fairer, more ambitious UK Budget that actually works for Wales. Will she meet with me?

Jo Stevens: I am very happy to meet with the right hon. Lady.

Mr Speaker: I thought so.

Cost of Living

3. **Dave Doogan** (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): What recent discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on reducing the cost of living in Wales. [905988]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Jo Stevens): I have regular discussions with the Chancellor and Treasury Ministers on a wide range of issues, including the cost of living. This Labour Government are on the side of working people. That is why we have already taken action by increasing the national minimum wage and the national living wage for 160,000 workers across Wales. We have frozen fuel duty and extended the warm home discount. There is more to do, and we are determined to put more money into people's pockets right across Wales.

Dave Doogan: A century of Labour taking the people of Wales for granted came crashing down last week with the sensational victory of Plaid's Lindsay Whittle in Caerphilly, with Labour reduced to third place. Why would anybody accept any more Labour, as Labour's cost of living soars, its Westminster perma-crisis deepens, and 700,000 people in Wales live under its poverty prospectus? The Secretary of State will not say what she is going to speak to the Chancellor about, but does she think the Chancellor is ready and willing to help the people of Wales? The people of Wales feel abandoned by Labour over the last five decades.

Jo Stevens: I am not sure whether the hon. Member has ever been to Caerphilly or even to Wales. If he has, that is good; if he has not, he needs to be careful about

what he says about the people in Wales. He absolutely does not know what he is talking about. His party's record in Scotland is nothing to boast about. Nationalists will divide the United Kingdom, costing Wales £21.5 billion every single year.

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

Ruth Jones (Newport West and Islwyn) (Lab): I welcome last month's news that Newport city council and Caerphilly county borough council will each receive £21.5 million from the UK Labour Government's Pride in Place scheme. That funding will empower communities across my constituency to invest in community assets and their local high streets, drive local growth and create jobs, thus reducing the cost of living. Does the Secretary of State agree that at last in Wales, we have two Labour Governments delivering for the people of Wales?

Jo Stevens: My hon. Friend, the Chair of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee, is absolutely right. Our pride in place programmes, the local growth fund, the city and growth deals, the investment zones and our freeports are all the result of having two Labour Governments working together for the benefit of everyone across Wales. Taken together, they will boost the economy, draw in further investment, create thousands of jobs and raise living standards across Wales. They demonstrate this Government's commitment to growth—practical, visible, long-term investment that empowers local communities and delivers real benefits for them.

Energy Infrastructure: Pylons

4. **Ann Davies** (Caerfyrddin) (PC): Whether she has had recent discussions with the Welsh Government on the replacement of overhead pylons with underground cabling. [905990]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Jo Stevens): Overhead lines are much cheaper to build; according to the Institution of Engineering and Technology, undergrounding costs an estimated four and a half times more than overhead lines. Overhead lines are also quicker to build, cause less environmental damage, and are much easier to maintain. The cost of building this infrastructure is borne by electricity bill payers, and Plaid's policy on undergrounding will not only increase bills, but suffocate the economic potential of Wales's green industrial revolution.

Ann Davies: My constituency is the location of two major infrastructure projects—a network of pylons of 97 km and 60 km, alongside 248 wind turbines that are 230 metres tall. The cumulative impact of these projects is significant, occupying land that could support other development, and it remains unclear whether they will lower electricity bills or improve electricity connectivity for local households or businesses. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Welsh Government to ensure that those projects deliver genuine benefits for our communities?

Jo Stevens: I have heard what the hon. Lady has said, but we do have a policy to ensure that communities that host clean energy infrastructure can directly benefit. The new community funds guidance aims to improve the consistency and amount of funding for communities

that could be used for local projects. Turning to bill discounts, we are introducing a scheme that will provide household discounts to those living closest to new and significantly upgraded transmission infrastructure projects.

Henry Tufnell (Mid and South Pembrokeshire) (Lab): I like my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Caerfyrddin (Ann Davies), and Plaid wants to be taken seriously as a party of government, but it fails to recognise the importance of the role that renewable energy will play. Does the Secretary of State agree with RenewableUK Cymru, which recently concluded that Plaid's approach would cost jobs and investment in communities such as mine in Pembrokeshire?

Jo Stevens: Labour is the only party that is committed to investing in renewable energy, which will bring down bills and create thousands of jobs for people right across Wales. Plaid and Reform are against renewable infrastructure, and Plaid and the SNP do not want nuclear—Plaid's economy spokesperson in the Senedd is anti-nuclear. Plaid is happy to see people pay higher bills, to spurn investment, and to see job opportunities slashed.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

David Chadwick (Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe) (LD): During the second world war, over 200 people were forced to leave their homes and give up their land in the Epynt when more than half of the community was taken for use by the Ministry of Defence. The people of the Epynt understood why that sacrifice had to be made, but now, Bute Energy and its wealthy investment backers want to take the rest of the Epynt. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Epynt has already sacrificed enough, and will she work with me to defend the Welsh countryside from once again having its wealth extracted from it, with no benefit to local communities?

Jo Stevens: It sounds like the Liberal Democrats in Wales have the same position as Plaid Cymru. Our priority is to drive growth, lower bills and create jobs for people through our new green energy revolution, including those in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Investment in his constituency is something he should be welcoming.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

5. **Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the adequacy of accommodation for asylum seekers in Wales. [905991]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Anna McMorrin): We inherited a broken asylum system in absolute chaos from the Tories, with tens of thousands stuck in a system dependent on expensive asylum hotels. We are committed to ending the use of hotels as asylum accommodation as soon as possible and before the end of this Parliament, as part of a controlled, managed and orderly programme.

Rebecca Smith: Under the Welsh Labour Government, waiting lists, educational standards and opportunities for young people have all ground to an abrupt halt. It is therefore shocking that the Welsh Labour Government

are not prioritising issues that would make a real difference to the people of Wales. Instead, Labour Ministers, supported by Plaid Cymru, are ploughing tens of millions of pounds into their nation of sanctuary policy, which is believed to support services for some illegal immigrants. Does the hon. Lady agree that it is high time her colleagues scrapped this wasteful, non-devolved policy and instead focused their time on lowering NHS waiting times and improving standards?

Anna McMorrin: It sounds like the hon. Member does not agree with welcoming the thousands of Ukrainian refugees that the UK Government's nation of sanctuary has supported. The scheme has been used to welcome Ukrainian families fleeing from Russian aggression. That is a cause that I understood her party supported.

Chris Evans (Caerphilly) (Lab/Co-op): I associate myself with the remarks of the leader of Plaid Cymru in paying tribute to Hefin David, my friend and colleague. He was an amazing representative for Wales and a real warrior for those who are neurodivergent or find themselves on the margins of society.

I am delighted that Caerphilly is so popular today. It seems that so many people who have either only visited several times, or not visited at all and have only read about it in the press, have become experts about my constituency.

I am also pleased that the Minister has raised the plight of Ukrainians who came to Wales to seek sanctuary, running from war, because if there was one downside to the by-election, it was the talk of asylum seekers being bad people—that they are all illegal and that they do not contribute anything. Those who said such things should see the exhibition that was on at Caerphilly council and see what asylum seekers have contributed. What message does the Minister have for those Ukrainians who are still seeking asylum in Wales?

Anna McMorrin: We offer sanctuary for those who desperately need it, and we are proud of that, but we inherited contracts and a broken system from the Conservatives. Hotel use has nearly halved since the last election, and we have removed 30,000 people who have no right to be here, ensuring that those who do need to be here have the welcome and support that they need. It is not job done, but work in progress. We can compare that with the 14 years of the Tory Government.¹

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): After wantonly scrapping the Rwanda scheme, the Labour Government are now overseeing record-breaking figures of illegal immigrants. It is reported that the scandal is now engulfing north Wales, where more than 200 illegal immigrants have tried to gain entry to the country on ferries from Dublin to Holyhead. Meanwhile, there is talk about Penally military camp in south-west Wales, which was previously condemned by the Welsh Labour Government. It appears that their policy, along with Reform's, is from boats to barracks, as is happening in Scotland and Sussex, yet Plaid says that there is no such thing as illegal immigration. Does the Minister agree that her Government and Plaid have no idea about and no interest in how to make our borders safe?

1.[Official Report, 20 November 2025; Vol. 775, c. 7WC.] (Correction)

Anna McMorris: I fear that the Conservatives forget about the chaos that they created. We inherited a broken system after 14 years of chaos, and contracts that we have to honour, but in the past year we have halved the use of hotels. We have removed 30,000 people who have no right to be here. It is not job done, as I say, but it is a work in progress. We can compare that work in just one year with 14 years of chaos under the hon. Lady's Government.¹

Cross-border Rail Connectivity

6. **Catherine Fookes** (Monmouthshire) (Lab): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to improve cross-border rail connectivity between Wales and England. [905992]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Anna McMorris): We are investing at least £445 million in Welsh rail in order to right years of underfunding by past Governments. That will mean new stations and more and faster trains along the key lines, and will improve cross-border connectivity, create jobs and boost economic growth.

Catherine Fookes: I thank the Minister for that £445 million investment, which will be a fundamental driver of economic growth and connectivity in south Wales. What action is she taking with Cabinet colleagues and industry partners to ensure that a new station serving my constituents in Magor and Undy is delivered without delay, getting my constituents on track, and faster, towards their destinations?

Anna McMorris: My hon. Friend has been a strong champion for this rail investment, which is the key to unlock Wales's economic potential. It includes funds to progress the five Burns stations in Cardiff East, Newport West, Somerton, Llanwern and Magor and Undy. I will continue to work with the Wales Rail Board and the Welsh Government to ensure that the community my hon. Friend represents is given the infrastructure that it needs.

Aphra Brandreth (Chester South and Eddisbury) (Con): The huge potential of both the north-west of England and north Wales is being held back by poor rail infrastructure. The last Conservative Government committed themselves to spending at least £1 billion to upgrade and electrify the railway lines from Crewe and Warrington through Chester and into north Wales, but this Labour Government have scrapped those transformational plans, at a time when economic growth is a priority. Will the Minister seek to reinstate the vital rail infrastructure investment in the Mersey Dee and north Wales region?

Anna McMorris: That money just did not exist. We are investing a historic £445 million in Welsh rail to right years of underfunding by previous Governments, unleashing Wales's economic potential. That will mean new stations, faster trains on key lines, and connecting people with well-paid and better jobs right across Wales. Two Governments are working in partnership to deliver for the people of Wales.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we come to Prime Minister's questions, may I welcome, in the Gallery, the honourable Speaker of the Parliament of Sri Lanka and his delegation?

1. [Official Report, 20 November 2025; Vol. 775, c. 8WC.] (Correction)

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [906071] **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 29 October.

The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer): The scenes of destruction emerging from Jamaica are truly shocking. Both the Foreign Secretary and I have been in close contact with our Jamaican counterparts in recent days to offer the UK's full support. I can update the House: HMS Trent and specialist rapid deployment teams are pre-positioned in the region, and we stand ready to provide humanitarian support.

Awaab Ishak died five years ago from a respiratory condition caused by exposure to black mould in his flat in Rochdale. He was just two years old. No child should grow up without the safety and security of a decent home. For far too long, millions of people have lived at the mercy of rogue landlords and insecure contracts. Labour is ending that. Despite the best efforts of the Tories and Reform, who voted against it, our Renters' Rights Act 2025 is now law, including Awaab's law.

Fighting for working people: that is the difference that a Labour Government make, and on that issue, this Government have secured the biggest deal to manufacture Typhoon fighter jets in this country for almost 20 years. We secured that deal because the UK is back as a leading and trusted member of NATO. That is a timely reminder for the Green party, whose policy is to take us out of NATO; for the Putin-friendly Reform party, which would have no standing with NATO; and for the Leader of the Opposition, because you do not win NATO deals by not turning up to NATO summits.

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

Nick Smith: I associate myself with the Prime Minister's remarks about supporting Jamaica.

Across our country, and in Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, off-road bikers are a menace. They tear up our environment, and turn our streets into racetracks. After years of Tory cuts, Gwent police are now tackling that. Does the Prime Minister agree that police forces, and communities such as mine, are seeing the difference that Labour can make in power?

The Prime Minister: I share my hon. Friend's determination that everyone should feel safe and secure in their community. Neighbourhood policing was decimated by the Conservative party, and we are restoring it with 3,000 extra officers by spring. We are also giving them the powers that they need, including tough new respect orders that allow the police to seize and destroy vehicles within 48 hours. The Tories walked through the Lobby, with Reform, to vote against our Crime and Policing Bill.

Mr Speaker: I call the Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs Kemi Badenoch (North West Essex) (Con): Last year, in its manifesto, Labour promised not to increase income tax, not to increase national insurance, and not to increase VAT. Does the Prime Minister still stand by his promises?

The Prime Minister: I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition is now finally talking about the economy. I can update the House: retail sales are higher than expected; inflation is lower than expected; growth has been upgraded this year; and the UK stock market is at an all-time high. The Budget is on 26 November, and we will lay out our plans then, but I can tell the House now that we will build a stronger economy, cut NHS waiting lists and deliver a better future for our country.

Mrs Badenoch: Well, well, well; what a fascinating answer. It is not the same answer that I received when I asked exactly the same question, word for word, on 9 July. Then, the Prime Minister replied with just one word—yes—and then he sat down with a smug grin on his face. What has changed in the past four months?

The Prime Minister: As the Leader of the Opposition well knows, no Prime Minister or Chancellor will ever set out their plans in advance. But I can say this: the figures from the productivity review that is being undertaken—which is a judgment on the Tories' record in office—are now coming through, and they confirm that the Tories did even more damage to the economy than we had previously thought. We will turn that around. We have already delivered the fastest growth in the G7 in the first half of this year, five interest rate cuts in a row, and trade deals with the US, EU and India. The Tories broke the economy; we are fixing it.

Mrs Badenoch: The right and learned hon. Gentleman says that no Prime Minister or Chancellor will say these things before the Budget. Has he told his Chancellor? She has been out there flying kites, causing constant speculation around the Budget that is damaging the economy. All week, the Government have been briefing about tax rises. What we have heard is that he does not have a plan, so we have some ideas for him. *[Interruption.]* It is quite clear that they need some ideas. On the Conservative Benches, we believe in scrapping taxes on family homes. Yesterday, we voted to abolish stamp duty; Labour voted against it. Even the former Deputy Prime Minister, who resigned in disgrace for not paying stamp duty, voted to keep it. I remind them that on this side of the House we know that abolishing stamp duty is how we get young people on the housing ladder and get the economy growing. So why will he not scrap this terrible tax?

The Prime Minister: Why did the Tories not do it, then, in their 14 years in office? As I said, the productivity review figures are now coming in, and those show the true extent of the damage that they did. The Leader of the Opposition asks us to take advice from them. These figures are coming out, and we all know that austerity damaged the economy on their watch. The botched Brexit deal damaged the economy on their watch. Liz Truss's mini-Budget damaged the economy on their watch. So we will take no lectures or advice from them on the economy. They will not be trusted on the economy for generations to come. That is why I can be clear that,

at our Budget, there will be no return to austerity—that is what broke the country—and no return to the instability of their mad borrowing spree, and we will end the unfairness and low growth that squeezed living standards for working people. That is the path to national renewal.

Mrs Badenoch: The Conservatives reduced the deficit every year until the pandemic. We more than doubled the personal allowance. We left 4 million more jobs than we found from Labour. We brought inflation down to 2%; it has nearly doubled—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Tufnell, you are in my sights. The pantomime season has not arrived—do not start it too early.

Mrs Badenoch: On our record, we brought inflation down to 2%; it has doubled under the Prime Minister. We left him the fastest growing economy in the G7; it is no longer. The truth is, the Government have no ideas; we are giving them some. There is another way to get growth: cutting welfare spending and getting people into work. Last month, I offered to work cross-party with him to bring down welfare spending, because he knows and we know that he would rather dip into people's pockets than upset the people behind him. Instead of tax rises, will he work with us to find a way to cut welfare spending and get Britain working again?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady talks about the Conservatives' record, so let us go through it. They crashed the economy. Inflation went up to 11%. Mortgages went through the roof. Welfare spending went up by £33 billion. And they want to give us advice! They reduced the UK to a laughing stock. Because of our Budget, waiting lists have come down, wages are up, mortgage rates are down and other countries want to do deals with us. Just on Monday of this week, the Turkish Government signed an £8 billion deal for Typhoons. Earlier this year, the Norwegian Government signed a £10 billion deal for frigates. That is because of the Budget that we passed—fixing the mess that the Tories left.

Mrs Badenoch: It is not because of the Budget that the Prime Minister passed; I started that deal back in January 2024, and I welcome it. *[Interruption.]* It has nothing to do with the Government's Budget; we are lucky the deal is still happening. I welcome the £8 billion deal that he has done with Turkey, but I remind him that just last month his Chancellor borrowed £20 billion. He will have to sell a hell of a lot more jets to make up for that. He will not rule out any tax rises, he cannot cut spending and he is increasing unemployment. This man knows nothing about economic growth, except how to destroy it. In his weakness, he has caved in to the unions on their regulations that will cripple businesses, costing them £5 billion every year. *[Interruption.]* Yes, please do speak up, because I want every single business out there to hear Labour MPs heckling when we talk about the damage that they are doing. I ask the Prime Minister: how on earth can he consider adding more burdens for these firms to deal with?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady has overlooked the fact that we had the highest growth in the G7 in the first six months of this year—and that growth has just

been upgraded—and we had three interest rate cuts. We are not going to take lessons from the Conservatives. She has now introduced what I think she calls a “golden economic rule”. This golden rule that she is now putting forward—very golden!—is £47 billion-worth of unspecified spending cuts, with no detail whatsoever. Let me put that in context: that would mean 85,000 fewer nurses, 234,000 fewer teachers or cutting every police officer in the country twice over. No wonder the Institute for Government said she is on “shaky foundations”. That is exactly what caused the problem in the first place.

Mrs Badenoch: The fact that he has to stand there and make stuff up just shows what kind of Prime Minister he is. We had an itemised list worth £47 billion; £23 billion was on welfare spending, which I asked him to work with us to cut. He refuses to do so. All he knows how to do is tax, tax, tax. If you work, the Government tax you more. If you save, they tax you more. If you buy a home, they tax you more. None of these taxes were in their manifesto, which he had four years to prepare. He is raising taxes because he is too weak to control spending. He is blaming us, he is blaming the OBR. Last week, they were blaming Brexit. Is it not the truth that with this Prime Minister, it is always someone else’s fault?

The Prime Minister: The Conservatives were kicked out of office because they broke the economy. They will not be trusted for years to come. The right hon. Lady cannot tell us what her position is on the last Budget, and she has a phantom £47 billion with no foundation as we go forward. That is exactly the mess that they caused, and they have not changed one bit. Meanwhile, we are fixing their mess: 5 million extra NHS appointments, five interest rate cuts, and growth and wages are up. That is the change a Labour Government make.

Q3. [906073] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester Withington) (Lab): As Palestinians try to rebuild their lives amid the rubble of Gaza, last night once again dozens of innocent people were killed by Israeli airstrikes. What will the UK do, along with our international partners, to hold the Israeli—the Netanyahu—Government to account for their actions, and what more can we do to ensure that aid gets in as the Israel Defence Forces block aid in breach of both the peace agreement and international law?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this point. I am deeply concerned by the strikes. This underlines the fragility of the ceasefire deal. All sides need to uphold President Trump’s peace plan. It is the only route to long-term peace for Israelis and Palestinians. We are of course in close touch with the US and regional allies pushing for de-escalation. The scale of destruction in Gaza is unimaginable. The immediate priority remains getting aid in at the speed and the volume needed.

Mr Speaker: We come to the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): May I associate myself with what the Prime Minister said about Jamaica, and indeed all the islands and countries affected by Hurricane Melissa? Our thoughts and prayers are with them all.

I am sure the whole House will also want to join me in paying tribute to Prunella Scales. I suspect I am not the only Member of the House with a “Fawlty Towers” DVD box set. She will be greatly missed.

Across Europe, in countries like Poland, Germany and France, we have seen evidence of dangerous Russian political interference. Last month, the former leader of a major party in Wales pleaded guilty to taking bribes to make pro-Russian statements. The evidence shows that Nathan Gill was a close confidant of the current Reform party leader for years. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that it is time we had an in-depth investigation into Russian meddling and money in British politics?

The Prime Minister: I join in the right hon. Member’s comments on Prunella Scales.

On the question of Russian interference, it is a serious problem in countries across Europe, including in our country, where it is a constant threat. For NATO allies, the conflict in Ukraine and dealing with Russian aggression is the No. 1 issue. That is why I have to say the Reform party would be an absolute disaster for our defence. We are a trusted member of NATO; we would not be a trusted member if we were Putin-friendly. We are leading the coalition of the willing, giving security and comfort to 30 other countries. That would collapse under Reform because it is Putin-friendly, and it would be a real threat to our defence and our security.

Ed Davey: I am grateful for the Prime Minister’s reply, and I agree with him on Ukraine, but I do hope he will look to have an investigation into this Russian interference in our politics.

Last week, I questioned how the Prime Minister can accept the damage of Brexit while refusing to do anything meaningful about it. The damage is clear, with the *Financial Times* reporting that lower productivity growth alone has blown a £20 billion black hole in the public finances—just part of the Brexit black hole that the Conservatives and Reform will not apologise for. Last week, he rejected my plan for a new customs union, so can I ask him what action he will take to change the Brexit deal, or is he just planning to complain about it?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Member must have overlooked the fact that there was a UK-EU summit earlier this year, in which there were 10 strands to the change that we have already agreed in relation to the relationship with the EU, including closer trading relationships and closer work on defence and security; that is an iterative process that we will continue into next year. But he is absolutely right about the botched deal of the last Government and the damage that has done to our economy. We are just seeing some of the figures coming through in relation to that. That is one of the factors behind the way they crashed the economy.

Q4. [906074] **Mr Jonathan Brash** (Hartlepool) (Lab): Football is a game based on fairness, yet brilliant clubs that unite communities every week, like Hartlepool, are being held back by a fundamental unfairness. The 3UP campaign—backed by 72 national league clubs, including Hartlepool United, and championed by Hartlepool legend Jeff Stelling—seeks to grant a third promotion place from the national league to league two. This simple change would be transformational for these historic

clubs, many of which are over a century old. While I accept Arsenal may never directly benefit from such a change, does the Prime Minister agree that this campaign to put football first would help the new football regulator to protect club heritage, ensure stability, and put fairness and fans back at the heart of our game?

The Prime Minister: Can I start by wishing Hartlepool United the best for this season? My hon. Friend will appreciate that the structure of the leagues is a matter for the leagues themselves, but I commend his campaign and everything that he is putting behind it. I also pay tribute to the staff, fans and players of Sheffield Wednesday at this difficult time. We have delivered the Independent Football Regulator to stand up for fans and to make sure that clubs have fit and proper owners. The Conservatives used to support that, but now they oppose it.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Prime Minister has a deep understanding of policing in Northern Ireland and its importance. He knows about the ongoing national security threat and about the additional costs of dealing with the legacy of our past. He knows that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has been underfunded, and that the Northern Ireland Executive have rightly brought forward a stability programme for it. He also knows that it is under strength; in 2020, New Decade, New Approach suggested that there should be 7,500 police officers in Northern Ireland, but today there are 6,200.

Does the Prime Minister know, however, that the Treasury did not look favourably on a request to draw on the reserves for a data breach that cost £120 million? Does he recognise that, in Treasury terms, the incident was “unforeseen, unaffordable and unavoidable”, and therefore matches the Treasury’s criteria? To set aside that money in-year would be 10% of the PSNI’s overall budget—it is not affordable. Can I ask him to think about this issue again, in engagement with the Chancellor, and to ensure that our Police Service of Northern Ireland and the national security threat that it faces are not hampered by in-year financial rules?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising this important issue, which I know is of real concern to him. I reassure him that I am in regular contact with Chief Constable Jon Boutcher and the PSNI on it, as he would expect. As he is aware, we provided a record settlement of £19.3 billion a year on average for the Executive, and we invested £113 million in additional security funding for the PSNI to help to address specific security challenges. While it is for the Executive to set the PSNI budget, I reassure him that our commitment is to keeping people safe in Northern Ireland.

Q5. [906075] **Alan Strickland** (Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor) (Lab): I am speaking on behalf of my constituents Shannon and Tyler, who lost their two-year-old son Hudson earlier this year. Worried about their son, they called 111 and were told that he had gastroenteritis. In fact, Hudson had a twisted bowel and, after being rushed to hospital a few days later, he tragically died.

Shannon and Tyler are full of praise for the NHS medical staff who worked so hard to save their son’s life, but they just wish they had been offered an in-person

appointment sooner, which might have given a more accurate diagnosis. They want Hudson’s legacy to be better access to face-to-face NHS appointments for children under five, so that other families do not face this tragic situation. Their online petition on the matter has gained over 80,000 signatures. Will the Prime Minister join me in sending the best wishes of the House to Hudson’s family, and will he ensure that they meet a Health Minister to discuss their courageous campaign?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that tragic case. I am sure that I speak for the whole House in saying that we send our sympathies and thoughts to Hudson’s parents, Shannon and Tyler. I will make sure that they get the meeting that he has asked for. This is exactly why we are working to improve access to face-to-face appointments for those who want one. To enable that, we have delivered the largest cash uplift for GPs in a decade, have put over 2,500 GPs into general practice, and are upgrading 1,000 surgeries to deliver 8 million more appointments.

Q2. [906072] **James McMurdock** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Ind): Earlier this week, I got to see the very best and some of the worst of our national health service. When my own daughter needed it, it was there, but when an 89-year-old gentleman in the restaurant I was eating at collapsed, it took over an hour and 15 minutes from my first call to the arrival of two exhausted paramedics.

Basildon hospital has just been downgraded to inadequate in the latest Care Quality Commission report. I invite the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care—or the Prime Minister, if he has time in his schedule—to visit Basildon with me so that he can thank the staff for their exceptional work and get to grips with the problems they are facing.

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue and for the two examples that he has given. The downgrading of Basildon hospital is deeply disappointing. The Care Quality Commission has set out immediate actions for the trust leaders to deliver improvements. Our decisions in government have seen a £26 billion boost for our NHS, helping to deliver over 5 million extra appointments. I gently point out that he was elected to represent a Reform party that would dismantle our NHS and charge people to see their doctor.

Q7. [906077] **Anneliese Midgley** (Knowsley) (Lab): Reform says that it stands up for the working class, but the truth is that it never has—its Members voted to block the Employment Rights Bill again and again. Does the Prime Minister agree that only this Government are on the side of working people? It is Labour that is creating tens of thousands of jobs, like in our deal with Turkey; it is Labour that is getting rid of zero-hours contracts; and it is Labour that is protecting workers from unfair dismissal from day one.

The Prime Minister: I am proud that we have delivered the biggest upgrade to workers’ rights in a generation—which the Tories and Reform have voted against at every turn, as they always do with any form of workers’ rights and protections. The deal that we struck on

Monday with Turkey is worth £8 billion, 20,000 jobs and 10 years of work in manufacturing the Typhoons. It was possible only because we are a trusted member of NATO. Reform would be an absolute nightmare on defence—it would not be a trusted member of NATO because it is Putin-friendly.

Q6. [906076] **Clive Jones** (Wokingham) (LD): Targets for cancer patients beginning treatment within 62 days have not been met by any NHS trust for 10 years—a legacy of the last Conservative Government. If those targets had been met in every month of 2025, so far nearly 3,000 breast cancer patients would have started their treatment on time. Will the Prime Minister ensure that the national cancer plan, which I asked for a year ago, makes it possible for the 62-day target to be met, along with recruiting much-needed cancer specialists and replacing outdated equipment?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter, which I know is personal to him. We are investing £600 million to improve diagnostic capacity and are rolling out new radiotherapy machines, including, I am pleased to say, in his local trust. We have seen real improvements, with 148,000 more people now having cancer diagnosed or ruled out within 28 days, but I acknowledge that there is more to do. The national cancer plan will set out how we will go further and deliver the best care for every patient.

Q8. [906078] **Ian Lavery** (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): The big four banks have been allowed to abandon our high streets, basically closing their branches with impunity. Between 1999 and 2025, my constituency alone lost banks in Guide Post, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Bedlington and Blyth. Meanwhile, those banks made more than £40 billion profit in the last year alone—they are absolutely drowning in cash. The manifesto pledge to roll out 350 banking hubs is to be welcomed, but its quirky—almost bizarre—qualifying criteria need detailed revision. Will the Prime Minister commit to a wholesale review of personal face-to-face banking, which would enable local residents and businesses, alongside many vulnerable people, to access their own money in their own time on their own high street?

The Prime Minister: I know how important face-to-face banking is on our high streets. As my hon. Friend says, we have committed to rolling out 350 banking hubs across the United Kingdom, and over 180 are already open. However, I want to reassure him that 350 is not the limit; although decisions over hubs are taken independently, they can be rolled out wherever a community needs one. I am happy to make sure the relevant Minister follows up with details for him.

Q9. [906079] **Mike Wood** (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): I am proud that the last Government introduced the triple lock, and we have committed to keeping it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The problem is, one or two of you are trying to catch my eye. If we don't get through this, you won't get a chance.

Mike Wood: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The triple lock was a great achievement of the previous Government, and we will be keeping it. From April, pensioners with private pensions as low as £2 a month will be paying income tax for the first time. At last year's Budget, the Chancellor was clear that extending the freeze on personal allowances would breach Labour's manifesto commitment. Will the Prime Minister prove the media speculation wrong, keep his promise and guarantee that there will be no extension to the freeze on personal allowances?

The Prime Minister: The freeze was introduced by them. That is why it is coming in next year.

Q12. [906082] **Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Middleton South) (Lab): The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy), when he was an official, produced a devastating report on the Home Office. Reading it, it shows a Department characterised by disarray and defeatism. There have been 12 Home Secretaries over the past 30 years. Some were better than others, but none managed to get the Department to deliver the services that people should be able to expect in this country. Will the Prime Minister give the new Home Secretary the necessary resources and policy interventions to ensure that she can be successful?

The Prime Minister: Yes. She is bearing down on the challenges at the Home Office—most of them inherited from the last Government. We will make the changes necessary, and I have every confidence in the Secretary of State to do so.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Q10. [906080] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Given all the hatreds there are in the world today, was it not a lovely moment to see the King and the Pope pray together in the Sistine chapel? Does it not give us hope that these historic divisions can be resolved? Does it not give us hope that, despite the fact that Ukraine and Gaza may seem intractable problems, if we have the will to preserve the freedom of all people to live in their own country, and if we have the will to have faith in our common humanity, these problems can be resolved and we can win through?

The Prime Minister: I agree. I thought that the King and the Pope praying together sent an incredible message to the world and was very powerful. I agree that if we all work together, we can bring people together, notwithstanding the very many difficulties and challenges around the world and in our own country. It is why we should, so far as we can, unite on national patriotic renewal in this country, rather than have the toxic division we see from some on the Benches opposite.

Q14. [906085] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Cambridge is one of the most intensive science and innovation clusters in the world, and that success is based on openness to talent. At the moment, in many American universities there are many well-qualified people pondering their futures. That presents a fantastic opportunity, but it is a global competition. What are our Government doing to make the destination of choice for those people the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's constituency is just one example of why the United Kingdom is a world leader in educating and attracting the brightest minds. Our immigration White Paper includes changes to make sure that more of the world's best graduates and entrepreneurs start their careers and businesses here. We are also boosting our research and development sector with more than £86 billion, to ensure that we continue to attract the best and the brightest.

Q11. [906081] **Alison Griffiths** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): Last weekend I spoke to Paul, who runs Bah-Humbug Sweets in Littlehampton, and yesterday I heard from Matt, a tech entrepreneur whose British company employs thousands worldwide. Their businesses could not be more different, but they both told me the same thing: this Government are piling on new taxes, regulation and costs that are making it harder to create jobs, invest and grow. So when will the Prime Minister stop choking opportunity and start backing the people who create jobs in the first place?

The Prime Minister: Our small business plan was widely welcomed by small businesses across the country, not least because of their input into it. The hon. Lady complains about the measures we had to take at the last Budget, including national insurance—[*Interruption.*] The Conservative Front Benchers are saying that we chose to take them, but they still cannot say whether they would reverse them. They know nothing about the damage they did to our economy.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I am wearing all black today to demonstrate my sorrow over a fatal stabbing that took place in my constituency yesterday. We all know that one death is one death too many, but I have had two deaths in my constituency in the last few weeks. My community needs reassurance. Knife crime must end. Will the Prime Minister say what more his Government are doing to tackle knife crime?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising these tragic cases, which have a huge impact on families, friends and communities. I know that she is a passionate and dedicated campaigner on this issue. Every single life lost to knife crime devastates communities. That is why we banned zombie knives and ninja swords and are strengthening controls on online knife sales. We are also giving stronger powers to the police in our Crime and Policing Bill, which both the Conservatives and Reform voted against.

Q13. [906083] **Olly Glover** (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): I recently had the privilege of visiting Fitzwaryn school, the only special school in my Oxfordshire constituency, to see the excellent care and education it provides. Given the urgent need for more funding for additional special schools and to enable special schools

to spread their expertise to mainstream schools, what does the Prime Minister say to parents and education workers who are desperately worried by his Government's decision announced last week to delay reforms to the special educational needs and disabilities system?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Member for raising that. I think the broken SEND system has been raised with me more frequently than any other issue at Prime Minister's questions. We need to review it because it is not working for any of those involved, particularly children and parents. It is important that we get it right and, in so far as we can, that we get a consensus on how we go forward. That is what we are attempting to do.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): A fourth patient has entered the glioblastoma drug trial set up in memory of my late sister. Today, we are joined by Ben Trotman, a patient of a similar trial in 2022 that was funded by the Jon Moulton foundation. Since then, Ben has married Emily, and in March they welcomed beautiful baby Mabel. When will the National Institute for Health and Care Research spend the £40 million given in 2017 for trials on brain tumours, or will glioblastoma patients always have to rely on the grief stricken or the philanthropist for life and hope?

The Prime Minister: I begin by paying tribute to my hon. Friend's sister Margaret, who was a guiding figure in the Labour party and left a powerful legacy in helping us to tackle brain cancer. We are determined to improve cancer survival rates and hit all NHS waiting times in relation to cancer so that no patient waits longer than they should. That is why we are investing £1.5 billion in new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners to help deliver over 30,000 more procedures and over 1.2 million diagnostic tests.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): I recently met about 20 independent local traders in Totnes who are furious that the last bank in town will close in January and that Link has refused to consider a banking hub. My businesses and constituents—1,100 of them have signed a petition—deserve better. The Prime Minister just told the hon. Member for Blyth and Ashington (Ian Lavery) that a banking hub can be rolled out wherever a community needs one, so will he now back my campaign, ask his Ministers to write to Link and instruct it to grant a banking hub to Totnes, and review the eligibility of rural towns for such hubs so that we can keep our vital high streets alive?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Member for raising that. She will have heard the answer I gave a few moments ago. I will ensure that she gets a meeting with the relevant Minister so that she can put the case for the banking hub in question.

Gaza and Hamas

12.39 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if she will make a statement on the actions taken to secure the elimination of Hamas from Gaza and the preservation of the ceasefire.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr Hamish Falconer): The House will be aware of events over the past 24 hours in Rafah, including reports that Israeli strikes took place last night. Estimates of the death toll vary, but the suggestion is that up to 100 people in Gaza have been killed. We understand that these strikes followed an attack yesterday afternoon, where responsibility remains unclear.

As the Prime Minister said earlier, we echo the Americans in calling for urgent de-escalation and for all parties to keep the commitments they have made in the ceasefire agreement. We are clear that Hamas must release the bodies of all remaining Israeli hostages. The immediate priority is to ensure the unrestricted flow of aid into Gaza. The Israeli Government must urgently lift restrictions on aid entering, and international non-governmental organisations must be permitted to operate in Gaza to provide the scale of support that is needed. Civilians cannot wait.

This Government are working closely with our partners to do everything we can to support the transition from the ceasefire to phase 2 of the peace plan. This includes the disarmament of Hamas, the deployment of a ceasefire monitoring mission, an international security force and the implementation of transitional governance arrangements in Gaza. We are clear that there can be no role for Hamas in the future governance of the strip. In recent days, the Foreign Secretary has spoken to the UN Under-Secretary-General for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief co-ordination, Tom Fletcher, the Egyptian Foreign Minister and the Israeli Foreign Minister about the importance of opening more crossings and removing restrictions on aid. As I told the House yesterday, the Foreign Secretary and I will be heading to the region shortly.

On 13 to 15 October, I co-hosted with the Egyptian Government and the Palestinian Authority the first conference to look at how we can leverage sustainable support to Gaza's reconstruction. Britain will continue to play our full part in support of the ceasefire and the wider peace initiative. There is not a moment to lose to get relief at scale to those in need and to make progress on the pathway to a lasting peace.

Priti Patel: The situation in Gaza is fragile. We all want the ceasefire to hold and endure, and for it to transition into a sustainable end to the conflict, but that requires the terms of the ceasefire to be adhered to. The scenes of masked Hamas gunmen carrying out summary executions is sickening. Their continued hoarding and disruption of aid to starve Gazans is shocking. Their refusal to disarm is disturbing, and their failure to return the bodies of the deceased hostages is distressing. The hostages and their families deserve the dignity of a proper burial. Their loved ones have already been through

terrible pain and suffering. No more coffins should be released with the wrong remains. This is a disgusting game that has to end immediately.

Can the Minister explain what pressure is being exerted on Hamas by the UK Government to ensure that they comply with the full terms of the agreement and release all the deceased hostages? Yesterday it was reported that Hamas gunmen killed an Israel Defence Forces soldier, violating the ceasefire and leading to the targeted IDF action in response. What is the Minister's assessment of the threat that Hamas pose, and what practical steps is the UK taking to support the disarming and elimination of Hamas and the terrorist infrastructure in Gaza?

Yesterday, the Secretary of State told the House that "the UK has been proposing different ways in which we can help in the process of decommissioning and disarming Hamas, using expertise that we have built up over very many years."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 2025; Vol. 774, c. 150.]

Can the Minister now say what Britain's specific role is? This is a unique situation regarding Hamas, with terrorist infrastructure and threats funded by Iran across the region. What actions are the Government taking to rebuild their relationship with Israel, given the important partnership that we have with Israel?

On aid, what steps are being taken to increase getting aid into Gaza? Given the remarks by the US Secretary of State about the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and its role in Gaza, what discussions have taken place with the US Administration about UNRWA's future and the implications for the UK following the Government's decision to give it millions of pounds, despite knowing some of the risks?

Mr Falconer: We track events in Gaza incredibly carefully. I do not intend to give the House a running commentary on each and every individual incident that takes place. The situation remains volatile and messy. I hope not to disappoint hon. Members if I avoid giving very specific answers on very specific incidents. Structures are now being put in place, including the Civil-Military Co-ordination Centre, which plays a role in seeking to verify the facts on the ground where we can. That work obviously takes some time. The UK is making a contribution to it, but I do not wish to get ahead of that process from the Dispatch Box.

What I will say is that we have been absolutely clear on the threat that Hamas poses to Palestinians, Israelis and the wider world. That is why it is sanctioned as a terrorist organisation here. We are taking a range of measures with our partners to work through the very complicated but necessary steps, whether that is about transitional governance in Gaza, the security arrangements that need to follow, the international security force, or a whole range of other questions. I assure the shadow Foreign Secretary that we are deep in those discussions. We have been having them over the last few days, and we will have them in the region, too. This is an incredibly complex piece of work, and we remain very focused on it.

Just quickly on aid, I would like to inform the House that there appears to have been quite a significant uprating of the aid going in, particularly through Kerem Shalom, which is welcome, but the House will know of the centrality of the other crossings, particularly Rafah and the Allenby bridge. They are not yet fully open. Aid

[Mr Falconer]

cannot therefore flow in the volumes that we would wish to see. We continue to work with all our partners to try to see them reopen.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I welcome the statement from my hon. Friend. It is fairly clear that the Israeli Government agreed to the peace deal only because they felt they had to, not because they necessarily wanted to. After all this time, we still have not got aid flowing into Gaza in the way we would all want to see. What further action can the Government take to put pressure on the Israeli Government to ensure that all the aid that is needed actually gets in, and gets in quickly?

Mr Falconer: That is a vital question from my hon. Friend, who follows these things closely. As I said in my last answer, to get to the volumes that we need, we will need both Rafah and the Allenby bridge to be reopened. It is welcome that there appears to be an increase of aid through Kerem Shalom—both UN aid and private trucks. It is vital that the Palestinian private sector, particularly in Gaza, can get goods in, restart the market and enable people to go about their normal lives. We will, as he would expect, continue to work with all our partners until we see the reopening of those crossings.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): The ceasefire was a rare moment of hope despite the challenges ahead, so we share the dismay that extremists on both sides continue to look for opportunities to restart the war. We feel the distress of the hostage families being tortured by Hamas cruelty, and the grief of those whose family members—women and children—die under IDF bombs. The fake recovery of bodies by Hamas, as evidenced by the Red Cross, is a cruel and despicable act. Yet we can also see that extremists in the Netanyahu Cabinet, who have no interest in peace nor in the rights of Palestinian civilians, are straining at the leash to retaliate. It is this cycle of violence and suffering that we must break.

What steps have the Government taken to work with regional partners to force Hamas to find and return the remaining hostage bodies and to disarm? Given the importance of maintaining President Trump's interest and attention, what conversations has the Minister had with US counterparts to ensure that the White House does not lose focus on the prize of peace through a two-state solution?

Mr Falconer: I can reassure the House that the British Government remain in very regular contact at the highest levels with the American Government on these questions. The American Government, as I think has been clear in recent days, remain very focused on these issues, which is to be welcomed and supported, as the hon. Member says. He raises important points about the recovery of bodies. I can confirm that I have been in talks with many of my opposite numbers across the region—most recently my Qatari opposites yesterday—as has the Foreign Secretary, and we continue to make these points with force.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his answer to the urgent question. He has done a great job over time updating this Chamber—he has been terrific through this difficult period. Will he say more about the type of aid that he thinks our country needs to send into Gaza to support the people there?

Mr Falconer: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. There are two areas in which aid will be particularly vital. Of course, there are the immediate needs of the Gazan people. Most recently at Sharm el-Sheikh, the Prime Minister announced a £20 million contribution to the humanitarian programme to meet those needs, which will be focused on water, sanitation and health. There is also a need for the sustainable reconstruction of Gaza. The message that we hear so often from Palestinians is that they wish for their own companies and private sector to be engaged in that endeavour, and do not simply wish to see the World Bank or the United Nations leading the charge. They, too, want to take agency in those questions. That was one reason we involved them so closely in the conference that I held in October.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Once again, it is the children of Gaza who seem to bear the brunt of the violence, with reports that 35 of them were liquidated overnight in the casual dropping of bombs in retaliation. Equally as shocking is the realisation that there will be absolutely no accountability whatsoever for those deaths, likely no investigation into the targeting or intelligence used, and no sense of any punishment for what is very obviously a significant crime. Allied to that is the fact that it has proven quite a handy distraction from the significant violence and brutality taking place daily in the west bank. Given that we have now recognised Palestine as a sovereign nation, will there be any further measures to deter Israeli aggression on Palestinian soil?

Mr Falconer: We have spoken in this House on a number of occasions about events in the west bank, and we have announced three waves of sanctions—including at the most senior levels—against the Israeli Government. I reassure the House that we remain very focused on settler violence. We are moving into the olive harvesting period, which, as the right hon. Member will know, is a period in which violence is often particularly high. Regrettably, we are seeing similar trends this year. I will have more to say about that later in the day.

In relation to the right hon. Member's first point on individual incidents, I refer him to my previous comments. It is important, at such a delicate moment for the ceasefire, that we are as precise as possible. That is why the CMCC is engaged in the way that it is.

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): The International Court of Justice has called on Israel to allow aid into Gaza, denounced its occupation of Palestinian territories as unlawful, and demanded the removal of troops. Does the Minister understand that as long as there are boots on the ground and UK arms are still sold to Israel, and unless Palestinians are allowed to determine their fate and be free of the violence that they continue to face, they will not have the peace that they need?

Mr Falconer: I think my hon. Friend refers to the ICJ advisory opinion in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As the House will be aware, there has been another advisory opinion from the ICJ more recently in relation to aid accessing Gaza. Assuming that she is asking about the former, we have made significant decisions since that advisory opinion—not least on the recognition of the Palestinian state. I clarify once again for the House that no British weaponry is used either in Gaza or in the west bank, other than subject to the messages relating to F-35s that we have discussed previously.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Minister quite rightly said that Hamas must disarm and that there can be no place for Hamas in the future of Gaza, yet the White House appears to be licensing Hamas to conduct internal security operations. What conversations is he having with his US counterparts to reconcile the UK position, which he clearly outlined, and that of the US?

Mr Falconer: As the right hon. Member knows, disarmament is usually a process. It takes time and requires serious and greatly complex technical work. We want to ensure that Gaza is free of Hamas and that Hamas are disarmed. That will take time, and it is the work that we and the Americans are engaged in.

Noah Law (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): Both in Gaza, where grassroots peacebuilders will face the immense task of reconciliation, and here at home, where debate has become dangerously polarised, the peace plan and the two-state solution remain the only credible path forward, and we must all be absolutely clear in condemning Hamas, who have no place in the future governance of a free Palestine, and the atrocities that Prime Minister Netanyahu's far-right Government continue to commit. Put simply, two wrongs do not make a right. I urge the Minister to make a statement calling for unity at this fractious time.

Mr Falconer: There have obviously been innumerable wrongs in the region in recent months. It is important that we now continue the work, move forward with the ceasefire into phase 2, and see the wider peace plan fully implemented.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Throughout these horrific two years, I have kept trying to make the case for the innocents—for the people who did not choose any of this and who are not responsible. It is completely unacceptable that Hamas have not released all the bodies, and it is equally unacceptable that the Israeli authorities released 100 Palestinian bodies with just numbers. What are the Government doing to help the Palestinian authorities to identify all the bodies that have been returned, in both Israel and Palestine, so that families can grieve and the dead can have the dignity that they deserve?

Mr Falconer: The hon. Member speaks with personal experience, real force and a long track record on these issues. My heart goes out to families on both sides. Mortuary processes are difficult at the best of times; one can only imagine the agonies that they are facing. We are not aware of specific requests for support in mortuary services, but if they are any, I am very happy to consider them.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Let us be clear: peace cannot exist under impunity. Weeks into the ceasefire, Israel has once again bombed Gaza, killing over 100 Palestinians, including 35 children, as it continues its genocide. Our Government have shamefully yet to reply more than a year and a half after the substantial ruling by the International Court of Justice, which made it absolutely clear that any Government who allow trade with Israel's settlement economy are complicit in sustaining the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories. British companies continue to trade in goods and financial services with the settlements, undermining our obligations under international law. When will the Government suspend the UK-Israel trade deal and end all trade linked to the settlements, or will the Minister continue to sit back and allow this complicity?

Mr Falconer: The hon. Member refers to the ICJ advisory opinion. I would not want the House to have the impression that the British Government have done nothing. At the centre of that advisory opinion is the question of the status of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We have been clear, subsequently, in recognising the status of that territory.

The hon. Member raises important questions about the trade in goods with settlements. We do not accept trade with settlements on the same basis as trade with Israel. Where British companies are doing so, they are in breach of the trading arrangements, and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs will take an interest. They must ensure that they know who they are trading with and in which territory. If people in settlements wish to falsely label where the thing is produced, it is difficult—as a whole range of nations and states have found—for others to determine.

I know that the hon. Member follows these issues closely. He will no doubt be interested in the efforts of the Irish Government to try to pass exactly the kind of legislation that he is describing, and in the very many difficulties that they have encountered in so doing. We are not in breach of our international obligations. If he could point me to legislation that is in operation and does what he says, I would be grateful to see it, but I think this is one of those questions on which we must continue to work with our partners to ensure that the status of the Occupied Palestinian Territories—part of the Palestinian state—is understood by all.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that, on top of the absolute imperative of Hamas releasing the remaining hostage bodies and not only completely disarming but being removed from all governance in Gaza, there must be a widespread deradicalisation programme to undo the damage done by innocent children in Gaza being taught in their textbooks, some of which were funded through the UNRWA—an uncomfortable truth—to hate Israel and Jews? That deradicalisation must happen too.

Mr Falconer: Much work has been done in recent months, including under this Government, in relation to the curriculum in Gaza, and I am aware of the concerns that have been raised. The funding to UNRWA that we have provided, which the shadow Foreign Secretary referred to, included specific provision for ensuring that all reforms identified in the Colonna report, including on curricula, were followed through, and we continue to engage with UNRWA on those questions.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): My colleagues have already asked about the current horror in Gaza, so I will pivot to the longer term. Before this crisis, we saw decades of illegal settlements on Palestinian territory, so I welcomed the Government's sanctions on extremist settlers and Israeli Ministers. I do not want us to lose sight of that issue, so will the Minister consider what further steps he can take, including trade restrictions, to combat illegal settlements?

Mr Falconer: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: there has been a significant increase in settlements and in violence associated with those settlements. This is a continued problem, and we will continue to work at it, alongside our partners, to try to see that terrible trend reversed.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I get the impression that the Minister shares my despair at what feel like constant impediments to real progress that are being put in place by the impunity of both Hamas and of Benjamin Netanyahu's genocidal regime. The United States of America has indicated that Israel's response last night was proportionate, and it backed the action. I am curious: is that view shared by His Majesty's Government?

Mr Falconer: For the reasons I gave earlier, I am reluctant to be drawn into a day-by-day commentary on the actions of both sides. What is key is that we keep the ceasefire going, and that is what the Americans have been clear is still in place. This is going to be difficult. The events of the last 24 hours have been difficult, and I am sure that we will have further difficult days ahead. This is not a straightforward path, and if the right hon. Gentleman doesn't mind, I will not be drawn on an individual instance today.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): It is now 19 days since 10 October, and there are still hostage families who cannot grieve for a loved one, and still people starving in Gaza because there is not enough aid, and now we are seeing the west bank deteriorate. In the last 24 hours, Vice-President Vance has argued that "skirmishes" are somehow inevitable. With the greatest will in the world, the death of 35 children and possibly more is not a "skirmish". If the international community can do anything, it is to be involved in the detail of ensuring that the ceasefire holds. If the Minister will not tell us what the Government's response is, will he at least say what possible justification the Israelis have given for the latest incident?

Mr Falconer: I do not wish to spend too much time at the Dispatch Box repeating the statements of others. I am sure that my hon. Friend, who follows this issue closely, will have seen what the Israeli Government provided as justification, the statements from Hamas denying that they were involved in the shooting in Rafah, and the considerable uncertainty that has surrounded some of those events. The key question for the British Government is whether or not we think the ceasefire can hold, and whether we think we can make all the progress, that my hon. Friend describes, on reopening the aid crossings, disarming Hamas, and transitional governance arrangements. I am not for one second taking away from the gravity of these incidents—lives have been lost, children have been killed—but the role

that stands before the British Government at the moment is to ensure that the ceasefire does not break down. That does not mean that we do not get into the detail. We have a major general in the Civil Military Co-ordination Centre who is part of the efforts to ensure that when violence and threats to the ceasefire occur, we understand the who and the why, but I will not give a running commentary from the Dispatch Box until we are in a position to do so.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): The Minister has already acknowledged that it is olive harvest season in the west bank—a harvest that supports approximately 100,000 farming Palestinians—yet we have seen more than 150 attacks by settlers against those farmers. How are the Government holding the Israeli Government to account to stop those settlers acting with impunity?

Mr Falconer: As the hon. Member rightly identifies, this is a period of particular danger. We have repeatedly condemned the increase in violence that is associated with settlements, and we have made sanctions against that. We will continue to make those points strongly in this harvest season as we did during the last.

Samantha Niblett (South Derbyshire) (Lab): All Members have been appalled by the scenes that emerged from Gaza in the wake of the ceasefire, showing Hamas executing people in the streets as they seek to reassert control over the area. Does the Minister agree that such scenes simply reinforce that Hamas are nothing but terrorists and murderers, and that they must have nothing to do with the future governance of Palestine?

Mr Falconer: I agree with my hon. Friend. The scenes we have seen, which the shadow Foreign Secretary referred to, are chilling. Hamas are terrorists and they can have no role. The work to remove and disarm them will not be easy, but it is the vital and necessary next step.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Yesterday it emerged that Hamas do know where the bodies of the remaining hostages are, as video evidence emerged of them playing games with one body, removing it from a building, burying it, then bringing along the International Red Cross and pretending that they had found it and dug it up. Do the Minister and the Government condemn that, and what more can they do with our international allies and the Gulf nations to put pressure and leverage on Hamas to return all the remaining bodies immediately?

Mr Falconer: The hon. Member is right: Hamas must return all the bodies immediately. We have made that point to our regional partners with force, and we will continue to do so.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The war crimes carried out by Israel last night, including the killing of 35 children, are a continuation of the horrors that we have seen over the last two years visited on the people of Palestine by a state led by Prime Minister Netanyahu, who is currently wanted for war crimes. The Government rightly brought wide-ranging sanctions on Russia for its unlawful invasion of Ukraine and its war crimes, but is it the truth that unless there are real consequences for Netanyahu and Israel for these war crimes, they will carry on? A lack of action and sanctions is giving the

green light and treating them with kid gloves, so is now the time for extensive widespread sanctions on Israel? Why is Israel treated differently from Russia, and why is Netanyahu treated differently from Putin?

Mr Falconer: We have discussed sanctions in this House many times, including the three waves during my time in government, and including against two Ministers. The priority now has to be to make the ceasefire work, to move to phase 2, and to get through all these incredibly important and complex questions, and that is the focus of this Government.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Over the past decade there has been a stark absence of diplomatic efforts to address the core issues of the conflict, and the continued advocacy for a two-state solution. Civil society organisations have played a vital role during this time in entering that chasm. Will the Minister outline how the Government are providing help to those organisations? For example, will it be through the recently announced international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace?

Mr Falconer: We remain focused on supporting the whole range of civil society. The hon. Member will be aware of some of the proposals in the Knesset, which we have opposed and to which I referred in my opening remarks. We will continue to conduct that work and will have more to say about the fund she refers to in the coming days and weeks.

Dame Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): The ceasefire has been one of the few positive achievements in what has been an unending tale of misery, violence, and horrific suffering, and all those involved in achieving that ceasefire deserve the gratitude and recognition that has been received. Now as Israel continues to kill Gazan children, and Hamas refuse to disarm, will the Minister reassure us that everyone involved in achieving a ceasefire in the US, the UK, and the middle east is equally concentrated and focused on keeping the peace and making the ceasefire work as a beginning of a peace process? Can he further reassure us, given our recognition of Palestine, that the Palestinian voice will be heard?

Mr Falconer: I reassure the House that I am absolutely certain that everyone in the UK who is working on this is focused on ensuring that the ceasefire sticks in the way that my hon. Friend describes. Indeed, I can tell from our many contacts with the American system that they remain similarly focused. They want this ceasefire to stick, and they are working to try to ensure that it does.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): Will the Minister give assurances to the House that this Government are utterly committed, along with our international allies, to eradicating Hamas's terrorist infrastructure, and that they will not cease until Hamas have been fully dismantled and obliterated, and the remains of those hostages murdered in captivity have been returned?

Mr Falconer: As I said to the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice), we are committed to ensuring that those bodies are returned and that Hamas

are disarmed. The infrastructure of Hamas is not just heavy weapons and small weapons, as has been the case in other conflicts; there is also a network of tunnels under Gaza that have posed a very significant threat to Israel. Dismantling them is a difficult and complex engineering and military task, but it needs to be included as part of the process.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab): I strongly welcome the Minister's commitment to work to support Chevening scholars to leave Gaza, particularly the decision to extend that support to students with full scholarships. Will the Minister update the House on the latest steps that the Government have taken to support Gazan students who wish to study in the UK, particularly those I have been arguing about who have dependants who they understandably do not wish to leave in Gaza?

Mr Falconer: If you will permit me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will say a little bit about the wider evacuation operations. Evacuations have continued, including on Monday and Tuesday this week, both for students, who my hon. Friend has been so doughty in pursuing, and for highly medically vulnerable children who can benefit from UK support. That work continues, and I have been working alongside the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West (Dr Ahmed). We have been able to help many people to get to the UK to transform their lives by getting vital medical assistance and educational opportunities, which I hope will allow all of them to make a real contribution to the future of Palestine.

The operations to get people in and out of Gaza have been incredibly complex, not least given the most recent closures. I am afraid that there are very strict limits on how many dependants anyone can bring out. We have made an update to our policy in relation to students who are fully funded, which says that we can support a very small number of dependants to leave. I know that many hon. Members with an interest in this have engaged with me directly, and I reiterate that these operations remain incredibly complex. I am happy to talk to all hon. Members who have an interest, but there is neither infinite capacity in the UK to support people, nor, even with our partners, unlimited capacity to get people out. We have made an announcement and I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend and many others across the House, but I wish to keep people's expectations suitably focused on the very many constraints that remain on these operations.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): Renewed violence in Gaza continues against a backdrop of unimaginable human suffering. Millions remain in desperate need of food, water and medical supplies, yet aid convoys continue to face unacceptable obstacles. The UN reported yesterday that many of the 177 aid trucks that entered Kerem Shalom were limited by congestion on coastal roads, in part because of damage to that aid route, meaning that they were forced to limit their supply of aid far below what was agreed. As yet, aid routes are not fully open, but Gazans cannot wait any longer. Aid restrictions should never have been there in the first place. What specific pressure are the Government exerting on Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Israeli authorities to get the routes fully open and the aid in?

Mr Falconer: The hon. Member asks an important question. As I said earlier, it is welcome that there has been an increase in Kerem Shalom, but there is congestion too. The UN, the private sector and a number of donors who are not using the UN are all trying to get aid through Kerem Shalom, so the congestion that she describes is perhaps to be expected. It is vital that other routes, including the Allenby bridge with Jordan and the Rafah crossing, which has already been the subject of much discussion, reopen too. We are working with our partners on these questions. We want to see progress soon—I would like to see it in days—but this has proved to be more complex than I had hoped and talks are ongoing.

Sarah Smith (Hyndburn) (Lab): I place on record my thanks to the Minister for his tireless work on the issues in the middle east. The devastation continues for Palestinian people living in Gaza, whether from the murderous intent of Hamas or from further strikes from Israel, which reportedly killed 104 people, including 46 children, overnight. Alongside that, Gaza's healthcare system has been decimated, and it is always women and girls who end up being the worst victims in such circumstances. Does the Minister agree and will he update the House on how further aid can be directed to support women and girls in particular, and to rebuild healthcare systems in Gaza?

Mr Falconer: These are vital questions from my hon. Friend, who I know has remained very focused on the issues. The Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West, who has kindly joined me on the Front Bench, and I remain focused on the issues. As access to Gaza becomes easier, as we all hope that it does, among the most urgent actions are ensuring that medical supplies, personnel and infrastructure are in place to meet the very significant needs of Gazan people. We will continue to work closely on that.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): Every day since the ceasefire took place, at least 20 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed by the IDF. There have been numerous other breaches of the ceasefire and continued military activity in the west bank. Will the Minister assure the House that Britain no longer flies RAF aeroplanes over Gaza, no longer co-operates with Israel on its security arrangements, and no longer supplies any weapons to Israel, because of its frequent breaches of the ceasefire and its continued abuse of the people of Gaza and the west bank?

Mr Falconer: I have set out our arrangements in relation to arms and the very significant suspensions that we made from the Dispatch Box a number of times—they remain in place. The right hon. Member asks about RAF flights; I think he refers to the RAF flights that were attempting to find hostages in Gaza. Those flights have stopped. The hostages have been released, so there is no further function for those flights and they have ended.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): One crucial factor in achieving the current ceasefire was the unprecedented declaration at the end of July by all 22 members of the Arab League, calling on Hamas to release the hostages, lay down their arms and give up power in Gaza. That was

highly important in showing Hamas that they had run out of road. What role do the UK and our partners have in influencing that declaration? Does the Minister agree that our strong diplomatic relations, led by our excellent diplomats, have a positive impact?

Mr Falconer: I associate myself very much with my hon. Friend's comments. He knows that neck of the woods well. Our diplomats are excellent. I was pleased to be in New York in July when the declaration he describes was made. It was part of a declaration that included our own commitments in relation to the Palestinian state, which led to our recognition in September.

Chris Coghlan (Dorking and Horley) (LD): We all hope desperately for a just peace in Gaza. I served alongside the Minister as a diplomat in the middle east and as a soldier. Given that, I particularly welcome the proposed international security force, but it is essential that such a force includes troops from Arab countries and possibly from western countries too, in order to reassure the Israelis, and that it is there for the long term and ready to take casualties. Will the Minister update the House on what progress there has been on the composition and the mandate of the potential force?

Mr Falconer: My friend the hon. and gallant Member is right to focus on some of these practical questions. He, like me, served in countries where peacekeeping forces were unable to keep the peace and unwilling to take casualties, and were therefore unable to fulfil their mandate. These are some of the most central and most delicate questions around the ISF. I hope he will forgive me for not giving a detailed commentary at this time, but I expect to return to the House to provide more detail when I am able.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): There have been recent press reports that the Israeli Government have been arming factions within Gaza in order to destabilise Hamas. Can the Minister comment on any of those reports? What is the position of the British Government on that?

Mr Falconer: As I said earlier, I will not provide extensive commentary on reports, but clearly safety and security for Gazans will involve Palestinian authorities able to ensure law and order. Those who have been living in Gaza have suffered terribly; there has been widespread looting and violence. I am sure many will pore over the question of who those factions and criminals are and who is supporting them. The key thing now is that security needs to return to Gaza, and that security cannot be provided by the masked Hamas gunmen that the shadow Foreign Secretary rightly referred to at the outset, so that work continues.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion Preseli) (PC): The Minister has rightly emphasised the importance of securing the swift and urgent supply of aid to all those in need in Gaza, but he has also mentioned that some of the crossings remain disrupted or fully closed. What reasons have been given for the continued delay in reopening all the crossings?

Mr Falconer: There has been some public reporting of Israeli concerns about the Allenby bridge, particularly after the violence there. Rafah is a subject that we have discussed many times in this House, and it remains an

absolutely critical artery. It is true to say that in both the Allenby crossing and Rafah there will need to be agreement between both countries. I hope that agreement can be secured quickly, that Israel removes the restrictions in place, and that we see the free flow of aid through those crossings very shortly.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement and his focus on maintaining the ceasefire. I stand in solidarity with the many ordinary Palestinians living under Hamas and with the families in Israel waiting for their loved ones to be returned, but I cannot conclude that what Netanyahu has done in the last 24 hours was proportionate in any way. I continue to hope and pray for peace. With peace will come the opportunity to rebuild Gaza, but I do not see how that can be done when Israel holds so many people without charge, particularly healthcare workers. My constituent Eman is really concerned about Dr Hussam Abu Safiya, who is being held. Does the Minister agree it is really important that people, particularly healthcare workers, should not be held without charge? Is he having negotiations with Israel on their release?

Mr Falconer: Due process is incredibly important. I have raised this specific case with the Israeli authorities. It is important that adequate explanations are provided where people are detained, particularly doctors who are providing vital, lifesaving work. We will continue to take this matter up with the Israelis.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): Overnight, more than 100 Palestinian civilians were killed by Israeli airstrikes. Once again, innocent civilians are suffering a collective punishment, this time imposed for breaches of the ceasefire by Hamas. Unless this Government believe that all Palestinian civilians are Hamas and are therefore legitimate targets, the Minister must unequivocally condemn these attacks on innocent civilians. Will he unequivocally condemn those attacks and call them what they are: an egregious breach of international humanitarian law?

Mr Falconer: I think I have covered those questions already in this session, but let me be absolutely clear: all Palestinians are very clearly not part of Hamas. So many Palestinians want to see an alternative. They want to see this process succeed and to see the ceasefire hold, and that is where our focus is.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): The Israel Defence Forces said this morning that they had "renewed enforcement of the ceasefire".

The strikes are reported to have killed 20 women and 46 children following the death of one IDF soldier. President Trump's peace plan makes provision for Arab states to commit stabilisation forces. I appreciate the Minister's point that he cannot provide a running commentary on such a stabilisation force, but does he share my view that after a ceasefire, the protagonists are the least well-placed to enforce peace?

Mr Falconer: I am not sure that I totally follow. The composition of the ISF is not yet determined, as I said to the hon. Gentleman's colleague. We will no doubt discuss this matter further in the House once we are in a position to provide a fuller update. A number of states have indicated some willingness to provide troops to the ISF.

I will clarify for the House that we have provided military personnel into the region, but it was into the Civil-Military Co-ordination Centre, which has a different tasking to the ISF. These are all complex questions that are very much in negotiation at the moment. When some of those matters are more clear and finalised, I am happy to return to the House.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): It is horrifying that Netanyahu has bombed Gaza in a clear violation of the ceasefire. The suffering in Gaza is unimaginable. To move forward, we must demand justice and reparations for all victims of atrocity crimes and hold to account the perpetrators. What are the Government doing to uphold UK obligations under international law to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide? What are the Government doing to push for journalists to be allowed in, given the Israeli Government's outrageous restrictions, which prevent them from documenting the horrors?

Mr Falconer: International justice and accountability are of vital importance. That is why this Government removed the block on the International Criminal Court and continued to support that very important body, and that is why we continue to support the International Court of Justice. They are the competent courts and the process by which justice will be secured, and we continue to support them in those endeavours.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): Are we expected to believe that in the months and years ahead, the Government will stand by their promise that Hamas must be fully disarmed and play no part in the Government in Palestine? I ask because a previous Labour Government, under Tony Blair, with the present National Security Adviser by his side, promised the people of Northern Ireland that the IRA and other terrorists would be totally disarmed through decommissioning. That did not happen: supposedly decommissioned weapons continued to be able to be used to kill, and we ended up with the surrogates of the IRA in government. Will it be any different in Gaza?

Mr Falconer: One thing I have learned so far as a politician is not to make comparisons between the middle east and practically anywhere else, and certainly not with Northern Ireland. I will allow the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to answer the hon. and learned Gentleman's particular questions about the current arrangements. Clearly, peace is possible—we have demonstrated it here and in many other places. That has to be the work of the Government, and that is what we are focused on.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): It appears that this ceasefire is going in the same vein as previous announcements on ceasefires—primarily one side, the Palestinians, cease; the other side, Israelis, continue to fire. Some 20 Palestinians have been killed every single day since this so-called last ceasefire. Last night was the most violent, with more than 104 Palestinians killed and the targeting of a cancer patient camp. We all appreciate the Minister coming in week in, week out to answer these questions—I certainly do—but given that the UK has not stopped arming Israel since the genocide began, can he confirm how many export licences to Israel have been granted in Labour's time in office?

Mr Falconer: I hope the hon. Member will forgive me, but I do not have the numbers precisely to hand. I did an extensive hearing in front of the Foreign Affairs Committee in which we went through the numbers in some detail, but let me focus on the key point. We have suspended all arms that could be used in this way; we are not selling bombs or bullets that could be used in Gaza or the west bank. The munitions that he and so many others in this country saw exploding last night on their television screens were not British.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for his answers, his tone and his well-chosen words; we appreciate them. The moment that there were reports of shots fired at Israeli soldiers in Rafah and of an IDF soldier being murdered, my heart sank—as the hearts of many others probably did—because I knew that the tenuous peace had been broken by Hamas. Does the Minister accept that retaliation is inevitable? What role can the Government play, along with our allies, to rebuild the fragile peace process and disarm Hamas, remove their weapons and destroy them? Real and lasting peace can then actually happen.

Mr Falconer: I thank the hon. Member for his important question and his as ever courteous tone. The work is important. The threats to the ceasefire are many and varied, and we will continue to work with our partners in exactly the way that he describes.

Asylum Seekers: MOD Housing

1.30 pm

Mr Angus MacDonald (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make a statement on the planned use of MOD barracks to house asylum seekers.

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (Alex Norris): The use of hotels to house asylum seekers is a disgrace. As Members on both sides of the House know, it is a practice that became widespread long before this Government entered office, and it is one of the clearest indicators of the shambles that we inherited last summer. People across the country are frustrated, if not furious. We wholeheartedly agree, and that is why since the general election we have been working to address the chronic issues in the asylum system that have been allowed to build up over several years. At their peak under the previous Government, there were 400 hotels in use; now, the number is around 200. That reduction has been achieved despite what the Home Affairs Select Committee has called a “dramatic increase in demand”. Under this Government, decisions on asylum applications are up, as are asylum-related returns, while system costs are down.

However, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made clear, we must go further and faster. That means moving at pace to fulfil the Government’s commitment to close every asylum hotel. Work to facilitate this exit is ongoing, and the asylum accommodation taskforce is working across Government to deliver alternative asylum accommodation. I can confirm to the House that plans are under way for the temporary use of Ministry of Defence sites at Cameron barracks in Inverness and at Crowborough training camp in East Sussex for the purpose of asylum accommodation. Under the plans, a total of around 900 people will be housed across both sites.

Those two sites are among a number of options that we are looking at as we seek to alleviate the pressure on the system and drive down hotel use, and while this is a complex and fast-moving operating environment, there is a strong understanding within the Home Office of the importance of local engagement. My officials have been engaging directly and regularly in advance of this announcement with the Scottish Government, the relevant councils and local service providers, and will continue to do so. Whatever decisions are made regarding specific locations, we are clear that the impact on communities must be minimised. The safety and security of people living and working in the surrounding areas is paramount.

A crisis of the scale we were left with was always going to take time to correct, but we know that the British people are impatient for change, as are we. This Government will do whatever it takes to end hotel use, fix the broken asylum system, and secure our borders.

Mr MacDonald: I thank the Minister for his answer, and the Speaker for allowing me to ask this urgent question.

I got a call yesterday at 7.10 in the morning from the BBC, who asked, “What is your comment on the Cameron barracks being taken over and used to house migrants?” I know that place well, because I was based there when

was in the Army. It is residential—it is surrounded by housing that is very close by—and what is more, it is only 10 minutes from Inverness city centre. I asked for a briefing from the Home Office and got one, which was wonderful. What I learned is that there are going to be up to 309 single male asylum seekers there, who will move in at the end of November. I have a few questions arising from that.

First, why was I not engaged in any discussion? Why were the Scottish Government not engaged in conversation, and why were Highland council and other authorities just informed, rather than engaged, which is the word that the Minister used? Secondly, did Home Office officials consider the fact that the site is in a city centre before they agreed to take it on? Why is it okay to close town centre migrant hotels in the south of England, yet plan to house 300 migrant men in Army quarters in Inverness city centre? It is effectively the same thing. Thirdly, will the Minister meet me to discuss the Home Office halting its plan to utilise Cameron barracks to house migrants?

Alex Norris: I am grateful for those questions, and recognise the anger that the hon. Gentleman has conveyed. I am sorry that he heard in the way he did, and of course I will have that meeting with him. It can be difficult to sequence these things correctly; as all colleagues know, we live in an age of misinformation and disinformation, and trying to sequence who hears what and when can be sticky. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman should not have heard in the way he did. The same is true for the hon. Member for Sussex Weald (Ms Ghani), whose duties as Deputy Speaker preclude her from taking part in these proceedings. I recognise the strength of feeling that she has conveyed to me in no uncertain terms about her views and the views of her constituents, and their opposition to these plans. I will continue to engage with the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Lady, and I encourage her local authority also to do so. Again, I recognise the strength of feeling.

Turning to the hon. Gentleman's other questions, of course the location of the site has been considered. We are looking at all sites in that way; whether it is a hotel or dispersed accommodation, the local context is always considered. I would gently say that both sites have been used recently for the Afghan resettlement scheme, so there is a clear understanding across Government of the capabilities of those sites and their locations.

However, I want to be very clear about what is at stake here. The hon. Gentleman talked about the closure of hotels, and we know that hotels are an exceptionally challenging issue in this country. Too many people come to this country having been sold the dream that they will be housed in a hotel and will be able to work illegally in our economy. Today, we have announced that we have had our best ever year for illegal work raids, with 1,000 people deported as a result, but we have to break the model that says, "You'll get to live in a hotel and work illegally." Closing the hotels is a really important part of that work.

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

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): Since this Government entered office, the illegal immigration crisis has gotten seriously worse on every front. The number of people arriving in this country illegally is up, and not

just by a little bit; arrivals are up by more than 50% compared with the same period before the election. Before the election, the number of migrants staying in hotels had fallen by 47%. It has now gone up, and fewer of the people breaking into this country illegally on a small boat are being removed.

We are now in a position where the Government are putting forward a proposal that, in opposition, they described as "an admission of failure". The Defence Minister, the hon. Member for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), is unable to say whether the plan will save us money or cost us more. We also hear that this proposal will involve accommodation on a site that is directly next to homes provided to the families of our brave armed forces personnel. Have the Government consulted those families about this plan?

All this demonstrates that we need much stronger proposals than the weak efforts the Government are presiding over. That is why we have put forward the borders plan, which goes beyond tinkering with the system. If we want to stop the use of this accommodation, we need to change completely how we approach this problem and ensure that all illegal immigrants are removed within a week. It is a comprehensive plan based on our proposals to leave the European Convention on Human Rights, reform how our asylum system operates, and remove the blockages that have prevented the removal of illegal entrants. It is a proposal that is not only practical, but fair, as those who come to the UK illegally should not be housed at the taxpayer's expense in ever greater numbers. People need to know that if they break into this country, they will be detained and deported. That is how we will solve this crisis.

I will finish by asking the question we are all wondering: when will the asylum hotels close? Will the Government commit to closing all asylum hotels within a year?

Alex Norris: What an optimistic effort by the hon. Gentleman! He invites us to believe that he and his colleagues have worked out in 14 months how to fix a system that they broke over a period of 14 years. The British public saw through that in July 2024, and I suspect that they will see through it again.

The hon. Gentleman talks about removals. Of course, removals are up—over 35,000 since we took office. When it comes to the question of why we have hotels in the first place, what was the original sin? It was that Conservative colleagues stopped assessing claims. That is why we have hotels, and it is why we have made the efforts to shift the backlog.

The reality is that the system is broken. It is a very simple equation—it is a complicated issue, but a simple equation. We are a very popular country and people want to come here. Of course we are popular—we are the greatest country in the world, with brilliant institutions—but that popularity is also due to the fact that people are sold a dream that they will be able to come here, live in a hotel and work illegally. Until and unless we attack those two fundamental factors, nothing will change. We know that the Conservatives do not oppose the plans we are debating today, because after all, they used two military sites themselves.

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): The Home Affairs Committee this week released a report into asylum accommodation and it is utterly damning. In 2019, the Conservative Government bound

[Chris Murray]

the country into asylum contracts that have been disastrous for local communities, disastrous for asylum seekers themselves and disastrous for the taxpayer, but they have been brilliant for private providers who have made tens of millions of pounds of profits. It is right that the Government are looking at alternative ways to house asylum seekers that will be better for communities, asylum seekers and the taxpayer. Scotland is a welcoming, tolerant country, and we are willing to play our part, but will the Minister give us assurances that he will learn from the mistakes of the previous Government and work with local communities, local authorities and devolved Administrations to make sure that this works and solves the problems we have seen?

Alex Norris: I have studied that report closely. There have been more than a thousand lessons learned from the previous Government's attempts to solve this issue. We are taking those in hand to make sure we do it right. My hon. Friend talks about the cost. I am pleased that in our time in office we have reduced the cost to the taxpayer of the asylum system by £1 billion, including £500 million across the hotel estate, but it is clear, including from his Committee's reports, that we have to go further, and that is what we are doing. We are, within the parameters of the contracts we inherited, sweating things. Where there is money to be recouped, we will recoup that for the taxpayer, but it comes back to the fundamental question that if we want to spend less money on this type of activity, we have to have fewer people in the estate. That starts with breaking the attraction that they have to come to this country.

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

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): We share the Minister's concern about the approach of the official Opposition. Clearly, they left us with this mess and now they feign outrage. It appears that this Government's proposal, sadly, is to decant asylum seekers from one kind of unsuitable and costly accommodation to another. Instead, they should be tackling the real issue: speeding up asylum decisions so that those with no right to stay are returned and those with a valid claim can work, pay tax and integrate.

I will pick up the Minister's point about the difficulty of sequencing communications. As a Member of Parliament who had an asylum hotel opened in his constituency, I was informed several weeks in advance. I offered a much better alternative form of accommodation somewhere else nearby. As I found out, the Home Office was determined to open a hotel, because that alternative was not taken up. The alternative accommodation would have been more appropriate, and my constituency feels let down.

The Government have promised to end the use of hotels by 2029, yet they have put forward no credible plan to achieve that. The Lib Dems have set out a plan for ending hotel use in just six months by declaring a national emergency and setting up Nightingale processing centres to bring down the backlog. Will the Home Secretary match the Lib Dem plan by declaring that national emergency today? Will the Minister confirm whether the plan that he has put forward means speeding

up decisions and returning those with no right to stay, or does it simply mean shifting large numbers of asylum seekers from one form of accommodation to another? Will he share what assessment has been made of the relative merits of Army barracks that are in or next to urban areas, as opposed to those in rural areas? Finally, will he concede that cutting overseas development spending will drive more people away from conflict zones to seek safety in Europe and onward unsafely on to boats in the English channel?

Alex Norris: I recognise the spirit with which the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues speak, and I share their zeal. Indeed, I think we can demonstrate it through our actions to speed up decisions. That is why we have made such a significant increase in decision making. Our commitment to speeding up removals is a matter of record. That is why we have seen well over 35,000 people with no right to stay removed since we took office. I gently say to him that as we deal with the backlog left by the Conservatives, we still have a significant cohort of people who will need to be housed and accommodated while their claims are processed.

Additionally, there is an attraction. We see that in the numbers who seek to cross the channel to come here. Until and unless we address that element, the suggestions from the hon. Gentleman alone will not create that deterrent. What we offer today is a significant and real deterrent to break that pull factor. On his point on overseas development, he will know the commitment made by the Prime Minister. We want to return that spending to 0.7% as soon as we can, because it makes a huge impact across the world, and we want to continue to do that.

Dame Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): I have visited the hotel in Newcastle where up to 400 asylum seekers are living. I have listened to local community concerns. I have spoken to the asylum seekers, the hotel owners, the programme managers, the police, and local stakeholders. It is clear that the policy of housing asylum seekers in hotel accommodation, instituted by the last Government, is failing everybody concerned, except for possibly the private providers profiting from the contracts. Newcastle city council is in discussions with the Home Office about alternative models for accommodation that better meet the needs of the city and of asylum seekers. Can the Minister tell us how those discussions are going and when we can expect to see progress?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend will know that in the spending review, £500 million was set aside for working with local government to try to identify those exact sites that she is talking about and to bring them forward for use. In the spirit of what the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) said, and in the spirit of what other colleagues have said about early engagement, there may well be better ways to build public confidence in what is being provided and that it is in the right locations with the right support. Those conversations with the city of Newcastle are ongoing, and we will be working hard to bring them to a satisfactory conclusion.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Let me begin by making it crystal clear that Madam Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Sussex Weald (Ms Ghani), is doing everything she can to object to

proposals to house illegal migrants at the Crowborough training camp in her constituency, just over the border from mine. The site is not suitable. It was previously considered by the Home Office and rejected, but it seems that we now have a council willing, for ideological reasons, to roll over to the suggestion that it is used. Councils can object to these proposals, so what objections has the Green and Liberal Democrat-led Wealden council made to the proposals to use the Crowborough training camp to house hundreds of asylum seekers?

Alex Norris: As I have set out, we have had significant discussions with local authorities. They challenge our assumptions, and they challenge scale and location, as is always the case. Nevertheless, I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that when he says, “No, it is not the right location”, he should be clear about what he is saying yes to. Is he saying yes to the continued use of hotels, or is he simply saying they should be somewhere else? I know those conversations will continue, and I encourage the local authorities to engage with local Members of Parliament.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): I am often asked on the doorsteps what we are doing to tackle this issue. Will the Minister please set out more information on what the Government are doing to stop small boat arrivals in the first place, so that we can close more hotels more quickly?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend raises the crucial part of the equation. Over the past year, we have made significant inroads in our efforts to disrupt organised crime and the people who use this model to prey on others. We have done 350 disruptions—an increase of 40% on what we inherited. These are embedded gangs who have had a six-year head start on this Government thanks to the Conservatives. That work is vital, but underpinning the gangs’ business model is the attraction of this country. We have to remove the hotels and illegal working to make sure we are not so attractive.

Mr Paul Kohler (Wimbledon) (LD): My colleague on the Home Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray) made an excellent point. The asylum accommodation contract signed under the previous Tory Government gifted scandalously high profits to private providers. Frankly, it is a PPE-type scandal. Clearsprings’ profits soared from £6,000 per employee in 2020 to £300,000 per employee in 2024, with its owner Graham King entering the *Sunday Times* rich list. Vast sums are still being wasted on asylum hotel accommodation under those same flawed arrangements, despite this Government having been in power for 16 months, and the numbers housed in hotels has increased by 8% over the past year. Will the Minister please explain how any new asylum accommodation will be provided in a cost-effective manner that does not allow private companies to make further obscene profits on the backs of the UK’s hard-working people?

Alex Norris: We have to work within the parameters of the contracts that we inherited from the Conservatives, but I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that we have reduced that bill by £1 billion, including £500 million from hotels. We are looking further at the profit-sharing elements of those contracts, and are recouping money for the taxpayer by making sure we get the best deal possible.

Torcuil Crichton (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): As the Minister pointed out, and as Shaun Fraser, the Labour candidate for Inverness, said yesterday, this situation has arisen because of the broken asylum system that the Labour Government inherited from the Conservatives, but it must be handled sensitively. While I sympathise with my friend, the hon. Member for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire (Mr MacDonald), given how he heard this news, I must caution him against leaning into language about Army patrols, security fences and the security of young women. As I have said, this must be handled sensitively, and it falls to us all to set a reasoned tone when expressing reasoned concerns.

May I ask the Minister how he will deal with the situation locally, and what talks he will have with Highland council, and other councils, when it comes to dealing with this proposal?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend has made an important point about the effectiveness of these sites. We have engaged with the local authorities, the health services, the police services and the fire services to ensure that the impact on the community is as light as possible. The experience from Napier barracks and from RAF Wethersfield is that if it is done thoughtfully it can be done well, and that is our commitment.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): My constituents are increasingly concerned about the rising number of houses in multiple occupation. Can the Minister assure me that any overflow from these bases will not lead to an increased reliance on HMOs in our towns and cities, including Walsall, and may I ask what further powers the Government will give councils to protect the private rented sector from being squeezed out as a result of this?

Alex Norris: The right hon. Lady has alighted on an important point. There is, of course, an option open to the Government: if we want to close the hotels, we can simply pull the lever of houses in multiple occupation and change the character of communities across the country, but we are clearly not doing that. We want to find the right balance, and dispersed accommodation is an important tool that local authorities have in relation to people fleeing violence, people with substance abuse and, in this instance, people who are seeking refuge. As I have said, we must find the right balance, and that is the choice. Opposition Members want the hotels to be closed, and they apparently do not want us to use military barracks, having done so themselves. They also do not want us to use houses in multiple occupation. That is an unserious approach to what is a very serious problem.

Jessica Toale (Bournemouth West) (Lab): The Conservatives left our asylum system in an absolute mess, and now they claim to care about consultation and community impact. Where was that when my community got two asylum hotels more than 10 years ago? This Government, by contrast, are bringing the number down while increasing the number of people with no right to be in the country who are returned, which shows how seriously we take the issue. Can the Minister please tell my constituents what more the Government are doing to close every single asylum hotel?

Alex Norris: I can give that clear message to my hon. Friend’s constituents from the Dispatch Box. We will close every single asylum hotel, as we committed ourselves to doing at the time of the general election.

[Alex Norris]

My hon. Friend has raised an important point, and I acknowledge the shortcomings in this exercise that were raised by the hon. Member for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire (Mr MacDonald) and also by Madam Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Sussex Weald (Ms Ghani). We want to reset the Home Office's relationship with local government, which is why we have had those conversations, but we need to ensure that local decision makers and local leaders are wired into these decisions earlier so that we can collectively ensure that they are a success.

Graham Leadbitter (Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey) (SNP): My colleague Shirley-Anne Somerville, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice in the Scottish Government, wrote to the Secretary of State about this issue on 26 September, seeking an urgent meeting with Highland council and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. No reply to that letter was received, and the first she knew of the decision was when she heard about it on the radio, as many of the rest of us did.

Asylum seekers, by their very nature, are fleeing conflict and persecution. Many require wraparound support, having suffered significant mental and, in some cases, physical trauma. If there is no support package in place, things are not going to go well. The arrival of 300 people in Inverness in such a short space of time puts a huge strain on local services. What is the Minister doing to address those issues with the Scottish Government and with Highland council?

Alex Norris: That point about wraparound support is very important as well. The point of using these sites is that we are able to provide local amenities and vital services for that cohort without having to rely on the local health services. We are having those conversations with health authorities, police and fire services and the local council to ensure that that support is in place, so that, as I said earlier, the impact on the existing community is as light as possible.

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): I welcome the urgency with which Ministers are seeking to end Tory-created asylum hotel use—which does not work for those fleeing persecution, or for local communities such as those in Falkirk—while also lowering the cost of the asylum system and speeding up processing. Will the Minister elaborate on the criteria that the Department will apply in deciding the sequence of asylum hotel closures, and on how they will be applied fairly and equitably across all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend tempts me, as he has tempted me on multiple occasions—this time to give him details on the sequence. I know of his vigour in closing hotels in his community. As I have said, we will close every single one of those hotels, and none will be open a day longer than they have to be. My hon. Friend will have to bear with us a little longer in respect of the sequence, but we will be clear about the decisions that we make when we make them.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): Well, what a bolt from the blue! There has been huge concern throughout the Wealden district since the news broke of a “boats to barracks” plan in Sussex. The council leadership urgently needs to speak to local MPs, as do

many other councillors, to assuage deep concerns about hundreds of asylum seekers coming to a very rural part of Sussex. Does this simply mean that people living in the Copthorne hotel will move to the barracks? Will the Minister kindly try to work with the Wealden district council leadership, so that public meetings can be held locally to discuss the significant issues that have arisen and the discussions that have taken place? What is happening about the planning process, and the community and police support? Many people need to understand these matters, given the unexpected choice of such a countryside location.

Alex Norris: The hon. Member has raised a number of important questions. Of course we want to work with the local authority to ensure that the public are giving the information and the reassurance that they need; as I have said, there is always a great deal of misinformation and disinformation, and I can give that commitment to her. She will have heard what I said about the timeliness of engagement with colleagues, and I reiterate my sadness in that regard. We will do better for her and her colleagues in securing the answers that they need as leaders in the community. Let me also reiterate, to her and her community, that we intend this to have the lightest possible impact on them. It has been proven to be done at Wethersfield and at Napier, and I have no doubt that we can do it again.

Samantha Niblett (South Derbyshire) (Lab): The number of boat crossings has risen from 800 in 2018, before we left the European Union, to 40,000 a year because of Brexit. Can the Minister provide some clarity on the measures that he is taking to help solve this immigration crisis at its core, without falling back on yet another fake silver bullet—leaving the European convention on human rights, which some Opposition parties are suggesting—which would get rid of not only the rights of asylum seekers but those of my constituents?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend has made an important point about the global nature of this challenge—[*Interruption.*] It is like being at a party you were not invited to at the moment, Madam Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friend, and other Members, will know of the work that we are doing with France, our most immediate neighbour, and the importance of scaling up our returns pilot. She will also know of our engagement on the continent with regard to organised crime. These are highly sophisticated global networks, and a global response is required to break them.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will the Minister ensure in future that Members are given some notice of the Government's plans relating to MOD accommodation? Will he ensure that the gross discourtesy that has been visited on the hon. Member for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire (Mr MacDonald) in this particular case is not repeated, and that communities may even be able to suggest to the Government alternatives, where alternatives exist? As for the pull factors to which he rightly alluded, will he ensure that accommodation that is offered up by the Ministry of Defence is at the more austere end of the spectrum? It is certainly the case that the men and women of our armed forces, families and veterans are heartily fed up with seeing people not being put in accommodation that apparently is not fit, but that apparently was fit to hold soldiers, sailors and airmen.

Alex Norris: These sites are austere accommodation. The whole point is to change the narrative that is sold to people on social media—that they can come here, live in a hotel and work illegally. The accommodation will be functional and it will be humane, but it will be basic. I can give the right hon. Member that assurance, because the point is exceptionally important.

On the right hon. Gentleman's point about engagement with colleagues, I hope he will know, from the short time I shadowed him in opposition, that I would never knowingly be discourteous to colleagues—I value colleagues across this place, of all parties and none. I have reflected a lot on what has happened in this case, exactly as he says, and yes, certainly with regard to colleagues, I need to do more directly. I have taken that on board as part of those reflections.

Carla Denyer (Bristol Central) (Green): The Refugee Council has a clear proposal that would allow the Minister to close asylum hotels within a year without resorting to barracks: a one-off scheme to give a time-limited permission to stay, subject to rigorous security checks, to people from countries that mean they are almost certain to be recognised as refugees if it were not for the backlog. Will the Minister adopt that sensible solution, and also provide safe and legal routes so that people are not pushed into the hands of people smugglers in the first place?

Alex Norris: The hon. Lady mentions an important proposal, and it is a reasonable thing to mention. We are talking about capacity in the system, and one way to resolve that, of course, would be to let significant numbers through the system without processing their claims in the normal way. I cannot support that. As she has heard me say on a number of occasions, the root of this is not just the strong day-to-day administrative running of the system; the reality is that we have managed to really improve the performance of it and reduce costs. But that alone will not stop what is happening, due to the significant pull factor to this country. I believe that doing as she suggests would merely turbocharge that, which I cannot support.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): The Minister has given us the usual Government lines on returns under this Government, when the majority of them are obviously voluntary returns. When it comes to enforced returns, the numbers are lower than in nine of the 14 years of Conservative Government, and 15% lower than the Tory average.

I want to raise the case of Hadush Kebatu. The Home Secretary said that she had “pulled every lever” to deport him, but when it emerged that he was paid £500 after threatening to disrupt his departure, we were told that was actually an operational decision. Can the Minister confirm that Kebatu withdrew his asylum claim and forfeited appeal rights, and admit that we will not be able to deport foreign criminals in sufficient numbers unless we cut off the endless routes for human rights claims and legal appeals?

Alex Norris: I can say to the hon. Gentleman that returns are up by more than 10% under this Government. I think the British public care about that. I make no apology for doing that in the quickest, cheapest and most expeditious way, which is what we pursue in many cases.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about Hadush Kebatu, a convicted sex offender who had no place on our streets and no place in our country; it is right that he has been removed. He was forcibly deported and a team of five escorts accompanied him on that flight. We turned down an application regarding the facilitated return scheme—which, under successive Governments, has offered grants of up to £1,500—but, given the very real threats to disrupt the flight, an operational decision was taken to provide a £500 payment. That was taken because the alternative would have been slower and more expensive for the taxpayer, and it would have included detention, a new flight and, no doubt, subsequent legal claims. That decision was not taken at the ministerial level, but I am not going to second-guess what is a difficult operational environment.

Sorcha Eastwood (Lagan Valley) (Alliance): This is a really difficult issue. The Minister spoke about people wanting to come to the UK because they had a dream. I want to be clear: I welcome people who want to come to the UK and live in a way that is reflective of our values, but so often we ask the most of communities who have the least. Does the Minister agree that the continued use of public money for asylum hotels poses a risk not just to our politics, but in terms of value for public money and social cohesion?

Alex Norris: I would start by saying that I share the hon. Lady's spirit on that, and I believe that the British public do too. Whether it is regarding Syrian refugees, Homes for Ukraine, the Afghan resettlement scheme, or British nationals overseas, the British public meet the moment when people need shelter, and show extraordinary capacity for compassion. But there has to be a limit on that, exactly as she says. I can assure her that we will break the pull factors, so that those who do not have a legitimate claim—more than half of those assessed do not have a legitimate reason—will no longer have a reason to come. In the meantime, in exactly the spirit of what she said regarding public confidence, we have removed £1 billion of spending from this area for exactly that reason.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): The UK is spending a fifth of its official development assistance budget on hotel bills. Some of that money was previously used to prevent conflict and to help refugees find refuge in their own regions. I served with an Army training regiment at Crowborough, one of the two sites, and I consider that if it was good enough for us, it is good enough for some of the refugees who are seeking asylum. But can the Minister assure the House that this move to use decommissioned barracks will cost taxpayers less than hotels currently do?

Alex Norris: The reality is that the unit cost per night is broadly similar. The point is that we have to reduce the number of people in that accommodation. That is how we get value for the taxpayer and how we will not need the accommodations at all.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his answers and his dedication to finding the answers that we need. While it was good to hear that there is a plan to house asylum seekers more cost-effectively, the Government must ensure that those areas do not become states within this state. What steps have been taken to ensure that law and order is upheld in any designated large areas, such as those proposed by the Minister?

Alex Norris: I am grateful for that question, and I would start by acknowledging the hon. Gentleman's Herculean work throughout my time in Parliament, and before, regarding Christians persecuted abroad, so that people do not have to leave their homes. That is important work, and that opinion is shared across this place. I want to be clear: the rule of law has primacy; it is absolute in this country, and it is the same for all of us. People who come here and want to make their homes here, as the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sorcha Eastwood) said, must embed themselves into communities, reflect our values and behave in those ways.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have just been debating the important matter of asylum seekers in MOD accommodation. Could you confirm, as I hope *Hansard* will, that in the nearly 37 minutes that we have spent debating this important matter, no Member of Reform has been in the Chamber or, indeed, made any contribution whatsoever?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. However, he will know that it is not a matter for the Chair.

UK-T rkiye Typhoon Export Deal

2.7 pm

The Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry (Luke Pollard): With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to update the House on the UK-T rkiye deal to sell 20 British-built Typhoon fighter jets.

On Monday, the Prime Minister travelled to Ankara with the Defence Secretary, where he finalised an agreement with President Erdoğan for T rkiye to purchase 20 British-built Typhoon fighter jets. That deal is worth £8 billion and is our biggest fighter jet export contract since 2007. This is a massive boost for our defence industry, for our economy and for our country. It confirms that defence is an engine for growth.

This deal will support 20,000 jobs across 330 UK companies across the country. In particular, it will support jobs in Lancashire, Bristol, Luton and Scotland for many years to come. That includes nearly 6,000 jobs directly supporting the Typhoon programme at BAE Systems sites, particularly at Warton and Samlesbury; more than 1,100 jobs in the south-west, such as at the Rolls-Royce facility in Bristol, producing modules for the EJ200 jet engines that will power these new Typhoon jets; and over 800 jobs in Scotland, including manufacturing cutting-edge radar systems at Leonardo in Edinburgh. Those are high-value, well-paid, good, unionised jobs—the kind of jobs that put money in working people's pockets, help revitalise communities, and help deliver on defence as an engine for growth.

This deal also preserves our sovereign skills, which underpin our national security and prosperity, so that they can be handed down to new generations. But it goes far beyond the procurement of Typhoon jets alone; it represents the leading edge of our enhanced strategic partnership between the UK and T rkiye. This agreement between our two countries is emblematic of a growing defence and industrial partnership, and will serve as a springboard for deeper collaboration in future.

T rkiye is a key NATO ally in a strategically critical part of the world and the gatekeeper to the Black sea. By equipping it with top-of-the-range Typhoon fighter jets—the best fourth-generation all-round fighter in the world—this deal strengthens NATO's collective deterrence in a crucial region. It boosts interoperability between our air forces and makes us all safer and more prosperous.

This deal comes just weeks after Norway chose the UK to supply it with at least five Type-26 frigates in a £10 billion deal—the biggest ever warship export deal by value in our history. That contract alone secures 4,000 UK jobs, including more than 2,000 in Scotland, and supports over 400 British companies right across our supply chain. Both deals, worth a combined £18 billion, are proof positive that other countries want to invest in Britain. When allies choose our capabilities, it leads directly to greater interoperability and investment back into our technology to achieve warfighting readiness. The deals are clear evidence that this Government's defence industrial strategy is delivering.

Here is what we are doing differently. This Government are going further and faster to back British industry, British jobs and British innovation. We are working more closely with allies around the world to strengthen our collective security. We are bringing forward the

biggest sustained increase in UK defence spending since the cold war to make Britain secure at home and strong abroad—£5 billion extra in the defence budget this year, achieving 2.5% of GDP by April 2027 and 3% in the next Parliament. And we are making defence an engine for economic growth for the next decade and well beyond, driving renewal and opportunity up and down the country.

As we set out in our defence industrial strategy, our armed forces are only as strong as the industry that stands behind them. We are fortunate in this country to have a world-class industry and a world-class supply chain, but we are making them even stronger by opening up defence to innovators, overhauling our procurement system, cutting contracting time, and increasing foreign direct investment in our defence sector by more than eight times over the past year.

Last week, before I visited BAE Systems in Warton and Samlesbury, I launched a consultation on an offsets policy, which will ensure that every pound spent on defence will make our armed forces stronger and the British public better off. The proposal would mean that when the UK buys from international partners, the winning contractor would be required to create jobs, know-how and investment opportunities here in the UK, strengthening the UK economy.

To the workers, managers and apprentices I met last week in Warton and Samlesbury, but also to those in Bristol, Edinburgh and across the UK, let me say this: this Government promised that we would have your back, and we are delivering on that promise with this deal. Your hard work, dedication and commitment helped deliver this deal, just as much as diplomacy and negotiation did. Thank you.

The UK and T rkiye may be positioned at opposite ends of Europe, but our partnership is helping to protect the continent at a time of rising threats, and the deal that we have announced this week only reinforces that partnership for the future. Work on the new Typhoon jets begins immediately. The first British-built Typhoon for T rkiye will be delivered in just five years' time, so the benefits will be felt immediately too: more jobs for working people, more investment in the supply chain, more confidence in the UK economy, defence as an engine for growth, security at home, and strength abroad. That is what this Government are delivering, and that is why I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

2.13 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for providing advance sight of his statement. I strongly welcome this very important news for UK fighter production. Combat air has historically been the largest component of UK defence exports, and few nations can hope to sustain such an advanced industrial base purely on domestic sales. I stressed throughout my time as the Minister for Defence Procurement the critical importance of exports, and this deal is very positive for the workforce in Warton—but also, as the Minister said, in Bristol, Edinburgh and elsewhere in the UK—for the wider small and medium-sized enterprises supply chain,

for our NATO ally Turkey and for the Royal Air Force, which requires a domestic base of highly skilled workers to maintain our ability to deliver sovereign competitiveness in the air domain.

At the very well-attended global combat air programme event in Mr Speaker's state rooms, I said that defence exports were like a baton passed between Administrations, because the biggest deals take years to pull off and require teamwork within and across Administrations. As with the Norwegian frigates, there was a massive and concerted effort under the previous Government to engage constantly with Turkey in support of Typhoon exports. In my time as a Minister, Typhoon exports were a top priority in the MOD and I chaired a weekly cross-Government committee that was focused in particular on persuading our German allies to change their long-standing position of opposing Typhoon sales to Saudi Arabia and Turkey. That work irrefutably helped pave the way for this deal.

I note that the Trinity House agreement with Germany, which I welcome, builds on the proposal to restore large-calibre barrel production to the UK, which I initiated from scratch. Does the Minister agree that Germany's change of position on Typhoon exports underlines the strength of our bilateral relationship with the Germans and the welcome stiffening of their military disposition more broadly, given the common threat we face?

Of course, we should also recognise the important role of other long-standing defence export partners in this announcement. I note that it has been reported that the deal involves Qatar and Oman giving Turkey up to 24 existing Typhoons. Can the Minister confirm whether either will be buying replacement Typhoons? I note that Qatar has the option on 12, which I understand is still outstanding. Can the Minister update us on progress on Typhoon exports to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

That brings me to the very relevant matter of GCAP, the programme that is developing the Typhoon's successor. I have previously spoken of how GCAP is, like AUKUS, effectively two pillars: the Tempest platform is pillar 1, and pillar 2 includes critical elements such as loyal wingmen and electronic warfare, with significant potential benefit to the RAF's immediate lethality. While appreciating the complications in inviting new nations to join pillar 1, and having given strong hints about the German position in relation to its SCAF partnership with France, has the Minister considered inviting Germany to be a pillar 2 partner of GCAP? Does the deal include any movement on complex weapons for integration into Typhoon, given our industrial strength in that area?

The MOD has now retired some 30 RAF tranche 1 Typhoons. Does the Minister plan to order any further Typhoons for the RAF to replace those, and if so, when?

E-Scan radar for the RAF's Typhoons, which is led by Leonardo in Edinburgh, has been successfully developed, but no production orders have been placed. I have previously urged Ministers to accelerate procurement to boost the lethality of our existing Typhoon fleet. When will E-Scan radar be in service for the RAF? The Typhoon needs an associated electronics upgrade known as P4E—phase 4 enhancement—to fully exploit the capabilities of E-Scan radar, but I understand that no contract for that has been placed yet either. When is P4E intended to be on contract?

[James Cartlidge]

Finally, it would be wrong of me not to welcome the Minister to his newly named position as the Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry. Personally, I think it is a shame that there is no longer a Minister for Defence Procurement, but perhaps that should not be a surprise, given how little procurement is going on in the MOD. Is it not the reality that, for all the boasts about defence spending, Labour is prioritising penny-pinching in the MOD and forcing a deep freeze in procurement? Specifically, can he confirm or deny reports in *The Telegraph* that he is demanding that the armed forces make in-year cuts this year of £2.6 billion?

Luke Pollard: I was nearly going to say that I warmly welcome all the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but I am afraid that the good news had to be tempered with a little bit of partisan attack. First, let me welcome his welcome for this deal. It shows that when there is good cross-party work, we can achieve things well. I am very proud that it is this Government who have landed this deal. We know that when we took office, a substantial amount of work was required to improve the MOD's export offer, and we have undertaken that work. It has shown benefits in the Norway deal, and now in the T rkiye deal, and we are working on a number of other contracts with our allies that I hope will produce similarly good news for workforces up and down the country in due course.

The hon. Gentleman asked about approvals from our allies. I can confirm that all Eurofighter nations have indeed signed off this export, including Germany. It is right that he raised the Trinity House agreement that was signed between this Government and Germany, which provides a huge amount of opportunity. Last week, to mark the one-year anniversary of the signing of that deal, Boris Pistorius and our very own Defence Secretary were in a P-8 flying from RAF Lossiemouth, which underlines our commitment to have German P-8s flying from Lossiemouth and to have German aircrews participating with our RAF jets in a really important international mission that flies from Lossiemouth.

GCAP is an essential part of our future combat air offer. That was reinforced in the strategic defence review that we published earlier this year, and the Typhoon order for T rkiye helps fill a gap in the production line between our current Typhoon orders and the production of GCAP platforms in the future.

The hon. Gentleman will know that all our spending announcements will be made as part of the defence investment plan towards the end of this year. The radar he mentions is an incredible piece of technology, which is of benefit not only to the RAF, but to other Typhoon nations.

I gently point out to the hon. Gentleman that, since taking office just over a year ago, we have signed 1,000 major deals in the MOD. We continue to procure not just traditional aspects, but cyber, drones and other capabilities for our armed forces. We will continue to work with our allies because the change we need in our armed forces is not just about renewing the kit and equipment for our forces, but about buying equipment alongside our allies, cutting research and development costs, increasing interoperability, moving towards interchangeability and strengthening our warfighting resilience.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for this deal, and I hope he will join in thanking all the workers for their tireless efforts in supporting our national security and that of our NATO allies.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): This deal will support 20,000 jobs and make sure we have the skills we need for future combat air programmes. Defence supports 37,000 jobs across the south-west. What steps are the Government taking to support skills across the whole defence sector and to support the space, satellite and drone sectors that are so strong in Cornwall?

Luke Pollard: As a fellow south-west MP, I know how important defence is to our region, and how important it is that we not only continue the investment in our armed forces, but renew those capabilities. Space has a critical part to play in our future capabilities and, indeed, the ability of our armed forces to deploy with effect today.

On skills, my hon. Friend will know that, as part of the £773 million package in the defence industrial strategy, we are looking to open a number of defence technical excellence colleges across England, which will provide an increased boost in the skills base we need. Our challenge to all defence companies, large and small, is to grow the skills base so that we have greater resilience and a greater ability to direct more of that increasing UK defence spend at British companies delivering for our armed forces.

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

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement. Let me begin by warmly welcoming the announcement of this deal. It will generate jobs for a skilled and dedicated workforce here in the UK and generate much-needed growth, while contributing to the security and deterrence capability of the NATO alliance. The Government are right to see T rkiye as a key strategic partner in the Black sea and, as a NATO member, as an essential partner in our collective efforts to contain Putin's imperial ambitions by defending our eastern flank.

Yet even as we recognise our shared security interests, we must be clear on Ankara's actions when they depart from our values and standards. The continued detention of Istanbul's mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, which is widely believed to be politically motivated, remains egregious and speaks to an alarming trend of democratic backsliding in T rkiye. Can the Minister confirm whether he or the Prime Minister raised concerns about Mayor İmamoğlu's continued detention while concluding this deal, and if not, will the Minister call on the Foreign Secretary to raise this with her Turkish counterpart at the earliest opportunity?

This deal speaks to the strategic imperative of deepening ties with our security partners across Europe and our alliance network. In May, the Government trumpeted their new security framework with the European Union—a move that the Liberal Democrats welcomed. However, five months on, it is not clear what progress, if any, the Government have made to flesh out the substance of the framework. Can the Minister please provide an

update on what steps have been taken since May to strengthen security ties with the EU? In particular, will he commit the UK to membership of the European Defence Agency to support a joined-up approach to collective rearmament with our European allies?

Luke Pollard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his warm welcome of this deal. The message that goes out loud and clear to the workforce of not just BAE Systems, but the entire supply chain, is one of cross-party support for their work that this statement has announced.

On the question of the Istanbul mayor, it is not for the Ministry of Defence to comment on individual legal cases in other countries. Our defence engagement with Türkiye is focused on shared security interests and NATO co-operation. However, I recognise what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I will ask the Foreign Office, which leads on that matter, to update him.

I was very pleased to hear the Prime Minister, at this Dispatch Box during Prime Minister's questions today, remark on the importance of the EU reset deal, our commitment as part of that deal to defence and security arrangements between the UK and the EU, and the progress we are seeking to make in forming closer ties with the EU. The hon. Gentleman will know that those negotiations are ongoing with our EU friends, and we hope to have updates shortly. However, let me say very clearly that our EU friends are also our NATO allies, and there is real common cause and a common opportunity to strengthen our collective defence by working together.

Mr Paul Foster (South Ribble) (Lab): I had the privilege of being at BAE Systems in Warton yesterday with the Prime Minister, and it is fair to say that the workforce are utterly buzzing about this announcement. It is the first new order of aircraft since 2017, as the Minister said, and the largest order since 2007. It was hard-won against the likes of the US, the Swedes, the French and other allies, but guess what? Lancashire won. It is for 20 aircraft signs now, with an option for a further 20, worth £8 billion. Generations of my constituents in South Ribble have worked or still do work in Samlesbury and Warton, and this deal has secured thousands of jobs for at least a decade, or even more. Can I please urge the Minister to still prioritise the Typhoon and to get us more orders as quickly as he can?

Luke Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend for the important work he has been doing alongside other Lancashire MPs not only Labour Members, but on a cross-party basis—in support of the workforce at Samlesbury and Warton. He says that Lancashire won, but I should place on the record that a key part was played by the Yorkshire Defence Secretary, and I think that when they each play nicely with their neighbours, they can achieve great things together.

My hon. Friend is exactly right that the Typhoon offers an incredible platform. As part of the Government's efforts to promote British industry and our products around the world, we will continue to promote the opportunities that the Typhoon presents to our allies, given the interoperability and close partnerships that Typhoon nations have with the RAF in particular, but also, as we move towards GCAP and the opportunities that it provides, the importance of saying that cutting-edge British innovation, especially in the combat air sector, keeps us and our allies safe.

Edward Argar (Melton and Syston) (Con): I welcome this announcement, and I congratulate the Minister and, indeed, the right hon. Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle) and their Conservative predecessors on the team effort in getting us to this point. Following this announcement, what next steps are the Government planning to take to build on it and further strengthen the UK's hugely important defence, diplomatic and economic relationship with our close NATO ally Turkey?

Luke Pollard: I thank the right hon. Member for his welcome, and for his thanks to my immediate predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle).

The partnership we are seeking to develop and which we are enhancing with the signing of the Typhoon deal between the UK and Türkiye is not just about a jet and a platform, but about the ongoing support and training arrangements for that provision. As we come together across a number of workstreams in support of NATO security, there will be more opportunities for military-to-military co-operation with our friends in Türkiye, but also for aligning our political objectives in what is an incredibly important part of the world. Türkiye is the gateway to the Black sea and our friends in Ukraine, and it is also an important regional player in the middle east, particularly in Syria. There are huge opportunities to work together with our friends there that this deal will help to reinforce.

Jonathan Hinder (Pendle and Clitheroe) (Lab): Many of my constituents in Pendle and Clitheroe work at the BAE site in Samlesbury, and they are delighted at this news, so I thank the Minister for his work and everyone who has worked on the deal. This deal is good for our national security, high-skilled jobs and local economies such as mine in Lancashire. Will the Minister outline what these contracts mean for opportunities for apprenticeships for young people?

Luke Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome, and for the support he has provided to the workforce at Samlesbury, and indeed in the wider supply chain. I was at Warton and Samlesbury last week to see and hear from apprentices, especially at the BAE Systems skills centre, about the opportunities that an apprenticeship has opened up for them.

Importantly, those opportunities are not just for those leaving school and directly taking up an apprenticeship. I was struck that one gentleman has left the Parachute Regiment to pursue his skills with BAE Systems at Samlesbury, and is using the skills he learned in the armed forces and putting them to good use in support of our national security. We want to expand the number of apprenticeship opportunities in defence and to expand the skills base, because there are good opportunities in defence for more of our young people—and perhaps those people who are still young at heart—to make sure that we are enhancing our national security. That is at the heart of the defence industrial strategy.

Mr Andrew Snowden (Fylde) (Con): Ever since I was elected, it has been a critical part of my work to push to secure Typhoon orders at the Warton site because of the impact those orders would have not only on jobs across Fylde and Lancashire, but on our sovereign capability to build our own military aircraft. I massively welcome this announcement and the work that has been

[Mr Andrew Snowden]

done by Ministers on the Front Bench and former Ministers on the Opposition Benches. I was touched that the Minister invited me to join him on his visit to BAE Systems last week, although the Prime Minister did not invite me to the announcement in my own constituency yesterday—perhaps he has been taking my questions at PMQs too personally.

The deal is welcome, but it means that we are now the only major partner in the Eurofighter project that is not ordering the aircraft that we are trying to sell to other countries. We are trying to sell aircraft abroad that we are not buying ourselves. I am sure it would be a great aid to future export deals—for getting that extra 20 further down the line and for looking at Saudi and other places where we are trying to sell them—and equally, it would continue to boost our sovereign capability in military aircraft and maintain jobs across our country if we placed that order for more Typhoons for the RAF. I would happily heap praise on the Minister if he did so.

Luke Pollard: I am heaping praise on the workforce in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and across Lancashire. It makes it so much easier to sell our products when we have a world-class workforce producing world-class products. I am sorry that he was not able to join me on my visit, but I know that he is a regular visitor to those facilities, so he will have heard about the importance of this order and why it has been such a priority for the Government to get it over the line.

The hon. Gentleman will know that all our spending commitments will be made in the defence investment plan that will be published towards the end of this year, something that I spoke to the workforce and the trade unions about when I met them on my recent visit. There are enormous opportunities in the export market to help to support the supply chains in the meantime, and they are not just about the end product—although his constituency really values that. This is a good news day for the 330 companies across our country for which there will be more orders to sustain good, well-paid jobs.

Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab): I welcome this deal, which is the biggest of its kind in a generation. As the world is becoming more unstable, this ambition should turn world-class defence deals into growth that we can feel in workshops, factories and communities across the country. In Calder Valley—or valve valley, as it is known because of its specialist valve manufacturers—businesses tell me that they want to play a bigger role in that success, but small and medium-sized firms feel locked out of defence procurement and supply chains. Worse, the big companies that dominate the field sometimes poach skilled staff from companies that cannot access the process. Can the Minister make sure that the procurement system is more open and competitive so that more communities such as Calder Valley can benefit from that investment?

Luke Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend, who I will have to refer to as the Member for valve valley from now on. He raises an important issue about the ability of small and medium-sized enterprises to access defence. Over the last decade, the amount of direct MOD spend with SMEs has fallen from 5% to 4%. We have set an ambition to spend an additional £2.5 billion directly

with small businesses by 2028. As part of that, we will be opening our office for small business growth at the start of the new year—a one-stop shop for small businesses to access MOD contracts and navigate the procurement system. At the same time, we are seeking to cut the contracting time, which favours large companies with bigger contract teams over small enterprises, to give more small businesses a shot at some of the increasing defence spending that the Government are making available.

Cameron Thomas (Tewkesbury) (LD): For over 20 years, the Eurofighter Typhoon has showcased the merits of European co-operation and the marvel of UK aerospace engineering. I commend the Government on this deal with our Turkish allies, which will secure British jobs, maintain our expertise in this field and park a squadron of multi-role-capable strike aircraft just south of occupied Crimea. I register my disappointment that the Government's press release neglected to credit the contribution of many of my constituents who, working with GE Aerospace in Bishops Cleeve, have supported the programme since its inception. Will the Minister take this opportunity to recognise them now?

Luke Pollard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for championing his workforce. One of the things that makes this House stand in contrast with some other places around the world is that we can, on a cross-party basis, support our defence industry and the people who are working hard to keep our nation safe, including those who work at GE Aerospace. I will be happy to work with him to thank not just his constituents, but all those in the supply chain who have made such a big difference to securing this deal. I also thank all those people working in sub-prime areas—not in one of the large defence companies—without whom we would not be able to produce the cutting-edge capabilities that our armed forces and our allies rely on. Millions of parts go into each of those platforms and every single one is important. Without them, we would not be able to fly those Typhoons, so the contribution of companies big and small is so important.

Markus Campbell-Savours (Penrith and Solway) (Lab): Many UK manufacturers are part of international groups and have the opportunity to transfer UK-generated profits to overseas entities via internal pricing mechanisms and management fees. Can the Minister confirm whether those profit-shifting mechanisms are assessed and dissuaded as part of UK defence procurement practices?

Luke Pollard: I suspect that I will need to meet my hon. Friend to get to the bottom of that question, but I am very happy to do so. As a nation, we certainly welcome the investment of overseas firms in the UK. The UK is a good place to invest in defence and to start a defence company. We need to make sure that all our contracts, big and small, return the value to the taxpayer. It is our intention that, where possible, intellectual property and profits should be held in the UK to support our growth mission. I am happy to meet him to discuss that further.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The news is welcome, but the future is unmanned, as the Minister knows. With that in mind, what UK equity have the Government secured in the drone joint venture that was signed in June between Leonardo and the Turkish company, Baykar?

Luke Pollard: I am happy to write to the right hon. Gentleman about the precise details of that deal. I politely say to him that the future is crewed, uncrewed and autonomous. That is what the strategic defence review set out, and that is why the platforms that we are looking at, such as GCAP, will start as a crewed platform but have the ability to spiral develop into an uncrewed and autonomous platform. That is a key part of staying ahead of our adversaries by making sure that we can increase the lethality of our crewed platforms by having uncrewed and autonomous platforms alongside them. That is the spirit not just in the combat air domain, but on land and at sea as well.

Samantha Niblett (South Derbyshire) (Lab): The Minister knows that I took part in the armed forces parliamentary scheme this year and last year, and I had the great privilege of visiting the NATO airbase in Poland where I saw Typhoons scramble to the skies to protect us from Russian aircraft. He rightly points out that T rkiye is an important NATO ally, and I am proud that Labour played an important part in founding NATO. Does he agree that it is shameful and wrong to suggest that NATO's presence in eastern Europe was provocative to Putin, as the leader of Reform, the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage), has previously asserted?

Luke Pollard: The armed forces parliamentary scheme is a brilliant opportunity for parliamentarians with or without defence knowledge to learn more about our platforms and, perhaps most importantly, about our people. The RAF crews that we forward-deployed to Poland to help to support our eastern flank allies did a superb job, as are the Typhoon crews leaving RAF airbases in the UK to support our eastern flank allies as part of our commitment to Eastern Sentry.

Let me be clear: our national security would not be helped by Putin-friendly policies or Putin-friendly politicians. That is why we all make a strong case about our support for NATO and our pride in being a party and a Government with a NATO-first defence policy. I encourage all those toying with the idea of siding with a Putin-friendly Government to look at what is happening in Ukraine, with the theft of Ukrainian children by Russia, the unprovoked illegal attack on civilian infrastructure, and the threats that Putin and his illegal war machine make not just to our friends in Ukraine but to our NATO allies, and come to the firm conclusion that being Putin-friendly is certainly un-British.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): The Minister will be aware that T rkiye was removed from the F-35 programme following its acquisition of the S-400 Russian air defence system amid concerns that it could compromise the F-35 technology. Can he say whether T rkiye has agreed to return the S-400, and if not, is he confident that our technology will not be similarly at risk?

Luke Pollard: I am comfortable that we have adequate measures in place on that matter. However, the right hon. Gentleman is right that T rkiye does not participate in the F-35 programme. As part of our work with T rkiye, there is a strong opportunity to ensure that the procurement opportunities that T rkiye has face firmly west rather than east, and that is an important part of the strategic relationship that the UK is seeking to build with our friends in Ankara. If we can find more opportunities to procure British and allied technologies

into T rkiye, with it then having less of a reliance not just on combat and sensing systems, but on oil, where it may look elsewhere, that will help to improve all of NATO's security, as well as supporting our friends in Ukraine.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, in particular the 8,000 jobs in the east of England resulting from the deal. Does the Secretary of State agree that this further demonstrates this Government's commitment to being a key NATO ally, which will inevitably keep residents in my constituency safe? I will briefly also pay tribute to my workforce—the Minister will be aware that Raytheon is based in Harlow, and we have a lot of expertise there.

Luke Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend not only for the promotion that he has offered me twice in his question, but for the support he has shown for his workforce. In these times of increased threats, as we are living in a new era of threat, it is important and incumbent on all parliamentarians of all parties to not only become more familiar with the brave men and woman serving in our armed forces who come from our constituencies, but champion the defence opportunities for industries and companies big and small in our constituencies. I know that my hon. Friend does so in Harlow, as do other Members across the House. Please keep that coming—that is how we increase our resilience and our warfighting readiness.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): I am pleased to hear the announcement of the order for 20 Typhoons from Turkey. Having met with representatives from the workforce at Warton in Parliament earlier in the year, I recognise that maintaining those crucial skills was balanced on a knife edge. I want to ask today about the European Common Radar System Mark 2, which is forecast to achieve an initial operating capability on our Tranche 3 Typhoon aircraft by the end of the decade. Given the Turkish Typhoon order will be Tranche 3 or 4, we can assume it will be specified with the ECRS MK2 and the wider Phase 4 Enhancement programme. Given that we are looking at the same staff, what impact will the Turkish order have on the timeline for the enhancement programme of our Typhoon fleet?

Luke Pollard: I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman with the full details, but having another Typhoon partner nation using UK radar technologies provides the opportunity for us to get greater value out of the R&D costs that the UK has put into the development of those new technologies, but also provides more opportunity for the workforce and the companies, especially Leonardo in Edinburgh, to be able to deliver that as well. It is not just radar, of course; as the shadow Minister suggested, it is also the software upgrades that are required to do so. I am very happy writing with the fuller details, and will share the letter with the House for Members who may be interested.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I warmly welcome this Typhoon export deal not only for entailing the strengthening of the NATO alliance, but for the jobs it will bring to the south-west of England. Plainly, these expensive Typhoon platforms will not be subject to re-export and are bound for T rkiye. However, given that UK manufactured arms have been found in the

[Richard Foord]

hands of the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan in recent weeks, how satisfied is the Minister with the integrity of the UK's arms export regime to states in eastern Europe and the middle east?

Luke Pollard: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome of the good-value platforms that we are exporting to T rkiye; it is really important that we have a strong relationship with T rkiye. He will know that the arms exports regime is run by the Department for Business and Trade. I have to say that the risk of diversion from some locations is real, and that is why before any arms exports licence is agreed by DBT, there is input from not just the MOD but other sources across Government to assess the risk of diversion or the equipment being lost or used in a way that does not accord with international humanitarian law. Where we think there are such risks, we do not grant those export licences. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to take up the matters he has raised further with DBT colleagues.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I welcome today's statement, of course. It is interesting that the Minister comes to the House with good news, but has to be dragged here when there is less good news. Nevertheless, this is welcome news and a real boost for defence jobs in this country. The Minister mentioned that some of our Eurofighter allies had signed this off and were happy with the deal. Would he like to comment on whether the White House is happy with it? Of course, anything that weans Turkey away from the Russian defence industrial complex and supply chain is to be welcomed, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) outlined. When the Prime Minister met the Turkish President on Monday in Ankara, did he also discuss Turkey being weaned off Russian oil and gas and being used as a conduit for Russian oil and gas going into some parts of the European Union—up at 36% at the moment, I think—which, of course, is funding the Russian war effort in Ukraine?

Luke Pollard: There are a number of nations across Europe and Asia with complex energy dependencies on Russia. This Government and our partner nations have been very clear that there needs to be a fast and smooth transition away from using Russian oil and gas, and it is something we continue to work on with our allies. We encourage all those that are using Russian oil and gas for their own economies, and, in doing so, effectively supporting the coffers of the Russian regime, to move at pace to get away from that. I can confirm that all partner nations and allies that were required to sign off this deal have done so.

Points of Order

2.46 pm

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On two separate occasions in July and September, the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Streatham and Croydon North (Steve Reed), made some very dubious claims from the Dispatch Box about water quality in Scotland, which were repeated in writing to a Cabinet Secretary in the Scottish Government, on social media and in broadcast interviews. I wrote to the Office for National Statistics to seek clarification. It has confirmed that the statements lack verifiable transparency and that the broad evidence does not support them, saying that: "without appropriate discussion of the limitations of some of the more specific figures quoted", they run the risk of "misleading the public".

I believe this to be a clear breach of public trust by a Minister and a Government who have staked their reputation on restoring trust in politics. I therefore ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether it is in order for the former DEFRA Secretary repeatedly to make clearly misleading statements in this place that are not supported by the facts, as demonstrated by the ONS, and whether you will call the right hon. Member to this House to apologise.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I thank the hon. Member for his point of order. The Chair is not responsible for what Ministers say or the way in which they use data, but the hon. Member's point of order is on the record. Those on the Government Front Bench will have heard his concerns, and, if a correction is necessary, I am sure one will be forthcoming. I gently remind the hon. Member that I am sure he meant to say "inadvertently" misleading.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Cabinet Office guide to parliamentary work is very clear that

"Every question should be approached with a predisposition to give relevant information fully. There should be no inconsistencies between the provision of information in answers to written questions and information given"

under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. If

"information would be released under FOI, it would also be released in response to"

a written parliamentary question. This position was confirmed by the then Leader of the House in October last year when she stated that if information would be released under freedom of information legislation, it would also be released in response to a written parliamentary question.

This guidance appears to have been breached in relation to questions about representations on the Government's plans to hike up parking fines. On 10 July, in answer to parliamentary question 64511, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), refused to publish the material. On 19 August, the Department released the same information under the Freedom of Information Act, explicitly referencing the unanswered parliamentary question. When asked again to publish the released material,

on 16 October, in answer to parliamentary question 77651, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Wakefield and Rothwell (Simon Lightwood), once again refused to do so.

We now have a situation where Parliament is being treated with contempt and information is being provided to members of the public under FOI but withheld from Members of this House. This is a direct breach of the Government's own guidance and of the principle of accountability to this House. Madam Deputy Speaker, will you consider communicating to the Leader of the House and to the Departments that such inconsistencies are wholly unacceptable and that information that would be released under FOI must also be released to Parliament? Should the two Ministers not now correct this affront and place the information in the Library of the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Before I respond to the right hon. Member's point of order, I say for the benefit of all Members that points of order should be concise. There is an increasing tendency to use them to make points that should be properly made in debates. I remind all Members that points of order should be limited to matters relating to the business before the House or the rules and conventions of the House.

On the point raised by the right hon. Member, he will know that it is Ministers, rather than the Chair, who are responsible for the responses that they give to parliamentary questions. However, he raises a serious point that those on the Government Front Bench will have heard. Members of this House play an important role in scrutinising the Government, and written parliamentary questions have an important role to play. I know that the Procedure Committee takes an interest in these matters, so the right hon. Member may also wish to raise the issue with that Committee.

European Convention on Human Rights (Withdrawal)

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

2.51 pm

Nigel Farage (Clacton) (Reform): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights, and to make further provision in connection with the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from that Convention.

In many ways, this is unfinished business. On 23 June 2016, in the biggest democratic exercise in the history of these islands, the British people—*[Interruption.]* Despite what they were told by all the businesses and all the trade unions and much of the press and most of this House, the British people managed, despite everything—*[Interruption.]* Children, be quiet.

Hon. Members: Oooh!

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I will be responsible for maintaining order in this Chamber.

Nigel Farage: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure you will allow me the opportunity to continue to try to say something despite such constant interventions.

The British people voted clearly, by a massive margin, to bring back the sovereignty—*[Interruption.]* By the way, what makes me laugh about this is that it is not just about the sovereignty of this country; it is about the sovereignty of this very Chamber and the people within it. It is about bringing power back to this very place, and that is what we voted for.

One of the biggest reasons why the vote happened was the deep alarm at the huge numbers of people coming into our country and the fact that we effectively had open borders, making us poorer in every way. Of course, our membership of the Council of Europe and the European convention and its writing into British law in 1998 kind of enshrined that, and I think it is what Tony Blair wanted us to do.

I believe that Brexit cannot be complete all the while we are subject to a foreign Court and a piece of legislation brought in by the Blair Government on which judges can choose their own political interpretation. We are not sovereign all the while we are part of the European convention on human rights, the Council of Europe and its associated court. It is as simple as that.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): Putin's patsy!

Nigel Farage: It is marvellous to see the intellectual levels of debate in this place—it really is.

Is it any wonder—*[Interruption.]* Is it any wonder that out in the country there is growing frustration—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Can I remind Members that the hon. Gentleman has a ten-minute rule Bill in front of this House and should be listened to without interruption?

Nigel Farage: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was talking about fear and anger growing in the country—and I sense there is also a bit of that growing in this Chamber.

When it comes to controlling our borders and to who should be able legally to live, work and settle in this country, and, indeed, to who should not be allowed to stay in our country, I do not believe it is right that that should be under the remit of judges in Strasbourg—who by the way are jurists, most of them not even legally qualified—and under the political control of judges in this country, who now can make their own interpretation of what we have understood for many, many years to be British common law.

This Bill intends to restore the power of this Parliament—the power of all of you as MPs to actually be in control of the things that matter most to all voters, whether they supported you or not. This Bill intends to bring back British common law and some ideas—rather than state-given rights, those of birthrights of liberty and freedom. These are things that over centuries served our country far better than any other nation in the European continent.

This is about liberty, it is about freedom, it is about democratic control. Just think, whatever the election result, even if 650 of us wanted to change rules on who can come across the channel and stay, we could be overruled by a convention that we signed up to in 1998—[*Interruption.*] Members shake their heads, but we could literally be overruled. This is about sovereignty—sovereignty of the country, sovereignty of our Parliament. It is about our voters being able to choose the future course and direction of our own country. That is why this matters.

Let us remind ourselves briefly of some of the worst examples of the ECHR taking away our democratic rights. Interestingly, it was the last Conservative Government who decided to put in place the Rwanda legislation. It was, in theory, very good, as it would act as a deterrent—[*Interruption.*] Unless people support the criminal gangs, yes it was a very good idea. The trouble was that it could not happen. Why could it not happen? In the case of the 2022 Rwanda deportation flight, at 10 pm a single judge in Strasbourg, without any legal qualification, decided on the basis of article 3 that the flight could not take off.

We have since seen horrendous stories, particularly under article 8 on the right to family life. Well, whose family? The families of British people, or the families of those who have come into Britain, in some cases illegally, and been waved through? Some of it is disgusting beyond belief. A Pakistani child sex offender dodged deportation on the basis that his removal would harm the children he had had in this country. The list goes on and on—Brazilian murderers, rapists and many others who claim the right to a family life under article 8. Well, what about British families? What about their rights and their freedoms? What are the priorities of Members of this place?

Of course, we will be told that by leaving this completely outdated, 75-year-old convention—[*Interruption.*] By the way, I fully understand why it was signed up to in the 1940s—the other European countries did not have constitutions or democracies that could prevent them from going into extremism—but we are not Russia and we are not Belarus. Nobody in the Chamber would say

that countries like New Zealand, Australia and Canada are barbaric or backward; they defend freedoms. But I do not defend state-given human rights, because they can be taken away by the very states who has given them in the first place. [*Interruption.*] I have never seen so many Liberal Democrats in all my life—it is absolutely marvellous. [*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order!

Nigel Farage: I ask the Liberal Democrats and others in this place: what is wrong with you? Do you not believe that this country is good enough to make its own laws? Do you not believe in the country that since Magna Carta has developed the principle of common law—which, with its faults, has been perhaps the best ever developed by civilisation? Do you not believe we are good enough to make these rules? Should we stick with outdated conventions preyed on by human rights lawyers in this country? This Bill would restore democratic trust and faith in this once great nation.

3.1 pm

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The speech we just heard totally misrepresents the European convention, and the failure of the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) to mention the huge benefits and rights that the European convention has brought to millions of British people says it all. Let me give those attracted by the argument we have just heard one strong reason to think again. Russia under Vladimir Putin is the only country to have withdrawn from the European convention on human rights. Maybe that is what attracts the hon. Member—after all, he said that Putin is the world leader he most admires.

Russia: a country where those who oppose the regime are mysteriously pushed off balconies, and where, if it is not enough to murder a political opponent like Alexei Navalny, Putin has even jailed lawyers who dared to represent him—things not allowed under the European convention. As we have seen Nathan Gill, a leading political ally of the hon. Member for Clacton, imprisoned for taking Russian bribes, perhaps we should not be surprised that the Reform party is so keen to follow Russia.

Besides Russia, where else are people's hard-fought-for rights under attack? Trump's America. Of course, the US is not part of the European convention, yet its citizens have benefited from something similar: the US constitution, which was designed to check the power of tyrants and protect the individual from the state. Just as the hon. Member for Clacton desires to remove people's rights here, his hero Donald Trump is doing the same in America, attacking the courts and the rule of law, and even inciting a violent mob against the US Congress to overturn an election. But of course, the hon. Member has called President Trump "an inspiration". If we want to know the hon. Member's intentions for British people's basic rights and freedoms, we only need to look at Putin's Russia or Trump's America. That is not patriotic. It is deeply un-British, and he should be ashamed.

Unlike the hon. Member for Clacton, I am proud of our country; I love our country. I am proud that Britain helped to create the European convention on human rights, championed by Winston Churchill himself. The convention protects the very people who need it most:

our elderly and most vulnerable, so that they may live and grow old with dignity; and our children, so that those facing horrific abuse have better protection. It also upholds our freedom of speech so that the press and public can criticise those in power without fear, and it protects our right to peaceful protest.

Seventy years ago, Britain became the first country to ratify the convention, as a leading voice on the global stage for human rights and the rule of law. That is our history. That is who we are. That is Britain at our best. Yet the hon. Member for Clacton wants us to forget our history, dump British values, undermine the rule of law and row back on people's hard-won rights. I say no.

To help get across how wrong the hon. Member, the Reform party and the Conservatives are on this, let me give some examples. When people died because of poor care at Stafford hospital, their families secured change—because of these laws. When British troops died in Iraq because of poor equipment, the Supreme Court ruled that the Government were accountable—because of these laws. After 96 people were killed in the Hillsborough disaster and the victims themselves were blamed, their families finally got to the truth—because of these laws. When the Metropolitan police failed to properly investigate the horrific assaults of John Worboys, his victims were able to take the police to court—because of these laws.

Time and again, the European convention and its British twin, the Human Rights Act, have brought justice for our people, and protected them from gross misconduct and unfair treatment. These laws help individuals hold the powerful to account—to hold Governments to account. These laws can get justice when the elite and powerful cover up and abuse their power. So it is clear, is it not, that the hon. Member for Clacton is not about standing up for the individual—for the ordinary person, for the people with no voice—but that he is the friend of the elite and the powerful?

If we do not defend our human rights here at home, how can we possibly persuade other countries of the importance of human rights for their own people? If we do what Reform wants, the biggest cheers will come from the Kremlin, from Beijing, from Tehran, from Pyongyang, and from dictators and authoritarian regimes the world over. That would be a betrayal of everything our country stands for. The hon. Member's plan would damage our country's ability to shape our world.

Leaving the convention would be another nail in the coffin of Britain's unique soft power. We have so often influenced world events for the better by being part of international agreements, by upholding international law and by leading. Of course, the hon. Member for Clacton has made his career by damaging our country and our influence. Remember how he led the campaign for Brexit with his Conservative friends? We know what a total mess that has turned out to be. He and his friends argued that Brexit would cut immigration, but immigration has gone up. Just look at how badly he has betrayed the people he claims to speak for. Brexit made the small boats crisis possible.

Before Brexit, we effectively had a returns agreement with every EU country: the Dublin system—a deterrent that worked. Now, undocumented migrants are trying to reach the UK because they know they cannot be returned. Thanks to the hon. Member, his Brexit ripped up Britain's rights to return people with no right to be

here and people who should have claimed asylum elsewhere in Europe. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may shout—they caused it!

Let us look at one of our closest allies, the Republic of Ireland, and a vital part of our country, Northern Ireland. The Good Friday agreement references the European convention seven times. The guarantee of basic rights and freedoms in the convention was fundamental to securing the Good Friday agreement, to ending the conflict, to stopping the bombs and to getting peace, yet the hon. Member for Clacton stands here today prepared to risk peace in our country—how utterly shameful.

As we approach Remembrance Sunday, let us never forget the sacrifices made for our freedoms today, and let us never forget the lessons that that greatest generation of British people learned and passed on to us—*Interruption.* I think the veterans will notice this barracking. Our greatest generation showed us that we needed these laws to protect people from state abuse, to stop authoritarian Governments and tyrants, and to defend people's rights. The post-war generation knew how costly far right-wing populism had been for our country and our people, so for our greatest generation, for British people today and for our democracy, I urge Members to vote against this Bill.

Question put (Standing Order No. 23).

The House divided: Ayes 96, Noes 154.

Division No. 331]

[3.10 pm]

AYES

Allister, Jim	Harris, Rebecca
Anderson, Lee	Hayes, rh Sir John
Anderson, Stuart	Hinds, rh Damian
Andrew, rh Stuart	Holden, rh Mr Richard
Argar, rh Edward	Hollinrake, Kevin
Bacon, Gareth	Holmes, Paul
Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi	Huddleston, Nigel
Barclay, rh Steve	Hudson, Dr Neil
Bedford, Mr Peter	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Bhatti, Saqib	Jenrick, rh Robert
Blackman, Bob	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Bool, Sarah	Lam, Katie
Bowie, Andrew	Lamont, John
Brandreth, Aphra	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Braverman, rh Suella	Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Burghart, Alex	Lopez, Julia
Cartlidge, James	Lowe, Rupert
Chope, Sir Christopher	Mak, Alan
Cleverly, rh Sir James	Mayhew, Jerome
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	McVey, rh Esther
Cocking, Lewis	Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Cross, Harriet	Moore, Robbie
Davies, Gareth	Morton, rh Wendy
Davies, Mims	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Norman, rh Jesse
Evans, Dr Luke	Obese-Jecty, Ben
Farage, Nigel	O'Brien, Neil
Fortune, Peter	Patel, rh Priti
Fox, Sir Ashley	Paul, Rebecca
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Philp, rh Chris
French, Mr Louie	Pritchard, rh Mark
Fuller, Richard	Raja, Shivani (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra</i>)
Glen, rh John	Rankin, Jack
Grant, Helen	Reed, David
Griffith, Andrew	Robertson, Joe
Griffiths, Alison	

Robinson, rh Gavin
Rosindell, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Smith, Greg
Smith, Rebecca
Snowden, Mr Andrew
Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Stafford, Gregory
Stephenson, Blake
Stride, rh Sir Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Thomas, Bradley
Tice, Richard
Timothy, Nick
Trott, rh Laura
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Whately, Helen
Wild, James
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wood, Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir John Whittingdale and
Danny Kruger

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy
vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-
Addy*)
Abrahams, Debbie
Adam, Shockat
Ali, Tahir
Amos, Gideon
Anderson, Fleur
Aquarone, Steff
Arthur, Dr Scott
Asser, James
Babarinde, Josh
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Begum, Apsana
Bennett, Alison
Berry, Si n
Billington, Ms Polly
Blake, Olivia
Brewer, Alex
Brown-Fuller, Jess
Buckley, Julia
Burgon, Richard
Burke, Maureen
Byrne, Ian
Cane, Charlotte
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chadwick, David
Chambers, Dr Danny
Charalambous, Bambos
Chowns, Dr Ellie
Coghlan, Chris
Collins, Victoria
Cooper, Andrew
Cooper, Dr Beccy
Cooper, Daisy
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Ms Stella
Crichton, Torcuil
Dance, Adam

Darling, Steve
Davey, rh Ed
Davies, Ann
De Cordova, Marsha
Dean, Bobby
Denyer, Carla
Dillon, Mr Lee
Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Dyke, Sarah
Eastwood, Sorcha
Eccles, Cat
Efford, Clive
Esterson, Bill
Flynn, rh Stephen
Foord, Richard
Forster, Mr Will
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Franklin, Z e
Furniss, Gill
George, Andrew
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Sarah
Gilmour, Rachel
Glover, Olly
Goldman, Marie
Gordon, Tom
Green, Sarah
Hack, Amanda
Hanna, Claire
Harding, Monica
Hayes, Helen
Heylings, Pippa
Hinchliff, Chris
Hobhouse, Wera
Hume, Alison
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Mr Adnan
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Liz

Jones, Clive
Jones, Gerald
Khan, Afzal
Kumaran, Uma
Lake, Ben
Lamb, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Law, Noah
Leadbitter, Graham
Leishman, Brian
Logan, Seamus
Long Bailey, Rebecca
MacDonald, Mr Angus
Maguire, Ben
Maguire, Helen
Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast
by Bobby Dean*)
Maskell, Rachael
Mathew, Brian
Mayer, Alex
Maynard, Charlie
McDonnell, rh John
Medi, Llinos
Midgley, Anneliese
van Mierlo, Freddie
Miller, Calum
Milne, John
Mohamed, Abtisam
Mohamed, Iqbal
Moon, Perran
Moran, Layla
Morello, Edward
Morgan, Helen
Morris, Grahame
Morrison, Mr Tom
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Susan
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah

Opher, Dr Simon
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Osborne, Tristan
Pinkerton, Dr Al
Qureshi, Yasmin
Ramsay, Adrian
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Sabine, Anna
Savage, Dr Roz
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Slade, Vikki
Slaughter, Andy
Smart, Lisa
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Sobel, Alex
Sollom, Ian
Stainbank, Euan
Stewart, Elaine
Stone, Jamie
Sultana, Zarah
Swann, Robin
Taylor, Luke
Thomas, Cameron
Vaughan, Tony
Voaden, Caroline
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whittome, Nadia
Wilkinson, Max
Wilson, Munira
Wishart, Pete
Witherden, Steve
Woodcock, Sean
Wrigley, Martin

Tellers for the Noes:
Wendy Chamberlain and
Claire Young

Question accordingly negated.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, notwithstanding the practice of the House on when a motion relating to a matter of privilege is taken, the motion in the name of Sir Alan Campbell relating to Privileges may be taken after the conclusion of proceedings on the Sentencing Bill; the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on that motion not later than one hour after their commencement; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; the business may be proceeded with, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Sir Alan Campbell.*)

Sentencing Bill

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Committee

New Clause 1

PARENTS OF YOUNG OFFENDERS

“(1) The Secretary of State must undertake an assessment of the effectiveness and use by the courts of the following powers in the Sentencing Code—

- (a) sections 365 to 375 (parenting orders); and
- (b) sections 380 to 383 (Costs, fines and other financial orders where offender aged under 18).

(2) The assessment undertaken under subsection (1) must make recommendations on—

- (a) ways to increase use of the Sentencing Code powers to make parenting and financial orders; and
- (b) other potential sentencing changes to promote greater parental responsibility in respect of young offenders.

(3) The Secretary of State must, within a year of the passing of this Act, lay a copy of the assessment made under this section before Parliament.”—(*Mr Bedford.*)

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to assess the use of the courts' existing powers to make parenting orders and financial orders to parents of young offenders.

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.24 pm

Mr Peter Bedford (Mid Leicestershire) (Con): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

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

New clause 2—*Re-sentencing those serving a sentence of imprisonment for public protection*—

“(1) The Lord Chancellor must make arrangements for, and relating to, the re-sentencing of all prisoners serving IPP sentences within 18 months beginning on the day on which this Act is passed.

(2) Those arrangements must include arrangements relating to the establishment of a committee to provide advice regarding the discharge of the Lord Chancellor's duty under subsection (1).

(3) The committee established by virtue of subsection (2) must include a judge nominated by the Lord Chief Justice.

(4) A court that imposed an IPP sentence has the power to re-sentence the prisoner in relation to the original offence.

(5) But the court may not impose a sentence that is a heavier penalty than the sentence that was imposed for the original offence.

(6) In relation to the exercise of the power in subsection (4)—

- (a) that power is to be treated as a power to re-sentence under the Sentencing Code (see section 402(1) of the Sentencing Act 2020);
- (b) the Code applies for the purposes of this section (and, accordingly, it does not matter that a person serving an IPP sentence was convicted of an offence before 1 December 2020).

(7) In this section—

‘IPP sentence’ means a sentence of imprisonment or detention in a young offender institution for public protection under section 225 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 or a sentence of detention for public protection under section 226 of that Act (including such a sentence of imprisonment or detention passed as a result of section 219 or 221 of the Armed Forces Act 2006);

‘original offence’ means the offence in relation to which the IPP sentence was imposed.

(8) This section comes into force at the end of the period of two months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.”

This new clause would implement the recommendation of the Justice Committee's 2022 Report that there should be a resentencing exercise in relation to all IPP sentenced individuals, and to establish a time-limited expert committee, including a member of the judiciary, to advise on the practical implementation of such an exercise.

New clause 3—*Use of funds raised through income reduction orders*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must undertake an assessment of the potential benefits and costs of directing the funds raised from income reduction orders into a fund that provides support for victims.

(2) The Secretary of State must, within a year of the passing of this Act, lay a copy of the assessment under subsection (1) before Parliament.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to undertake an assessment of the potential benefits of using the monies raised through income reduction orders to fund support for victims.

New clause 4—*Probation caseloads*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, before laying regulations to commence the provisions in this Act, establish maximum caseload limits for probation officers supervising individuals subject to—

- (a) licence conditions;
- (b) community orders; or
- (c) any other form of court-imposed supervision by the probation service.

(2) The Secretary of State must, each year, lay before Parliament a report on compliance with the caseload limits set under this section.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to set maximum caseloads for probation before implementation of the Act, and to report annually on compliance.

New clause 5—*Access to rehabilitation and support services*—

“(1) The probation service must ensure all individuals subject to licence conditions, community orders, or other court-imposed supervision have access to—

- (a) NHS mental health and substance misuse services,
- (b) education, training and employment support, and
- (c) approved behaviour change or offender behaviour programmes.

(2) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament, each year, a report on the availability and use of the services provided under subsection (1).”

This new clause would require the probation service to ensure people under its supervision can access mental health and substance misuse services; education, training and support; and approved behaviour change or offender management programmes, and to report annually on the availability and uptake of those services.

New clause 6—*Digital systems for tracking offender progress*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within one year of the passing of this Act, undertake an assessment of the benefits and costs of implementing a digital sentence management system for prisoners and individuals who are subject to supervision by the probation service.

(2) The assessment must consider the following potential functions of a sentence management system—

- (a) tracking offender progress,
- (b) providing for the sharing of information between the courts, probation service, and other relevant agencies, subject to the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018,
- (c) monitoring compliance with rehabilitation programmes, and
- (d) any other functions that the Secretary of State deems appropriate.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to undertake an assessment of implementing a digital sentence management system for prisoners and individuals subject to supervision by the probation service.

New clause 7—Specialist teams for high-risk or complex offenders—

“(1) The probation service must undertake an assessment of the potential benefits of establishing specialist probation teams to supervise—

- (a) high-risk offenders,
- (b) offenders with complex mental health needs,
- (c) offenders with substance misuse needs, and
- (d) young offenders who are transitioning to adult supervision.

(2) The assessment must consider the potential benefits of specialist probation teams having lower average caseloads per probation officer.

(3) The assessment must consider the potential arrangements for specialist probation teams accessing support from other relevant agencies.

(4) The Secretary of State must, within a year of the passing of this Act, lay a copy of the assessment under this section before Parliament.”

This new clause would require the probation service to assess the potential benefits of establishing specialist probation teams to supervise offenders who are high-risk; have complex mental health or substance misuse needs; and young offenders transitioning to adult supervision.

New clause 8—Domestic abuse aggravated offences—

“(1) A court must treat an offence committed in England and Wales as domestic abuse aggravated, if—

- (a) the offender and the victim are personally connected to each other; and
- (b) the offence involves behaviour which constitutes domestic abuse.

(2) In this section—

‘domestic abuse’ has the meaning given by section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and

‘personally connected’ has the meaning given by section 2 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.”

This new clause would require a court to treat a domestic abuse offence as aggravated.

New clause 9—Rehabilitative programmes for offences relating to violence against women and girls—

“(1) The Secretary of State must undertake an assessment of the potential benefits of creating mandatory rehabilitative programmes about women and girls, for individuals sentenced for—

- (a) assault;
- (b) battery; or
- (c) actual bodily harm

when the victim is a woman or girl.

(2) The Secretary of State must, within a year of the passing of this Act, lay a copy of the assessment under this section before Parliament.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to carry out an assessment of the potential benefits of creating mandatory rehabilitative programmes about women and girls, for individuals sentenced for certain offences.

New clause 10—Screening for traumatic brain injuries—

“(1) The Secretary of State must undertake an assessment of the potential costs and benefits of screening all prisoners for traumatic brain injuries at the start of their custodial sentence.

(2) The assessment should consider—

- (a) how screening for traumatic brain injuries could inform the management of a prisoner’s sentence,

- (b) the health services and rehabilitation programmes available for prisoners with traumatic brain injuries, and

- (c) any other matters that the Secretary of State deems appropriate.

(3) The Secretary of State must, within a year of the passing of this Act, lay a copy of the assessment made under this section before Parliament.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to carry out an assessment of the potential benefits of introducing standardised screening for traumatic brain injuries for prisoners starting a custodial sentence.

New clause 11—Suspension of driving licences during bail for driving related offences—

“(1) This section applies where an individual has been granted bail in respect of one of the following offences—

- (a) dangerous or careless driving;
- (b) drink driving; or
- (c) drug driving.

(2) The court may suspend the driving licence of the individual, pending the outcome of any criminal proceedings.”

This new clause would allow the court to suspend the driving licence of an individual charged for certain driving offences, pending the outcome of the trial.

New clause 12—Access to rehabilitation programmes and education for individuals held on remand—

“(1) Where an individual is held in custodial remand pending sentencing, the probation service must provide access to the same rehabilitative programmes that are available to prisoners after sentencing.

(2) Where an individual is held in custodial demand pending trial, the probation service must provide access to the same—

- (a) education;
- (b) therapy; and
- (c) any other support that the probation service deems appropriate,

that is available to prisoners after sentencing.”

This new clause would allow prisoners held on remand to access rehabilitative programmes, education, therapy and other support before the start of their sentence.

New clause 14—Under-18 anonymity for cases involving serious crime—

“(1) This section applies where a person (‘P’) aged under 18—

- (a) has been convicted of an offence; and
- (b) will receive a custodial sentence of four or more years.

(2) Where this section applies, prior to delivering sentencing remarks, the court must lift any reporting restrictions identifying P.

(3) This section applies notwithstanding the provisions of Chapter IV of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.”

This new clause would require reporting restrictions to be lifted at the point of sentencing for young offenders who have received a sentence of four or more years.

New clause 15—Court transcripts of sentencing remarks—

“(1) All transcripts of sentencing remarks made in the Crown Court must be published within two sitting days of being delivered.

(2) All published sentencing remarks must be made freely available, including online.”

This new clause would require all sentencing remarks made in the Crown Court to be published and made available to all.

New clause 16—Sexual offences: Offender Personality Disorder Pathway—

“(1) The Prison Rules 1999 are amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph 20 (Health services), after sub-paragraph (1) insert—

“(1A) Provision under subsection (1) must include access, for all eligible prisoners serving custodial sentences for sexual offences, to services provided under the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway.”

This new clause would require the Government to provide access to the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway to all eligible prisoners serving sentences for sexual offences.

New clause 17—Sexual offences: chemical suppression—

“Within one year of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish and lay before Parliament a report on how most effectively to introduce mandatory chemical suppression for certain individuals serving sentences for sexual offences, with appropriate legal and clinical safeguards.”

This new clause would require the Government to publish a report on mandatory chemical suppression for certain sex offenders.

New clause 18—Sentencing Council: abolition—

“(1) The Sentencing Council (established under section 118 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009) is abolished.

(2) The Secretary of State may prepare—

- (a) sentencing guidelines which may be general in nature or limited to a particular offence, particular category of offence or particular category of offender;
- (b) sentencing guidelines about the discharge of a court’s duty under section 73 of the Sentencing Code (reduction in sentences for guilty pleas); and
- (c) sentencing guidelines about the application of any rule of law as to the totality of sentences.

(3) The Secretary of State may prepare sentencing guidelines about any other matter.

(4) When developing sentencing guidelines, the Secretary of State must—

- (a) promote understanding of, and public confidence in, the sentencing and criminal justice system;
- (b) consult Parliament on all draft guidelines; and
- (c) publish the reasons for proposing any guidelines that could result in an offender receiving a shorter sentence than that set out in an Act of Parliament.

(5) The Secretary of State may report, from time to time, on the impact of sentencing guidelines on sentencing practice.

(6) The Secretary of State must monitor—

- (a) the application of the sentencing guidelines; and
- (b) the impact on victims of sentencing decisions.

(7) The Secretary of State may by regulations make further provision under this section.”

This new clause would abolish the Sentencing Council, give the Secretary of State the power to publish sentencing guidelines, and impose various requirements linked to consultation and monitoring.

New clause 19—Whole life order: murder of a police or prison officer—

“(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph 2 of Schedule 21 (Determination of minimum term in relation to mandatory life sentence for murder etc), in sub-paragraph (2)(c), after ‘duty,’ insert ‘or if the motivation for the murder was connected to the police officer or prison officer’s current or former duties.’”

This new clause would expand the circumstances in which it is appropriate to apply a whole life order for murdering a prison or police officer, to include murder motivated by the victim’s current or former duties.

New clause 20—Child cruelty offences: notification and offender management requirements—

“(1) A person (‘relevant offender’) is subject to the notification requirements of subsections (2) and (3) for the period set out in subsection (4) if the relevant offender is convicted of an offence listed in subsection (6).

(2) A relevant offender must notify to the police within the three days of the time of their conviction or their release from custody, and annually thereafter, providing—

- (a) the relevant offender’s date of birth;
- (b) their national insurance number;
- (c) their name on the notification date and, where using one or more other names on that date, each of those names;
- (d) their place of residence on the date of notification;
- (e) the address of any other premises in the United Kingdom at which, at the time the notification is given, they regularly reside or stay; and
- (f) any information that may be prescribed in regulations by the Secretary of State.

(3) A relevant offender must notify to the police, within the period of three days beginning with the event occurring, about—

- (a) their use of a name which has not been notified to the police under subsection (2);
- (b) a change to their place or residence; and
- (c) any other prescribed change of circumstances as defined in regulations made under this section.

(4) The dates of discharge from notification requirements under this section are the same as those set out in Section 88B of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

(5) The information required by subsections (2) and (3), once received, must be—

- (a) monitored regularly by the police and probation service; and
- (b) retained for the purposes of offender management.

(6) The relevant offences are—

- (a) causing or allowing the death of a child or vulnerable adult, or allowing them to suffer serious harm (section 5 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004);
- (b) child cruelty, neglect and violence (section 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933);
- (c) infanticide (section 1 of the Infanticide Act 1938);
- (d) exposing children whereby life is endangered (section 27 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861);
- (e) an offence under sections 4, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23 or 47 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1860, if the victim is under the age of 16;
- (f) an offence under any of the following provisions of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003—
 - (i) female genital mutilation (section 1);
 - (ii) assisting a girl to mutilate her own genitalia (section 2);
 - (iii) assisting a non-UK person to mutilate overseas a girl’s genitalia (section 3); and
- (g) cruelty to children (section 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933).”

This new clause would create notification requirements for people convicted of child cruelty, analogous to the Sex Offenders Register. Their information and personal details would be kept on record by the police for the purposes of offender management, with the aim of reducing the risk to children from future offences.

New clause 21—Lifetime driving ban for death by dangerous driving—

“(1) This section applies where a person is convicted of an offence under section 1 the Road Traffic Act 1988.

(2) Where this section applies, notwithstanding the provisions of Chapter 1 of Part 8 of the Sentencing Code (Driving disqualification), the driver must be banned from driving for life.”

This new clause would mean that anyone who causes death by dangerous driving would be banned from driving for life.

New clause 22—Review of sentence following a change in law—

“(1) Where a person is serving or subject to a sentence imposed for an offence, and—

- (a) the offence has been abolished, or
- (b) there has been a change in the law which materially alters the sentence that would be imposed for the same offence following that change in the law,

that person may apply to the sentencing court, or to such other court as may be prescribed, for a review of the sentence.

(2) On such an application, the court may—

- (a) quash the sentence and resentence the person in accordance with the existing law; or
- (b) make such other order as necessary in the interests of justice.

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for the procedure and eligibility criteria for applications under this section.”

This new clause would allow a person still serving a sentence under a law that has changed to seek review or resentencing in line with the existing law.

New clause 23—Review of the impact of a change in the law on unspent convictions—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act, lay before Parliament a report reviewing—

- (a) the effect of changes in the criminal law, whether legislative or judicial, on those serving sentences for offences that would attract a different sentence following the subsequent changes to the criminal law; and
- (b) the adequacy of existing mechanisms for addressing any perceived injustice arising from such changes.

(2) The Secretary of State must thereafter lay a further report under subsection (1) every three years.

(3) A report made under this section must include—

- (a) recommendations for legislative or administrative steps to prevent any instances of injustice arising from changes in the law; and
- (b) data on the number of persons serving sentences in the scenario set out in subsection (1)(a) and, of those, the number who remain imprisoned.”

This new clause would create a statutory duty for the Government to review, on a recurring basis, how changes to the law affect those already convicted or sentenced.

New clause 24—Deportation of foreign criminals: European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018—

“(1) Section 32 of the UK Borders Act 2007 is amended as follows.

(2) At the start of subsection (5), insert ‘Notwithstanding the provisions of section 7A of the European Union Withdrawal Act 2018 and Article 2 of the Windsor Framework,’.”

This new clause would seek to disapply section 7A of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 (as amended under the Windsor Framework) to the deportation of foreign criminals, with the aim of preventing the courts from disapplying those provisions to Northern Ireland if they are deemed incompatible with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

New clause 25—Electronic monitoring: oversight—

“(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In Part 14 of Schedule 9, in paragraph 31 (Electronic monitoring: person responsible for monitoring), after sub-paragraph (2) insert—

‘(3) Regulations under this section must ensure that—

- (a) electronic monitoring is overseen by the Probation Service;
- (b) the fitting of necessary apparatus for the purposes of electronic monitoring may only be undertaken by those in the employment of an organisation with responsibility for delivering electronic monitoring; and

- (c) the fitting of necessary apparatus may not be undertaken by an employee of HM Prison and Probation Service unless the responsibility for the delivery of electronic monitoring is held solely by HM Prison and Probation Service.”

This new clause would ensure that the probation service oversees electronic monitoring, and that prison officers would not be responsible for fitting tags unless tagging contracts are brought into the public sector.

New clause 26—Unpaid work requirements: community work—

“(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 9 (Restriction on imposing unpaid work requirement), after sub-paragraph (1)(b) insert—

- ‘(c) that the unpaid work is work undertaken for a non-profit organisation, social enterprise, voluntary organisation or local authority.’”

This new clause would prohibit private sector involvement in unpaid work as part of a community sentence.

New clause 27—Probation capacity: independent report—

“(1) Within three months of the passage of this Act, a report must be published and laid before Parliament by HM Inspectorate of Probation (‘the Inspectorate’) determining whether there is adequate capacity in the Probation Service to meet provisions of this Act anticipated to increase levels of demand on the Probation Service.

(2) If the report under subsection (1) determines that the capacity of the Probation Service is inadequate, provisions of this Act anticipated to increase levels of demand on the Probation Service may not come into force until a further report determines that the Probation Service has adequate capacity.

(3) Following a report under subsection (1), the Inspectorate must publish and lay before Parliament a further report, no less than once every twelve months, determining whether there is adequate capacity in the Probation Service.

(4) If a report under subsections (1) or (3) determines that the capacity of the Probation Service is inadequate, the Inspectorate may direct that a prioritisation framework must be issued to the areas in which the capacity concerns apply, in order to provide local services with guidance about which activities to deprioritise.

(5) The Secretary of State must, within two weeks of the laying of a report under subsections (1) or (3) with a finding of inadequate capacity, make a statement to Parliament setting out how probation capacity will be increased to an adequate level.”

This new clause would ensure that the provisions of this Bill likely to increase demand on the Probation Service cannot be implemented until HM Inspectorate of Probation determines that there is adequate capacity to address those demands, and would enable the Inspectorate to trigger the issuing of a prioritisation framework to help local areas to identify which activities to deprioritise.

New clause 28—Management of offenders: devolution to Wales—

“(1) Schedule 7A of the Government of Wales Act 2006 is amended as follows.

(2) In Paragraph 175 (Prisons and offender management)—

- (a) omit sub-paragraph (2); and
- (b) in sub-paragraph (3), omit ‘probation’

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations make further provision under this section.”

This new clause seeks to devolve probation services and offender management to Wales, by removing it from the list of reserved matters in the Government of Wales Act 2006.

New clause 29—Foreign criminals: risk assessments prior to deportation—

“(1) The UK Borders Act 2007 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 32 (Automatic deportation) insert—

‘32A Deportation following stalking offences: risk assessments

- (1) This section applies where a foreign criminal—
 - (a) has been convicted of an offence under sections 2A or 4A of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 or section 42A of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001; and
 - (b) is subject to a deportation order under this Act.
- (2) Where this section applies, prior to deportation, a risk assessment must be prepared to assess the likelihood after deportation of the foreign criminal—
 - (a) committing an offence which, were it to be committed in England or Wales, would constitute a further offence under sections 2A or 4A of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 or section 42A of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001; or
 - (b) contacting or seeking to contact the victim of the offence for which the foreign criminal was convicted in England or Wales.
- (3) A risk assessment prepared under this section must be shared, subject to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, with the relevant authorities in the country to which the foreign criminal will be deported.
- (4) The Secretary of State may by regulations make further provision under this section.”

This new clause would require the preparation of a risk assessment for any foreign criminal being deported after a stalking conviction, and for the assessment to be shared with the authorities in the country to which the offender is returning.

New clause 30—Foreign criminals: potential stalking offences following deportation—

“(1) The UK Borders Act 2007 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 32 (Automatic deportation) insert—

‘32A Potential stalking offences following deportation

- (1) This section applies where the conditions in subsections (2) and (3) apply.
- (2) Condition 1 is that a foreign criminal—
 - (a) has been convicted of an offence under sections 2A or 4A of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 or section 42A of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001; and
 - (b) is subject to a deportation order under this Act.
- (3) Condition 2 is that they have—
 - (a) committed an offence which, were it to be committed in England or Wales, would constitute a further offence under sections 2A or 4A of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 or section 42A of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001; or
 - (b) they have contacted or sought to contact the victim of the offence for which the foreign criminal was convicted in England or Wales.
- (4) The Secretary of State must issue guidance to the relevant authorities, setting out—
 - (a) a police point of contact in the country to which the offender is returning;
 - (b) steps to protect and safeguard the victim in the UK; and
 - (c) any other matters that the Secretary of State deems appropriate.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to issue guidance in dealing with foreign criminals who have been deported after a stalking conviction, and who seek to continue to stalk the victim.

New clause 31—Exclusion from automatic release following fixed-term recall for specified serious offences—

“(1) An offender shall not be eligible for automatic release following a fixed-term recall where they have been convicted of any of the following offences—

- (a) rape;
- (b) assault by penetration;

- (c) rape of a child under 13;
- (d) assault of a child under 13 by penetration;
- (e) inciting a child under 13 to engage in sexual activity;
- (f) paying for the sexual services of a child aged under 13;
- (g) kidnapping or false imprisonment with the intention of committing a sexual offence;
- (h) creating or possessing indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children;
- (i) grievous bodily harm (under section 18 or section 20 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861);
- (j) grooming (under section 15 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003);
- (k) stalking (under section 2A or 4A of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997);
- (l) causing or allowing the death of a vulnerable child or adult (under section 5 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004); or
- (m) causing death by dangerous driving (under section 1 of the Road Traffic Act 1988).

(2) For the purposes of this section, a person shall also be ineligible for release following a fixed-term recall if they have been convicted of an attempt, conspiracy, or incitement to commit any of the offences listed in subsection (1).

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations add or remove offences from the list in subsection (1).”

This new clause would mean offenders who had committed certain serious offences would not be eligible for automatic release following a fixed term recall.

New clause 32—Powers of the probation service to impose and vary conditions of supervision—

“(1) Where an offender is—

- (a) subject to a community order, a suspended sentence order, or a period of probation supervision; and
- (b) required to reside at a specified address as a condition of that order or supervision,

the Probation Service may, in accordance with this section, direct that the offender reside at an alternative address.

(2) A direction under subsection (1) may be given where—

- (a) it is necessary to protect another person (including a partner, former partner, or family member) from risk of harm;
- (b) it is necessary for the effective management or rehabilitation of the offender; or
- (c) it is otherwise in the interests of justice.

(3) Where the probation service has made a direction under subsection (1), it may recommend or determine other terms of supervision, including—

- (a) restrictions on contact or association with specified individuals;
- (b) requirements relating to participation in programmes addressing offending behaviour; or
- (c) curfew or exclusion requirements, subject to approval by the sentencing court.

(4) Where a direction or variation made under this section materially alters the conditions imposed by the sentencing court, the probation service must—

- (a) notify the court and the offender as soon as possible; and
- (b) seek confirmation by the sentencing court of the varied terms within 14 days.

(5) Any direction or variation made under this section shall have effect as if imposed by the sentencing court, until it has been confirmed, revoked, or amended by the court.

(6) In this section, “the probation service” includes any person or body authorised to supervise offenders under the Offender Management Act 2007.”

This new clause would give the probation service the power to change the residence requirement of an individual subject to supervision in certain circumstances, and to make other changes to the terms of supervision, subject to confirmation by the sentencing court.

New clause 33—Mandatory dependent support orders upon sentencing—

“(1) Where an offender is known to have dependents who rely on them for financial or other material support, the court shall, at the time of sentencing, inquire into the circumstances and reasonable needs of those dependents.

(2) In addition to any sentence imposed, the court must make an order requiring the offender to make periodic payments or other contributions towards the maintenance and welfare of their dependents (‘dependent support order’), unless the court determines that such an order would be manifestly unjust or impracticable.

(3) The amount, frequency, and method of payment made under subsection (2) shall be determined by the court having regard to—

- (a) the offender’s financial means, earning capacity, and assets;
- (b) the reasonable living costs and needs of the dependents; and
- (c) any other relevant circumstances.

(4) The court may direct that payments be made—

- (a) through a designated collection authority; or
- (b) directly to the dependent’s guardian, caregiver, or other appointed representative.

(5) An order made under this section shall remain in effect—

- (a) for such time as specified by the court; or
- (b) until it is varied or discharged by the court on application by any interested party.

(6) A failure to comply with an order made under this section shall constitute a breach of the sentence.”

This new clause would create a power for a sentencing court to require an offender to make periodic payments or other contributions towards the maintenance and welfare of their dependents.

New clause 34—10-year driving ban for death by dangerous or careless driving and related offences—

“(1) This section applies where a person is convicted of an offence under sections 1, 2B, 3ZB, 3ZC or 3A of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

(2) Where this section applies, notwithstanding the provisions of Chapter 1 of Part 8 of the Sentencing Code (Driving disqualification), the driver must be banned from driving for 10 years.”

This new clause would mean that anyone who causes death by dangerous or careless driving (or related offences) would be banned from driving for ten years.

New clause 35—Causing death or serious injury by dangerous, careless or inconsiderate driving: statutory aggravating factor—

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

(2) After section 3A, insert—

‘3B Causing death or serious injury by dangerous, careless or inconsiderate driving: aggravating factor for sentencing

In considering the seriousness of any offence committed under sections 1, 1A, 2B, 2C, 3ZB, 3ZC, 3ZS or 3A for the purposes of sentencing, the court must treat failure to—

- (a) stop at the scene of the accident;
- (b) call the emergency services; or
- (c) administer first aid, where it is possible to do so;

as an aggravating factor, and state in open court that the offence is so aggravated.’”

This new clause would create statutory aggravating factors, for the purposes of sentencing, of failure to stop, call the emergency services, or administer first aid where it is possible to do so, in cases of causing death or serious injury by dangerous, careless or inconsiderate driving.

New clause 36—Earned progression for prisoner release—

“(1) The Criminal Justice Act 2003 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 244, after subsection (4), insert—

‘(5) The duty to release under subsection (1) is subject to the prisoner demonstrating compliance with the earned progression scheme during the course of their custodial sentence.

(6) The Secretary of State must issue regulations, under section 267 (alteration by order of the relevant proportion of sentence) setting a higher requisite custodial period for prisoners who have not demonstrated compliance with the earned progression scheme during their sentence.

(7) In this section, ‘the earned progression scheme’ must include—

- (a) compliance with prison rules;
- (b) engagement in purposeful activity;
- (c) attendance at any required work, education, treatment or training obligations, where these are available; and
- (d) any other factors that the Secretary of State deems appropriate.

(8) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide further guidance to prisons on the operation of the earned progression scheme.”

This new clause seeks to implement the recommendation of the independent review on sentencing for the release of prisoners at the one third point of their sentence to be subject to their compliance with an earned progression scheme.

New clause 38—Sentencing Council—

“(1) The Sentencing Council of England and Wales is abolished.”

New clause 39—Deportation of foreign criminals—

“(1) A foreign criminal who has been sentenced to—

- (a) a custodial sentence of at least 6 months; or
- (b) a community sentence of at least 6 months,

must be the subject of an immediate deportation order, subject to subsection (2) below.

(2) The Secretary of State may determine, in exceptional cases, that a deportation order under subsection (1) does not apply.

(3) In this section, ‘foreign criminal’ means a person who—

- (a) is not a British citizen or an Irish citizen, and
- (b) is convicted in the United Kingdom of an offence.”

This new clause would apply an automatic deportation order to foreign criminals sentenced to at least six months’ imprisonment or a six month community sentence.

New clause 40—Criminal cases review—

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

(2) After section 36 (Reviews of sentencing), insert—

‘PART IVB

CRIMINAL CASES REVIEW (PUBLIC PETITION)

36A Scope of this Part

(1) A case to which this Part applies may be referred to the Court of Appeal under section 2 below.

(2) Subject to Rules of Court, the jurisdiction of the Court of Appeal under section 36B shall be exercised by the criminal division of the Court, and references to the Court of Appeal in this Part shall be construed as references to that division.

- (3) This Part applies to any case—
 - (a) of a description specified in an order under this section; or
 - (b) in which sentence is passed on a person—
 - (i) for an offence triable only on indictment; or
 - (ii) for an offence of a description specified in an order under this section.
- (4) The Secretary of State may by order provide that this section shall apply to any case of a description specified in the order or to any case in which sentence is passed on a person for an offence triable either way of a description specified in the order.
- (5) A statutory instrument containing an order under this section shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.
- (6) In this Part, ‘sentence’ has the same meaning as in the Criminal Appeal Act 1968, except that it does not include an interim hospital order under Part III of the Mental Health Act 1983, and ‘sentencing’ shall be construed accordingly.
- (7) In its application to Northern Ireland, this section shall have effect subject to the modifications set out in subsections (8) to (11).
- (8) Subsection (2) shall not apply to Northern Ireland.
- (9) In this section—

‘offence triable only on indictment’ means an offence punishable only on conviction on indictment;

‘offence triable either way’ means an offence punishable on conviction on indictment or on summary conviction; and

any reference in subsection (4) to the Secretary of State must be construed as a reference to the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland.
- (10) For subsection (5), in Northern Ireland an order under subsection (4) shall be a statutory rule for the purposes of the Statutory Rules (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 (and not a statutory instrument), and any such order shall be subject to negative resolution (within the meaning of section 41(6) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954).
- (11) References in subsection (6) to the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 and Part III of the Mental Health Act 1983 shall be respectively construed as references to Part I of the Criminal Appeal (Northern Ireland) Act 1980 and Part III of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

36B Criminal cases review (public petition)

- (1) If it appears to any adult British citizen aged 18 or over—
 - (a) that the sentencing of a person in a proceeding in the Crown Court (‘the person sentenced’) has been unduly lenient or unduly harsh; and
 - (b) that the case is one to which section 36A applies,

that British citizen (‘the petitioner’) may refer the case to the Criminal Cases Review Commission (‘the Commission’) for it to review the sentencing of the person sentenced, in accordance with section 36C below, and if the Commission refers the case to the Court of Appeal, upon such a reference the Court of Appeal may—

 - (a) quash any sentence passed on the person sentenced; and
 - (b) in place of it pass such sentence as they think appropriate for the case and as the lower court had power to pass when dealing with the person sentenced,

provided that the petitioner has filed the reference with the Commission in writing, signed by at least 500 signatures (‘the co-petitioners’) including his own.
- (2) The Secretary of State may by regulations stipulate the information and form that the petitioner must provide when filing the reference.

- (3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) above, the condition specified in paragraph (a) of that subsection may be satisfied whether or not it appears that the judge—
 - (a) erred in law as to his powers of sentencing; or
 - (b) failed to comply with a mandatory sentence requirement under section 399(b) or (c) of the Sentencing Code.
- (4) For the purposes of this Part, any two or more sentences are to be treated as passed in the same proceeding if they would be so treated for the purposes of section 11 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968.
- (5) Where a reference under this section relates to a minimum term order made under section 321 of the Sentencing Code, the Court of Appeal shall not, in deciding what order under that section is appropriate for the case, make any allowance for the fact that the person to whom it relates is being sentenced for a second time.
- (6) No judge shall sit as a member of the Court of Appeal on the hearing of, or shall determine any application in proceedings incidental or preliminary to, a reference under this section of a sentence passed by himself.
- (7) Where the Court of Appeal has concluded its review of a case referred to it under this section, and given its judgment thereon, the Court of Appeal, the petitioner or the person sentenced may refer a point of law involved in any sentence passed on the person sentenced to the Supreme Court for its opinion, and the Supreme Court shall consider the point and give its opinion on it accordingly, and either remit the case to the Court of Appeal to be dealt with or itself deal with the case.
- (8) A reference under subsection (6) shall be made only with the leave of the Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court and leave shall not be granted unless it is certified by the Court of Appeal that the point of law is of general public importance and it appears to the Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court (as the case may be) that the point is one which ought to be considered by the Supreme Court.
- (9) For the purpose of dealing with a case under this section, the Supreme Court may exercise any powers of the Court of Appeal.
- (10) In the application of this section to Northern Ireland—
 - (a) subsection (2)(b) shall read as if for the words after ‘failed to’ there were substituted ‘impose a sentence required by—
 - (i) Article 70(2) of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004,
 - (ii) paragraph 2(4) or (5) of Schedule 2 to the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006,
 - (iii) Article 13 or 14 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, or
 - (iv) section 7(2) of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015’.
 - (b) the references to sections 11 and 35(1) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 shall be read as references to sections 10(2) and 33(1) of the Criminal Appeal (Northern Ireland) Act 1980, respectively; and
 - (c) the reference in subsection (3A) to a minimum term order made under section 321 of the Sentencing Code shall be read as a reference to an order under Article 5(1) of the Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001.

36C The Commission

- (1) The Commission under section 36B is the same body as that established under section 8 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 and the provisions of section 8 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 shall apply to the role of the Commission under this Part.
- (2) Sections 9, 10, and 12A to 25 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 shall apply to this Part.
- (3) The Commission must review all cases referred to it within 8 weeks of receiving any such referral and must, within that time, make its decision.
- (4) If the Commission decides that the case should be referred to the Court of Appeal by reason of an unduly harsh sentence then, immediately upon receipt of the referral, the Court of Appeal must make an order that the person sentenced be released on temporary licence ('ROTL') until further order of the court, and the Court of Appeal must also determine suitable bail conditions, if any and the person sentenced must remain ROTL until the Court of Appeal has determined the referral."

This new clause would allow any British citizen to refer a sentence to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, for the Commission to review the sentence and consider whether to refer it to the Court of Appeal.

New clause 41—*Sentencing statistics: duty to publish—*

"(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, direct His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) to record and retain, in relation to all offenders convicted and sentenced in the Crown Court or Magistrates' courts, the offender's—

- (a) country of birth
- (b) nationality,
- (c) ethnicity,
- (d) immigration status, and
- (e) the offence(s) for which they were sentenced.

(2) The Secretary of State must make arrangements for the data recorded under subsection (1) to be published and laid before Parliament—

- (a) within twelve months of the passing of this Act, and
- (b) annually thereafter."

This new clause would require the Government to record and publish statistics on convicted offenders' birthplace, nationality, ethnicity and immigration status.

New clause 42—*Crown Court sitting days for the delivery of sentencing—*

"(1) The Secretary of State must, within a year of the passing of this Act, undertake an assessment of the potential merits of removing the cap on sittings day in the Crown Court in so far as it applies to sentencing hearings.

(2) The Secretary of State must lay a copy of the assessment made under subsection (1) before Parliament."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to undertake an assessment of the potential merits of removing the cap on sittings days in the Crown Court in so far as it applies to sentencing hearings.

New clause 43—*Expiry—*

"This Act expires at the end of the period of two years beginning with the day on which it is passed."

This new clause is a sunset clause, meaning the Act would cease to have effect after two years.

Amendment 5, page 1, line 4, leave out clause 1.

Amendment 32, in clause 1, page 1, line 14, after "months" insert "before any credit is given for a guilty plea".

This amendment would mean that the presumption for a suspended sentence would apply to sentences before credit is given for a guilty plea.

Amendment 35, page 1, line 17, after "order" insert "with the maximum operational period".

This amendment would mean that all suspended sentences given in place of immediate custody would be suspended for the maximum period.

Amendment 33, page 3, line 9, after "individual" insert "or the public".

This amendment would mean that the presumption for a suspended sentence would not apply where the court was of the opinion that not imposing an immediate custodial sentence would put the public (as well as an individual) at significant risk of harm.

Amendment 34, page 3, line 9, leave out "significant".

This amendment would mean that the presumption for a suspended sentence would not apply where the risk of harm applies, removing the requirement for the harm to be significant.

Amendment 14, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

"(3A) Where a court has passed a suspended sentence under this section, it must also require the offender to be subject to an electronic monitoring requirement for the duration of the sentence."

This amendment would require offenders (under the age of 21) given suspended sentences to be subject to electronic monitoring.

Amendment 15, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is not a British citizen or an Irish citizen."

Amendment 16, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender—

- (a) has been convicted of three or more other offences in the 12 months leading to the conviction for which a suspended sentence would otherwise have been passed (the 'current offence');
- (b) has been convicted of 10 or more offences prior to the current offence;
- (c) has been convicted of the same offence as the current offence on three or more previous occasions;
- (d) is convicted of an offence (the current offence) with a mandatory minimum custodial sentence;
- (e) has previously received a suspended sentence order or a custodial sentence for the same offence as the current offence;
- (f) has breached a suspended sentence order or orders on three or more occasions, either by breaching community requirements or committing a further offence;
- (g) has a history of poor compliance with court orders, according to a written or oral statement from a probation officer;
- (h) at the time of the current offence, was—
 - (i) subject to a supervision order; or
 - (ii) on licence, or subject to supervision, under Chapter 6 of Part 12 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (release, licences, supervision and recall).
- (i) is convicted of an offence eligible for consideration under the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme under sections 35 and 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988; or
- (j) is being sentenced for three or more offences concurrently."

This amendment would prevent suspended sentences from being passed in a range of circumstances.

Amendment 17, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of an offence—

- (a) under section 1 of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 or section 89 (1) of the Police Act 1996; or
- (b) aggravated by section 68A of the Sentencing Act 2020 (assaults on those providing a public service etc)."

Amendment 18, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of an offence involving a firearm or ammunition, including but not limited to the Firearms Act 1968 and the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006."

Amendment 19, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of a burglary offence."

Amendment 20, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of an offence involving possession of or threatening with an article with a blade or point or an offensive weapon,"

Amendment 21, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of a terrorism offence."

Amendment 22, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of an offence under section 6(1) or (2) of the Bail Act 1976 (failure to surrender to custody)."

Amendment 36, page 4, line 4, after "months" insert

"before any credit is given for a guilty plea".

This amendment would mean that the presumption for a suspended sentence would apply to sentences before credit is given for a guilty plea.

Amendment 39, page 4, line 7, after "order" insert

"with the maximum operational period".

This amendment would mean that all suspended sentences given in place of immediate custody would be suspended for the maximum period.

Amendment 37, page 5, line 20, after "individual" insert "or the public".

This amendment would mean that the presumption for a suspended sentence would not apply where the court was of the opinion that not imposing an immediate custodial sentence would put the public (as well as an individual) at significant risk of harm.

Amendment 38, page 5, line 20, leave out "significant".

This amendment would mean that the presumption for a suspended sentence would not apply where the risk of harm applies, removing the requirement for the harm to be significant.

Amendment 23, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

"(3A) Where a court has passed a suspended sentence under this section, it must also require the offender to be subject to an electronic monitoring requirement for the duration of the sentence."

This amendment would require offenders (aged 21 or over) given suspended sentences to be subject to electronic monitoring.

Amendment 24, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is not a British citizen or an Irish citizen."

Amendment 25, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender—

- (a) has been convicted of three or more other offences in the 12 months leading to the conviction for which a suspended sentence would otherwise have been passed (the 'current offence');
- (b) has been convicted of 10 or more offences prior to the current offence;

- (c) has been convicted of the same offence as the current offence on three or more previous occasions;
- (d) is convicted of an offence (the current offence) with a mandatory minimum custodial sentence;
- (e) has previously received a suspended sentence order or a custodial sentence for the same offence as the current offence;
- (f) has breached a suspended sentence order or orders on three or more occasions, either by breaching community requirements or committing a further offence;
- (g) has a history of poor compliance with court orders, according to a written or oral statement from a probation officer;
- (h) at the time of the current offence, was—
 - (i) subject to a supervision order; or
 - (ii) on licence, or subject to supervision, under Chapter 6 of Part 12 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (release, licences, supervision and recall).
- (i) is convicted of an offence eligible for consideration under the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme under sections 35 and 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988; or
- (j) is being sentenced for three or more offences concurrently."

This amendment would prevent suspended sentences from being passed in a range of circumstances.

Amendment 26, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of an offence—

- (c) under section 1 of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 or section 89 (1) of the Police Act 1996; or
- (d) aggravated by section 68A of the Sentencing Act 2020 (assaults on those providing a public service etc)."

Amendment 27, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of an offence involving a firearm or ammunition, including but not limited to the Firearms Act 1968 and the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006."

Amendment 28, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of a burglary offence."

Amendment 29, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of an offence involving possession of or threatening with an article with a blade or point or an offensive weapon,"

Amendment 30, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of a terrorism offence."

Amendment 31, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

"(3A) But this section does not apply if the offender is convicted of an offence under section 6(1) or (2) of the Bail Act 1976 (failure to surrender to custody)."

Amendment 6, page 6, line 28, leave out clause 2.

Amendment 1, in clause 4, page 14, line 10, after "(including victims of crime" insert

"ensuring their protection from further physical or psychological harm".

This amendment would amend the statutory purposes of sentencing to incorporate safeguarding victims from further physical or psychological harm.

Amendment 9, page 36, line 9, leave out clauses 18 and 19.

Amendment 7, page 37, line 9, leave out clause 20.

Amendment 11, page 47, leave out lines 16 to 19.

This amendment would leave out the Bill's provision to give probation officers more discretion in relation to licence conditions

Amendment 2, in clause 24, page 49, line 14, at end insert—

- “(10) The Secretary of State must, before laying regulations commencing subsection (4) of this section, undertake an assessment of the potential effects of a driving prohibition condition on a person's ability to attend—
- (a) employment,
 - (b) education, or
 - (c) a rehabilitation programme.
- (11) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a report of the assessment carried out under subsection (10) including recommendations on—
- (a) offender rehabilitation,
 - (b) offender reintegration, and
 - (c) any other matters that the Secretary deems appropriate.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State, before commencing the driving prohibition provisions in the Bill, to publish a report on their potential effects on the ability of ex-offenders to attend employment, education and rehabilitation providers.

Amendment 3, page 49, line 14, at end insert—

- “(10) The Secretary of State must, before laying regulations commencing subsection (7) of this section, undertake and publish an assessment of the potential effects of a restriction zone condition on a person's ability to attend—
- (a) employment,
 - (b) education, or
 - (c) a rehabilitation programme.
- (11) The court may provide for exemptions in a restriction zone condition to allow a person to attend employment, education or a rehabilitation programme.
- (12) A probation officer may vary a restriction zone condition imposed by the court to allow a person to attend employment, education or a rehabilitation programme.
- (13) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament, each year, a report on—
- (a) the number of people subject to a restriction zone condition,
 - (b) the number of cases where a restriction zone condition has included an exemption or modification to allow a person to attend employment, education or a rehabilitation programme, and
 - (c) evidence on the effects of restriction zone conditions on reoffending and rehabilitation.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State, before implementing the relevant provisions, to assess the potential effects of a restriction zone condition on an ex-offender's ability to attend education, employment or a rehabilitation programme. It would allow for exemptions to restriction zone conditions, and require an annual report on their use and effectiveness.

Amendment 12, page 66, line 34, leave out clause 36.

Amendment 13, page 68, line 8, leave out clause 37.

Amendment 4, page 68, line 24, leave out clause 38.

Mr Bedford: In September 2024, my constituents and, indeed, the country were left shocked by the senseless killing of Braunstone Town resident Bhim Kohli. Mr Kohli, a well-respected and decent man, was just walking through Franklin park as he usually did, accompanied by his dog Rocky, when he was targeted and assaulted to death by a 14-year-old boy, egged on by a 12-year-old girl.

Since this horrific event, I have been working with Mr Kohli's daughter Susan, and I pay tribute to the Kohli family for the dignified manner in which they have dealt with the emotional and tragic aftermath of such a horrific incident. Susan is not looking for retribution; she is simply looking to promote justice for the families of victims, who at the moment do not feel that the justice system works for them. I pay tribute to Susan, who I know is sitting at home, alongside Rocky, watching today's debate.

I have tabled new clauses 1 and 14 in memory of Mr Kohli, and I would like hon. Members across the House to support them. They would place greater responsibility on child offenders and the parents of child offenders. New clause 1 would require the Secretary of State to undertake an assessment of the effectiveness and use of parental orders throughout the justice system. For hon. Members who do not know, parental orders are measures that either require parents of child offenders to pay for their children's crimes, or force them to attend parenting classes. Yet, despite those powers being on the statute book, they are rarely used. In fact, the Ministry of Justice confirmed that their use has decreased from over 1,000 in 2010 to just 27 in recent years. That is woefully inadequate.

These measures are designed not to punish, but to support; to help families restore discipline and stability; and to prevent the next crime before it happens. Susan put it to me that if the parents of the two individuals in this case were placed under parental orders, they would perhaps appreciate the damage and impact that their negligent behaviour has caused. The fact that one of the parents recently asked for their child's tag to be removed so that they could go on a family holiday is shameful.

New clause 14 would bring an end to anonymity protections for young offenders who commit the most heinous and serious crimes. I believe in deterrence, and I believe that when an individual commits an act so vile and abhorrent, the full weight of justice must be felt, including being named publicly. The boy—15 years old by the time of the trial—should not be shielded. Our judicial system should not protect those who have shown such disregard for human life; they should be named, just as Axel Rudakubana was following a court order, and as Mohammed Umar Khan was last week.

New clause 14 is simple: if an individual under the age of 18 commits a serious crime, they will be named—no ifs, no buts. In my eyes, if someone is old enough to commit such an appalling crime, they are old enough to face the full consequences of their actions.

Lewis Cocking (Broxbourne) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent and passionate speech. Does he agree that the Government should consider supporting new clause 14 and removing anonymity for young people who commit such serious crimes, because they are looking to reduce the voting age to 16? We should talk about when people in this country become adults. They should not be protected if they commit such serious crimes.

Mr Bedford: I could not agree more. My hon. Friend mentions the rumours that the Government are planning to lower the voting age, and it would seem contradictory to have two ages of responsibility.

I will turn now to new clause 18, tabled my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Dr Mullan). It is shocking that the girl who was with the 14-year-old boy,

and who egged him on to commit the assault—quite literally to kill a man—did not receive a custodial sentence. Sentencing guidelines make it nearly impossible for individuals of that age to receive a custodial sentence. But what can we in this House do about that? The answer is “very little” because we have an unelected and unaccountable quango determining sentencing guidelines, rather than democratically elected Members in this place. That is wrong and must change.

We must abolish the Sentencing Council and restore democratic accountability to our judicial system to promote equality before the law and ensure that serious crimes are treated with the tough punishment that they deserve, irrespective of a defendant’s sob story. Crime is crime. That is why I also support new clauses 17 and 19, which would ensure tough sentences for those who commit sexual abuse or murder.

I also support new clause 21, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty), which would deliver a powerful message: someone who takes a life through dangerous or reckless driving should forfeit the privilege of driving. It would prioritise public safety and provide justice for families who have lost loved ones, like my constituent Emma Johnson who lost her parents to the actions of a careless driver.

I sincerely hope that the Government support the amendments. We in this place must ensure that justice is done and seen to be done.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Does the Chair of the Justice Committee wish to make a speech?

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab) *indicated dissent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Then I call John McDonnell.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I have only a couple of sentences, Madam Deputy Speaker.

To remind the Minister, in last week’s Committee, my new clause—which is effectively new clause 26 today—represented the views of a number of organisations, including the National Association of Probation Officers, recalling the problems that we faced with privatisation, particularly in relation to community service and unpaid work. In London in 2013, the supervision of unpaid work was privatised to Serco, and it was a catastrophic failure in providing both effective work and security for the community overall. It left a stain on the old process of managing community work. That was reflected when the previous Government totally privatised probation, which then had to be brought back in-house.

New clause 26 simply asks for an assurance from the Government that, although we will want to engage with voluntary organisations, charities and non-profit bodies, we will not seek the privatisation of community service and unpaid work, in particular the placement of former prisoners in work in which they could be exploited.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who I am sure will join me in supporting my new clauses 27 and 28, and new clause 25 in the name of the hon. Member for Liverpool Riverside (Kim Johnson). My new clauses relate to probation capacity and the devolution of probation

services to Wales, but in Committee we had no feedback whatsoever from the Minister at the close of the day. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that those four new clauses, including his own, warrant a response from the Minister?

John McDonnell: That is why I tabled my new clause in Committee. I did not want to be a pain in the neck; I just wanted the Minister to acknowledge our understanding of the implications of the measures and the Probation Service’s overall concerns about these matters. I have re-tabled the new clause simply to get the Minister’s view and to hear the Government’s attitude on those issues. A range of amendments have come from the justice unions parliamentary group, which the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) chairs.

Let me be absolutely clear: community service has always been state-supervised work with charities and non-profit organisations. At no stage do we want to allow private sector organisations to profiteer in that area of service. No matter what attitude the Minister takes, I hope that he can give us an assurance on that. If there is a need for further discussion and dialogue, I am sure that the justice unions parliamentary group will be willing to meet him to go through those issues in more detail.

Andy Slaughter: My right hon. Friend makes a good point. Although commercial organisations may well be able to run community schemes, it is clear that the ambition of voluntary organisations is rehabilitation and the prevention of reoffending, and that really must be the goal of community sentencing, which is at the heart of the Bill.

John McDonnell: I can only draw on the experience that my hon. Friend and I had when Serco was in charge, which was about profiteering and reducing costs, largely through a reduction in staff. He might recall that on occasion we had reports that community service volunteers were turning up, and the tools were not available for them to do their work. There was a lack of supervision, and in a few instances we discovered that some of the vehicles that they used had been forced into and were unsafe.

We do not want to go back to that profiteering. That is why an assurance that this provision will be managed and orientated by the state, using non-profit-making voluntary organisations and charities, would reassure those professionals who have unfortunately experienced the privatisation that has taken place in the past, to the detriment of us all.

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

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I rise to speak in support of new clause 19, and other new clauses tabled in my name and those of Opposition Members. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Leicestershire (Mr Bedford) for opening the debate. He has drawn attention to an important issue, and something I often ponder. I am aware that many powers are available to tackle the involvement of parents in offending, but I never get the sense that they are working as well as we would want them to. My hon. Friend’s new clause would help us to get to the bottom of that.

[Dr Kieran Mullan]

It is a privilege to take part in this debate on behalf of His Majesty's Opposition, and to have a further opportunity to do what I can to make clear to Labour Members the enormous negative impact on victims that the Bill will have. The Bill will fundamentally change how we deliver justice for victims of serious violent and sexual crimes in this country. The official Opposition tabled amendments and new clauses in Committee, but we did not get to undertake line-by-line scrutiny in a proper Bill Committee. I suspect that that is because the Government know that the reality of the Bill is so damning that they fear an outright rebellion of their MPs if they cannot continue the pretence about what it does and does not do. Nevertheless, we attempted to provide a limited and more acceptable reform of the early release measures to exclude sexual and serious violence offenders. Labour MPs rejected that, and we are now left only with a new clause to remove those measures entirely.

Why do we persist? Because the consequences if we do not are dire. The Government have said time and again that no person who has committed what they describe as the "most serious" offences would be released earlier, but we know that to be completely false. The change in automatic release rules applies to all standard determinate sentences, and to every person who is on one.

I reiterate that the independent Library briefing note confirms that these releases will be automatic. More than 60% of offenders sentenced to prison for rape receive standard determinate sentences, as do more than 90% of those convicted of child grooming offences. Around half of individuals imprisoned for attempted murder are also given standard determinate sentences. Each year, hundreds of people convicted of child rape or sexual assault, including offences involving victims aged under 13, serve those types of sentences. In total, more than 6,000 offenders are sent to prison annually for serious violent sexual offences, and they will get out of prison earlier under the Bill.

I do not know in how many ways I can explain that to Members to overcome the briefing that it is not true, which is happening outside the Chamber. I have no choice but to take Members through the numbers. I have in front of me the sentencing data for those convicted of the rape of a female aged 16 or over. In total, 590 men on average are sent to prison for that offence every year. One hundred and ninety-seven of them would be excluded from the early release measures because they were given extended determinate sentences or life sentences, but 393 would not. That is 393 rapists—the vast majority—being sent to prison every year who will be let out of prison earlier. That is without including those guilty of the rape of children, many of whom will also be let out of prison earlier.

Many Members have spoken about terrible cases of causing death by dangerous driving. Glenn and Becky Youens from Justice for Victims campaign in memory of their daughter, Violet-Grace, who was killed at four years old by a drug dealer going at 80 mph in a 30 mph zone. The drug dealer fled the scene then returned, stepping over her as she lay injured on the pavement, to get to their drugs. Are we seriously going to tell people such as Glenn and Becky that those perpetrators can get out of prison earlier in future? Because that is what will happen. Every year, 169 offenders on average are sent to prison for causing death by dangerous driving.

Some 163 of them are given a standard determinate sentence and will get out of jail earlier as a result of the Bill, and some of them will serve only a third of their sentence.

I have pages of examples. Out of 228 offenders sent to prison every year for sexual grooming, 211 serve standard determinate sentences, and under the Bill, 196 will serve only a third of their sentence. Out of 475 people sent to prison every year for stalking, 458 serve standard determinate sentences, and under the Bill, 427 will serve only a third of their sentence. Out of 576 offenders sent to prison every year for the offence of sexual activity involving a child under 16, 502 will get out of prison earlier because of the Bill, and 269 of them will serve only a third of their sentence.

This morning, the Home Secretary said that she was glad that the "vile child sex offender", as she described him, Hadush Kebatu, is off our streets. She is right to welcome that. Kebatu was convicted of sexual assault offences against women and girls. What do the measures proposed by the former Justice Secretary, who is now Home Secretary, mean in relation to other vile child sex offenders who have been sent to prison for the same offences? I can tell the House that under the Bill, two thirds of the offenders sent to prison for similar sexual assault offences will have to serve only a third of their sentence. The Government celebrate removing those offenders from the streets, while at the same time legislating to put them back on the streets.

It is shameful that Labour Members, with their majority, voted against our amendments and new clauses to remove the early release measures in specific circumstances. Our new clause to remove the measures entirely remains before the House, even if we will not get the opportunity to vote on it today.

New clause 19 seeks to address a clear gap in the law that I believe the majority of Members across the House would agree must be closed. At present, our sentencing framework requires that a whole life order be imposed on anyone convicted of murdering a police or prison officer while that officer is carrying out their duties. That provision acts as both a deterrent and a guarantee of justice for those who risk their lives in confronting dangerous offenders, yet a recent court case has created a precedent that that measure will not be applied if the prison or police officer is not actively on duty at the time of their murder.

I want to describe to the House the disturbing events surrounding the murder of former prison officer Lenny Scott, who was killed by a violent offender he had once supervised. Mr Scott was working as a prison officer at HMP Altcourse in Liverpool. In 2020, Elias Morgan offered him a bribe to keep it to himself that a phone had been found in Morgan's cell. The vast majority of prison officers do an excellent job and follow the rules, but the House will be aware of examples of corruption in our prison service. Mr Scott could have taken that bribe—he almost certainly knew that Morgan was capable of violent offences and was involved in organised crime—and forgotten his duties and responsibilities, but he did not. He refused the bribe. He was then subjected to death threats by Morgan.

It is a matter of public record that Mr Scott's time as a prison officer was not unblemished, but when it comes to the question of courage, sheer guts and bravery, refusing to be cowed by a violent thug, and refusing to

take the easy way out, Mr Scott was an exemplar, not just to prison officers but to all of us. But Morgan made good on his threats, waiting for years, until 2024, to murder Mr Scott in cold blood. It was a carefully planned murder. Lancashire police found evidence that the month before the murder, Morgan was scoping out locations linked to Mr Scott. He drove close to Mr Scott's home in Prescot in Merseyside, a gym in the Speke area of Liverpool where Mr Scott sometimes trained, and a gym on Peel Road in Skelmersdale, where the shooting would later take place. Morgan gunned down Mr Scott as he was leaving the gym, shooting him six times. Mr Scott did not stand a chance.

In 2013, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May—the former Prime Minister and right hon. Member for Maidenhead—announced that we would change the law so that the murder of a police officer or a prison officer would result in a whole life order. Speaking at the time in relation to police officers, she said:

“We ask police officers to keep us safe by confronting and stopping violent criminals for us. We ask you to take the risks so that we don't have to...We are clear: life should mean life for anyone convicted of murdering a police officer.”

As prison officers carry out similar duties, the measures rightly included them.

However, the sentencing for Mr Scott's murder has made it clear that the courts have not understood the will of Parliament, because Morgan was not given a whole life order. He was given a life sentence with a minimum tariff. It is true to say that his sentence is longer than most, at 45 years, but Morgan was 35 when he was convicted, so it is not inconceivable that he could get out one day. I do not believe that Parliament intended for criminals like him to ever get out. I was shocked at that outcome; it had not occurred to me that the measure would not apply. I was very familiar with the measure in relation to police officers, following my own time as a volunteer police officer, so my initial reaction was to believe that it must not have been applied to prison officers, and I raised that in the House.

3.45 pm

Parliament legislated to say that the ultimate sanction of our legal system should be used when police and prison officers are killed for doing their jobs, and Lenny Scott was killed for doing his job. The wording of the present measure refers to the murder taking place in the course of their duty. I cannot know with certainty what was in the minds of all parliamentarians when passing that legislation. Maybe they had considered scenarios such as the one that Mr Scott suffered and actively chose to exclude them, but even if they did, Conservatives are clear that they should not. Our new clause would ensure that that loophole is closed once and for all.

When a police or prison officer is murdered, if the motivation for the murder was connected to the police or prison officer's current or former duties, it should result in a whole-life order. We cannot go back and secure that outcome for Mr Scott and his family, but I have had the pleasure of speaking with Mr Scott's mother, who would very much welcome this change in memory of her son so that her family knows that, although nothing can be undone, something positive can happen for others as a result. She has accepted an invitation to attend Parliament and meet with me, and I am sure that the Minister would welcome the opportunity to meet her as well.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Jake Richards) *indicated assent.*

Dr Mullan: I note that the Minister is nodding.

We can ensure that criminals know that the fullest possible consequences of the law will follow if they murder a police or prison officer simply because they were doing their job.

New clause 20 seeks to establish notification and offender management requirements for those convicted of child cruelty offences, in effect creating a system similar to the sex offenders register for individuals who have abused and neglected children. I want to be clear why this matters. Every one of us in this House knows that behind the legal language of child cruelty or abuse lie some of the most distressing and life-altering crimes imaginable—crimes in which a child, utterly dependent and vulnerable, gets the worst instead of the best, often from those who are supposed to love and care for them.

This measure will not fix everything—sadly, that is not the world we live in—but before us there is a clear and proven step we can take towards improving how we protect our children. At present, if somebody is convicted of a sexual offence against a child, they are rightly placed on the sex offenders register. They are required to keep the police informed of their whereabouts, their identity and any change to their circumstances, including whether they live with children.

The requirement sits separately from probation requirements. If a person is convicted of an offence to which the requirements apply and receives a prison sentence of 13 months or more, the notification requirements are indefinite. That allows the police service, along with other agencies, better to assess and manage risk and ultimately to protect children and others from harm. If a person is convicted of horrific physical abuse, of neglect, or of causing a child's death through sustained cruelty, there is no equivalent requirement. Once their sentence and probation is over, they can disappear into the community with no requirement to report where they live, no oversight by those who might need to protect other children, and no legal mechanism for ongoing management. That is a clear gap in our child protection system, and new clause 20 would correct it.

A person convicted of any of the listed child cruelty or violence offences, including causing or allowing the death of a child or vulnerable adult, child cruelty or neglect, infanticide, exposing children whereby life is endangered, and female genital mutilation, would be required to notify the police of their details within three days of conviction or release. They would have to confirm where they live, any other addresses they use and any names that they go by. They would have to keep that information up to date and confirm it annually, just as child sex offenders already do.

Importantly, that information could be shared between the police and other agencies that work to safeguard children. That would give local law enforcement the information it needs to identify the risk that individuals could pose to the local community and to intervene with any precautionary measures early to protect children before harm could come. It would offer greater protection to the public by ensuring that those who have committed abuse and cruelty to children are treated in the same manner as those who have committed sexual abuse.

[Dr Mullan]

Let me say a few words about the reason why we are considering this measure and about an extraordinary lady called Paula Hudgell. Paula Hudgell's name has been spoken before in this House. She is the adoptive mother of 11-year-old Tony Hudgell, who had both legs amputated after abuse by his birth parents. She has previously campaigned successfully for tougher sentences to be available for child abuse offences, for which she was awarded an OBE. When Paula adopted Tony, the criminals responsible for what happened to him—his birth parents—were not even going to be prosecuted. Paula told me that if anyone had done to her birth children what they had done to Tony, she would have done everything that she could to pursue justice, and that Tony was no different, even though he was adopted. That is exactly what she did for him, and in the end his birth parents were convicted. The maximum sentence they received appalled Paula, and her first campaign began, to change that maximum to a life sentence.

However, during the course of her campaigning and from getting to see the parole system and what it can do to monitor people after they have served their sentence, Paula got an incredible insight into the system's flaws and what needed to change. Discussing it with a police officer, Becki Taft—I also pay tribute to her—who Paula got to know during the course of the prosecution, they both recognised the glaring omission that we are seeking to remedy today, so Paula acted. She is continuing to act despite facing enormous challenges in her personal circumstances, as she is undergoing treatment for cancer that can no longer be cured. Paula said:

"I've been battling cancer, but as long as I have fire in my belly, I'll keep fighting to protect children by pushing for this register. That's what keeps me going—knowing that Tony's legacy can help save other young lives."

She is an incredible woman who I am honoured to have gotten to know, and her MP, the shadow Solicitor General, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and Malling (Helen Grant), has done so much to help Paula turn her campaign into words on a page—into legislation we can pass. She is someone I am pleased to be able to call a friend.

I sincerely thank the Justice Secretary for taking a direct interest in this issue, and I am sure that the Minister will also want to closely consider it. I want to ensure that the strength of feeling among Conservative Members and others is reflected in the Lobby tonight. It may be that the Government are not ready to support this measure this evening. Labour MPs may feel that that is reasonable at this stage, but I would welcome a commitment from the Dispatch Box that will enable me to conclude that we can agree to work cross-party in the other place to get this done.

I look forward to the rest of the debate, and to considering amendments tabled by other Members. I hope I have been able to clearly explain our proposals, which relate to prison and police officer whole life orders and the child cruelty register. However, whatever else this Bill achieves and whatever else we might reasonably disagree on, at the heart of the Bill is the biggest step backwards in securing justice for the victims of serious crime in a generation. For it to pass unamended would represent a betrayal of victims. I do not believe that Labour Members want that, and it is not too late. I am

confident that the Lords will not let this Bill pass unamended, so at some point, Labour MPs will again be able to decide to say no to the Prime Minister and his plan.

MPs always have choices, and this Government spend £1 trillion a year on various services. Whatever the positive and honourable intentions Labour Members have when it comes to securing justice for victims, and whatever positive measures they suggest, they will be disastrously undone if they do not work collaboratively to make clear that they will not support measures that will let thousands of serious violent and sexual offenders out of prison earlier.

Linsey Farnsworth (Amber Valley) (Lab): My new clause 36 seeks to implement a key recommendation of David Gauke's independent sentencing review, on which the measures in this Bill are based. The new clause proposes that release at one third of a sentence should be conditional on positive actions and purposeful activity, such as attending education classes, engaging in voluntary work and participating in drug rehabilitation.

My amendment seeks to address the prison capacity crisis by embedding an emphasis on rehabilitation into the earned progression model from its very first stage. Incentivising purposeful activity will do two things. First, it will actively reward better behaviour within prison, leading to fewer instances of additional adjudication days being added.

Pam Cox (Colchester) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that offering clear incentives for earned release is a key way of offering certain offenders clear chances to change, thereby reducing the risk of reoffending and enhancing public protection?

Linsey Farnsworth: I absolutely agree. As my hon. Friend will have seen—she sits alongside me on the Justice Committee—there is clear evidence to back that up. Secondly, starting the process of rehabilitation through positive requirements earlier will reduce reoffending rates on release, thereby cutting crime and consequently easing pressure on prison capacity in the longer term.

To develop my first point, inquiries by the Justice Select Committee have found worryingly high rates of drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm, and violence against inmates and staff. Evidence submitted by Collective Voice shows that prisoners are more likely to develop substance misuse issues while in custody if they lack meaningful activity. The Prisoners' Education Trust has described how participating in education has rehabilitative benefits, helping people in prison to occupy their time positively and learn new skills.

His Majesty's inspectorate of prisons found that the prisons best able to tackle substance abuse combined clear boundaries, high expectations and, importantly, meaningful incentives. Prisons such as HMP Oakwood and HMP Rye Hill, which offer rich, purposeful activity, see significantly lower rates of drug use and better behaviour. By incentivising engagement in well-resourced, purposeful activity, new clause 36 would reduce the likelihood of prisoners turning to substances or violence. In turn, fewer prisoners would incur additional days on their sentence, which would ease overcrowding and the strain on prison staff.

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. As she said, the chief inspector of prisons has found that rehabilitation in prisons is not working. This Bill presents an opportunity for a sea change in how that works, as well as in reoffending when people leave prison. As a member of the Select Committee, she will know that we will soon produce a major report on rehabilitation. It is essential that purposeful activity becomes the norm in prisons, and not the exception.

Linsey Farnsworth: I thank my hon. Friend, the Chair of the Select Committee. I greatly trust and rely on his opinion. It is essential that rehabilitative work is available to all in prisons, as I will go on to talk about in a little more detail.

On my second point, structured rehabilitation during custody prepares individuals for life after release. As the earned progression model stands, the emphasis on rehabilitation begins largely during the intensive supervision stage. While I welcome the focus and measures in the Bill to tackle the root causes of crime, we should not wait until release from custody to begin that important work. Too often, individuals return upon release to the same environments, the same pressures and the same risks that contributed to their offending in the first place. Why wait, when we can intervene when they are most reachable? We literally have a captive audience. If people leave custody having already engaged in structured rehabilitation, they are more likely to respond positively to supervision and less likely to reoffend. That in turn reduces pressure on the Probation Service, which is also already under immense strain.

To summarise, the model proposed by new clause 36 is fair and proportionate, actively rewarding good behaviour while existing provisions in the Bill punish bad behaviour. Those who engage constructively while in custody through an earned progression scheme may be released as early as a third in. Those who break the rules will serve more days. Meanwhile, those who neither engage positively nor breach rules will see no change in their release date. That ensures that rehabilitation, positive behaviour, purposeful activity and steps towards reintegration are actively incentivised and baked in to the earned progression model from the start.

Having said that, I understand that practicalities have to be considered in implementing this positive requirements scheme, if it is to be successful. Years of neglect by the previous Government have left our prison system overstretched and under-resourced. On 4 February, the Justice Committee heard evidence from Clinks, the Prison Reform Trust, Women in Prison, and Nacro. We were told during that session that only 50% of prisoners are engaged in education or work, which is often part-time and not rehabilitative. That is due to staffing shortages, overcrowding and limited resources and facilities. In essence, we have inherited prisons that cannot offer the programmes people need and access to purposeful activity is highly inconsistent.

I recognise the immense scale of the challenge in getting the prison system to a place where the proposals in my new clause can be implemented fairly, effectively and with the necessary resources across the country. While I do not expect the Government to accept my new clause today, I strongly urge the Minister to commit to incorporating positive requirements on purposeful

activity in the earned progression model as soon as conditions allow. This incremental approach is in line with the position that David Gauke outlined in his review.

He said:

“This Review holds the view that, as prison capacity eases and fuller regimes become possible, compliance requirements for earned release should become more demanding.”

Only by doing this will we truly future-proof our prisons, help people to turn their backs on crime, and ensure, unlike the last Government, that we always have places in our prisons for the most dangerous offenders.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

4 pm

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): As the House has heard repeatedly in recent weeks, our justice system is crumbling under the strain in our courts, prisons and probation services, bulging at the seams, stretched to the limit and ultimately failing all who come into contact with it. It is not adequately punishing criminals, not rehabilitating them, and not protecting victims and survivors. Confidence has been slowly eroded and undermined. This has to end. The Bill provided ample opportunity for us to address these issues, with scope to consider how we tackle the looming projection of a prison population of over 100,000 in just three years' time. I am disappointed that such a large Bill, which makes fundamental changes to sentencing, was not given the line-by-line scrutiny that a Bill Committee, rather than a Committee of the whole House, could have afforded it.

The Liberal Democrats are supportive of many of the steps taken in the Bill, and, in the spirit of working collaboratively on a crisis that affects us all, we have tabled a number of amendments that seek to improve and strengthen it. For example, we welcome clause 3, which would give courts the power to order offenders to make monthly payments from their income, and we have tabled new clause 3 to ask the Government to assess whether income reduction orders could be used to fund victim support. On the topic of financial penalties, new clause 33 would create a power for sentencing courts to require offenders to make periodic payments or other contributions towards the maintenance and welfare of their dependants, ensuring that their responsibility to provide support is not automatically void during a custodial sentence.

Creating a presumption of a suspended sentence for terms of under 12 months is a measure for which the Liberal Democrats have long campaigned. It is a necessary step to reduce prison overcrowding, but it also plays a vital role in reducing reoffending, with rehabilitation offered in the community. Sixty-two per cent of those serving custodial sentences of less than 12 months go on to reoffend, but only 24% reoffend if they are given a suspended sentence or a community order. We do not need to send offenders to prison to become better criminals; we need to support them to become better citizens. Creating a rehabilitative system will, in the long term, reduce costs, protect victims and ease the pressure on our public services. The work of our justice system should be centred on that goal, for the good of all.

[*Jess Brown-Fuller*]

To that end, new clause 12 would allow and facilitate access to rehabilitative programmes, education, therapy and other support for prisoners held on remand before their sentencing hearings. As of June this year, 20% of the prison population are on remand and yet to have their sentencing hearings. With court backlogs at an all-time high, we see offenders arriving at their sentencing hearings, receiving their sentences, and then heading straight home because of the length of time that they have served on remand. Remand prisons are often overcrowded, and typically suffer from understaffing and inadequate facilities. These prisoners should be offered the same level of support as sentenced prisoners if we are to reduce the levels of reoffending.

We are, of course, supportive of the identifier that was included in the Bill following the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde), in collaboration with the Government. I commend his hard work and determination to make tangible changes for those who have experienced domestic abuse, providing greater confidence that their abusers will be dealt with suitably in the system, and I thank the Government for their constructive engagement with him on this issue. However, our campaign does not end there. New clause 8 would ensure that domestic abuse was treated as an aggravated offence, reflecting the severity and the long-term impact of such crimes on victims. New clause 9 asks the Government

“to carry out an assessment of the potential benefits of creating mandatory rehabilitative programmes”

to tackle violence against women and girls, for individuals sentenced to offences such as assault, battery and actual bodily harm when the victim was female.

We have also tabled a number of amendments relating to the Probation Service, because none of this means anything if probation is not properly resourced. I know that the Government will refer to the £700 million of additional funding, but it is not yet being felt on the frontline of probation, where the situation remains as described by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation earlier this year. According to the inspectorate, the service “has too few staff, with too little experience and training, managing too many cases.”

Without maximum caseloads, we open ourselves up to a higher risk of human error and also a more cautious approach to recalling, because staff simply do not have the capacity to manage people in the community effectively.

Probation officers believe fundamentally in rehabilitation and in supporting offenders to reintegrate into society, but I must raise some serious concerns around the removal of the existing short-term and standard recalls in favour of a 56-day blanket recall for all offenders except those identified through a multi-agency public protection arrangement.

For example, under the current guidance, somebody who might be engaging with mental health services in the community but not attending their probation appointment—somebody who is therefore non-compliant with their agreement—would be recalled for 28 days under a fixed-term recall. That means that, if they are in temporary accommodation, as we know a lot of people coming out of prison are, the likelihood is that the accommodation will still be there when they have served their fixed term, and they can re-engage with the programmes in the community that they were already on.

Under the new arrangements, though, in the same circumstances, somebody recalled for 56 days would be coming out and, in effect, starting again, having lost their accommodation arrangements and their place on the community programme with which they were engaging, as places are typically only held for up to four weeks. The likelihood of them then going on to reoffend—in a cycle—will increase, and we will see the same people being recalled.

At the other end of the spectrum, if a serious offender breached their licence by intimidating, harassing or stalking their victim, instead of receiving a standard recall, which would last until the end of their sentence, they would be returned to serve just 56 days. Those who in probation are classified as medium-risk offenders—that covers the majority of offences related to violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse perpetrators and stalkers—would not come under the Government’s proposed exclusions relating to MAPPA levels 2 and 3.

On Monday in this Chamber, we spoke at length and there was consensus across the House that we needed to do more to support victims, but the recall measures in the Bill directly contradict that desire. There is a serious omission, which we are extremely concerned will lead to the release of dangerous criminals on to our streets, who will then continue to reoffend. New clause 31 would ensure that offenders who have committed certain serious offences would not be eligible for automatic release following a fixed-term recall, and I implore the Minister to go away and look at that proposal.

This Bill provided a great chance to address some key issues in our justice system, and it showed signs of life, taking an innovative approach to some issues, but it ultimately lacks vision and, expectedly, funding. I thank Members for their engagement, and encourage them to support new clause 12.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): I am pleased to support this vital Sentencing Bill, which represents a significant step towards protecting victims and delivering justice.

I would like to draw Members’ attention to new clauses 8 and 31 and amendment 1. The Conservatives claimed to be champions of law and order, yet their record was of lawless disorder. After 14 years in power, they increased sentence lengths without planning the prison places to uphold them, delivering just a few hundred spaces while violence, drugs and chaos spiralled across our prison estates. They left our justice system on the brink, and forced the early release of more than 10,000 offenders in secret, shattering public confidence.

This Government are taking a different path. We are delivering the largest prison expansion since Victorian times; 2,500 new places are already open and we are on track for 14,000 by 2031. We will ensure that we will never again run out of prison capacity. We must also make prisons work. That means punishment that cuts crime through earned release, tougher community sentences, intensive supervision and proper rehabilitation that turns offenders away from crime for good.

Central to making sentencing work is protecting victims, not just at the point of conviction but every day thereafter. I thank the hon. Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller) for highlighting the important issue of domestic abuse in new clauses 8 and 31. The Bill introduces a powerful

new mechanism under clause 6, “Finding of domestic abuse”, by ensuring that, once the court is satisfied that an offence involves domestic abuse, it must declare that is the case in an open court, permanently recognising the heightened harm to victims. This activates stronger protections, which can include electronic tagging and exclusion zones, ensuring that offenders can be tracked in real time and kept away from victims’ homes and workplaces.

The “Loose Women” Facing It Together campaign has powerfully shown the real human impact of domestic abuse and the urgent need for continuous protection. The measures in the Bill meet that need, ensuring that abusers cannot return to intimidate or control and that victims are safeguarded, with the full force of the law behind them. These landmark reforms will end the crisis that we inherited, and restore faith in a justice system that protects the public and puts victims first.

Since my election, I have been campaigning tirelessly on the issue of tool theft, a crime that devastates the livelihoods of tradespeople across our country. There are too many to list in this House today, but I expect that we all know someone who has been a victim of this crime. The rate of suicide among construction workers is the highest of any profession—four times higher than that for any other occupation. In December 2024, I laid a ten-minute rule Bill before the House that called for tool theft to be recognised as a significant additional harm and for courts to consider the total financial loss to victims. That would mean considering not just the value of the tools themselves, but the cost of repairs and the loss of work, and the ripple effect on businesses and families.

Having worked closely with Justice Ministers over the past year, I am pleased to see that the Bill recognises the additional protections needed for victims, for which the sector has been calling. This Bill, with its provisions requiring courts to consider the full impact of theft on victims, its new restriction zones that can ban prolific thieves from construction sites and tool retailers, and its tougher community sentences, delivers transformative protections for tradespeople. Although the Government do not support amendment 1, tabled by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello), I thank him for enabling a discussion on the wider impact of crime.

I am pleased to note that the Bill requires courts to consider the full impact of crime, including psychological harm. It recognises what victims of tool theft and, indeed, all crimes have been telling us all along: harm does not stop when tools are stolen or a crime is committed. The psychological harm of losing one’s livelihood, the anxiety about future thefts and the mental health impact of not being able to work are real harms that must be considered when sentencing offenders, and the Bill delivers in this regard.

These reforms will protect the public through tougher sentencing and tighter monitoring, cut crime by stopping reoffending before it happens, support victims by recognising harm and preventing future abuse, and build a safer society with less crime and, ultimately, fewer victims.

Helen Grant (Maidstone and Malling) (Con): I wish to speak to new clause 20, regarding the introduction of a child cruelty register. Tony and Paula Hudgell are my constituents, and I have had the honour of getting to know both of them—especially Paula, Tony’s adoptive

mum—extremely well. One special aspect of our job as MPs is getting to meet incredible people doing incredible things, often behind the public gaze, but in a decade and a half as a Member—I am showing my age now—I have personally never come across such a courageous, driven and united mother-and-son team. That is what they are: a team, especially given Tony’s young age of 11.

New clause 20 would introduce a child cruelty register, described so eloquently and passionately by the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Dr Mullan), who is also a great champion of victims. It underlines what our job is really about: changing and improving the lives of our constituents, keeping them safe and protecting the most vulnerable.

When Tony was just a little baby—41 days old—his birth parents, Jody Simpson and Anthony Smith, abused him so badly that he had to have both his legs amputated. Tony will have to live with the consequences of his injuries for the rest of his life. Smith and Simpson were sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment by a judge at Maidstone Crown court—at the time, the maximum that the judge could give. They served eight years, and were released quite recently. They will be managed and monitored by police and probation for the remaining two years of their sentences, but after that, there is nothing—zero. There will be no management, no monitoring, and no reporting requirements if they change their names, start a new family, move county or have more children, and their case details will be archived, leaving a terrible and dangerous gap in our child protection system.

4.15 pm

I was a legal aid family lawyer for over 20 years prior to becoming a Member of Parliament, and I specialised in child abuse and domestic violence work. Most days of the week, I would attend various county courts around the south-east of the country, obtaining non-molestation injunctions and occupation orders, mainly for women and children. Some perpetrators went to prison following criminal proceedings, but upon release far too many would go straight back to their former homes and abuse their families all over again. It was like a vicious circle. The point I want to make is that prison can of course be a good rehabilitation, but, tragically, many upon leaving prison remain a risk. As parliamentarians, we must do all we can, when we have the chance, to manage and eradicate that risk.

The child cruelty register would require people convicted of certain child cruelty offences to provide personal details and information to the police. The information would be kept on record, allowing the police and probation to continue to manage and monitor those who remain a risk after the completion of their sentence. Experience has shown me—and it really has—that people who commit serious crimes often move around, including by moving county, and they deliberately avoid detection by not registering with health services, social services and other agencies. The notification requirement in the new clause would serve as a good single identifier to help stop some families slipping through the net. In other respects, the register would operate in a very similar manner to the sex offenders register.

I would like to end my speech with a message from Paula. She said:

“No child should ever endure what Tony went through. The suffering he experienced as a baby changed all of our lives forever. For the past seven years, I have fought tirelessly for a Child

Cruelty Register because I believe that those who commit such horrific crimes against children should never be allowed to simply disappear from the system once their sentence ends. A register would mean proper monitoring, accountability, and protection—not just for Tony, but for every child in this country. It is heartbreaking that, right now, known abusers can change their names, move to new areas, and form new relationships”—

or have more children—

“without any requirement to tell the authorities. That is a loophole that puts children at serious risk.”

As Paula’s MP, I repeat again that, as parliamentarians, we have a duty to do all we can when we have the chance, as we do today with this Bill, to eradicate that terrible risk.

Sarah Smith (Hyndburn) (Lab): I want to speak in support of new clause 36, which would require offenders to comply with an earned progression scheme before being subject to release. I think that is an important opportunity to enhance the Government’s ambitions for this Bill, because shoplifting, antisocial behaviour and car break-ins continue to plague my constituents in Accrington town centre.

Increases in levels of town centre crime and break-ins are often caused by offenders released early who have failed to receive the rehabilitation they require. They often have drug or alcohol addictions, and they are back on the streets trying to feed those addictions, and stuck in a cycle of lose, lose, lose—for my residents, for the police and for the taxpayer. Although we must be tough on crime, we must also tackle the root causes of crime and ensure that the system delivers for victims and stops the revolving door of our prisons that serves none of us.

The reforms to the community order requirements will lead to less crime and safer streets for my constituents in a number of areas. The Bill will provide a more tailored and effective approach to punishment and rehabilitation, because courts will have expanded tools to tailor community and suspended sentence orders to better fit the individual offender, the offence and the risk posed. The Bill adds new community requirements to the list of options attached to a community or suspended sentence order, such as prohibitions on driving or attending pubs, bars, clubs or public events, and being restricted to geographic zones. That enhanced flexibility means that sentences in the community can be more meaningful and effective—not just a series of generic tasks, but specifically calibrated to the offender’s behaviour, the harm caused and the need to protect the public and victims. It ensures that community-based sentences are not perceived as light or ineffective, but carry real conditions and consequences.

The Bill also strengthens public protection and victim confidence; in fact, bolstering protection for victims and communities is one of the key aims of the reforms. By allowing restriction zones, bans on attending premises that sell alcohol or public events, and driving prohibitions, the Bill enables courts to impose orders that explicitly guard against certain behaviours or contexts associated with risk. Those measures reassure victims that offenders remain under meaningful restrictions and that community sentences carry real weight and oversight, rather than being a passive “watch and wait” approach. In turn, that helps to maintain public confidence in our justice system and supports the principle that people who offend should face real consequences.

Furthermore, the Bill supports rehabilitation while reducing the unnecessary use of custody, which must be for the most violent and serious offenders. It complements the broader move to ensure that custody is used appropriately—not as a default for lower-level offenders, but reserved for cases where it is necessary for public protection. By strengthening community orders and equipping the courts with more tailored requirements, the Bill supports the case that many offenders can be managed in the community through conditions that deter, restrict and rehabilitate. For far too long, the evidence has shown that it is those changes that will tackle the ongoing problems that the courts and prisons are facing, as well as the ongoing issues with that low-level but incredibly damaging crime happening time and again in our communities.

Such approaches help to reduce prison overcrowding, better align our resources, and focus custodial capacity on those who most require it. At the same time, the reforms encourage compliance—for example, by introducing a community sentence progression scheme, under which offenders who fully comply with the requirements and complete their sentence may have their community order terminated early.

There are practical benefits for communities, offenders and the Probation Service. For communities, community orders become more visible and meaningful. The added conditions reflect the reality that punishment and supervision in the community should be not lesser than custody, but different. For offenders, the structured environment of a community sentence with tailored requirements offers the possibility of real change through supervision, conditional freedom and accountability, rather than automatic imprisonment, which can increase harm and reoffending. For the Probation Service, the Bill’s provisions also include strengthened investment in community supervision, better tools for monitoring and enforcement, and clearer mechanisms for rewarding compliance.

In conclusion, the Bill represents a significant advance in our justice framework, offering modernised, flexible and robust community sentencing options that strengthen public protection, shore up victim confidence, support rehabilitation and make more effective and efficient use of our resources. The new community order requirements and community requirements are central to that: by giving courts more precise, meaningful powers, they ensure that justice is done in the community as well as through custody. I am confident that they will make a real difference to my constituents in Hyndburn, who are rightfully frustrated that they see the same people causing the same problems, and no real solutions to the crimes that those people are committing.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): As we return to consideration of this dreadful Bill, we debate amendments and new clauses that are designed to mitigate its worst effects, in particular new clauses 43, 21, 18, 19 and 20, which I have signed, and new clause 1.

Edward Argar (Melton and Syston) (Con): On new clause 1, will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir John Hayes: It is early in my speech, but such is my regard for my right hon. Friend that I will.

Edward Argar: I am very grateful. As a former sentencing Minister, I can see no logical reason why the Government would oppose new clause 1—tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Leicestershire (Mr Bedford), my fellow Leicestershire MP—which simply asks for an assessment and recommendations to be made and for them to be reported back to this House. Can my right hon. Friend, who is himself a former senior Home Office Minister, see any reason why the Government could not simply do the right thing and accept new clause 1?

Sir John Hayes: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his remarks about my experience in government, which are far too flattering. I agree that new clause 1 is precisely the kind of amendment that the Government could accept. He will know from his time in government, as I do, that no Act is the Bill as it began, for Bills metamorphose during their consideration. Wise Governments listen to arguments that are made during scrutiny, either on the Floor of the House or in Committee, and the best Ministers allow the Bill that they introduced to change over time. That is the purpose of Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Leicestershire (Mr Bedford) has done a service to this House in tabling this new clause, thereby allowing the Minister to improve the Bill in the way he suggests.

As we have debated this Bill over time, a distinct difference has emerged between practicalities and principles. The question remains: is this a Bill built on expediency—a necessary response to the unbearable tension between prison supply and the demand for prison places—or a Bill born of a distaste for incarceration as a means of delivering justice? The first is inexcusable; the second indefensible; but neither is inexorable.

In practice, as the hon. Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller) said, if remand were treated in a different way—and that, essentially, is about more court sittings and more court time for faster access to justice—fewer prisoners would be kept on remand. If we do not believe that, we would have to assume that every person brought to trial would be found guilty or imprisoned, which cannot be true.

If we dealt with the huge number of foreign national offenders more swiftly—[*Interruption.*] I know the Government are making those attempts, but it is not enough, any more than what the previous Government did. If we dealt with that issue more swiftly, we would alter the demand for places, for too much of the debate focuses on the supply of prison places and not on the demand-side drivers that absorb places, which could be eased.

When we last debated the Bill, we talked about my ideas for supply-side change. I will not repeat myself, for you would not allow me to do so, Madam Deputy Speaker, in relation to the amendments and new clauses before us today. However, the Minister needs to think more laterally and creatively. I imagine that he is a bright man—or bright-ish, at least. If he did so, he could look at those demand-side drivers and deal with the practicalities.

As for principles, it is time to end the liberal orthodoxy that has perpetuated the pervasive myth that crime is an illness to be treated, and not a destructive, deviant decision that warrants punishment. In the previous debate we heard many times the argument that everyone deserves a second chance, which I have no doubt underpins much of the resistance to the amendments proposed today.

As I listened to the powerful case my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and Malling (Helen Grant) made, I asked myself this: can anyone in this place with a heart believe that those who terrorise and torture children persistently and who maim and murder innocent babes—sometimes their own—deserve a second chance? Can anyone with a heart really believe that those who killed two people dedicated to the service of others—Jo Cox and Sir David Amess, Members of this House—deserve a second chance? Does that awful self-deluded Islamist fanatic who plotted and planned and executed little girls at a pop concert deserve a second chance? The only second chance they all deserve is when they stand before their maker and beg for forgiveness. For us to forgive such extreme acts is to play God. Forgiveness at that level and to that degree is beyond any Member in this Chamber, for it is beyond any human being. That is what I think about second chances.

4.30 pm

Furthermore, every time we make the case for second chances, we displace the proper attention we should give the victims. That is what several of the amendments seek to address, particularly those in the name of my hon. Friend the shadow Minister. As I have said before and am not afraid to say again, he has been a champion of victims and he deserves great credit for being so.

In advancing the amendments before us, we must make a principled case for just deserts. Just deserts essentially mean that people get what they deserve. Those who choose by any means to get what they want, including by violence, deception and harm to others, deserve to be punished. It is so obvious—so intuitively right—that it is what the overwhelming majority of decent, law-abiding people feel. It is what our constituents expect us to recognise and to act on. Those who suffer from the fear and reality of crime are frustrated, to say the least, that the old order—the liberal orthodoxy that has dominated public discourse for too long—does not recognise that plain fact.

I think it was Chesterton who said,

“Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions.”

We hear a lot about tolerance, but we hear far too little about convictions. That old order is out of tune with popular sentiment and out of time, yet the Sentencing Council perpetuates those prejudices. That is why it must go. It represents that old bankrupt order.

Linsey Farnsworth: Does the right hon. Member realise that the Sentencing Council does not just pluck out of the air its sentencing recommendations? It consults widely with a variety of organisations, people working in the criminal justice system and the public before coming to its conclusions about the right sentences for offences. I would submit that there should be recognition of the work that it does.

Sir John Hayes: I simply say to the hon. Lady that when we delegate that kind of authority to those who are unelected and unaccountable, we are no longer doing our job. Her view, which has prevailed for a very long time, is not entirely the fault of Labour; it is a problem with the whole political class. We have created every kind of body imaginable in every aspect of government to do things that should be done by this House and by Ministers of the Crown.

[Sir John Hayes]

The Sentencing Council is just another of those bodies. Who knows who is on the Sentencing Council? Certainly most of the hon. Lady's constituents and most of mine would not have a clue, and they certainly would not know how to influence them in any way. Of course, it is working people who are most disadvantaged by that, not the privileged few who occupy the social circles that the Sentencing Council no doubt occupies. It is the hard-working, patriotic and law-abiding majority in my constituency and hers who are frustrated by a criminal justice system that persistently excuses the worst kinds of crimes rather than punishing them as they deserve to be punished.

There is a new future emerging in the post-liberal age as we build a new order. That order will be inspired by time-honoured truths, rooted in the will of the people and powered by a ceaseless determination to recapture our country for our people. Burke said:

“Bad laws are the worst sort of tyranny.”

The tyranny of the cruelty of crime and disorder will haunt places and people across our country as the vile and vicious are let loose. I urge the House to accept the variety of amendments that I have mentioned and the many others on the amendment paper that are attempts to rescue the Bill from that horror.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): I rise to speak to the amendments that I have tabled. I am delighted to have another attempt to stop the Government doing something that defies justice as well as common sense and that will make our streets less safe. As I said in Committee, my amendments would mean that some serious offenders would not be given the “get out of jail free” card proposed by the Government.

Since Committee, we have had the ludicrous situation involving Hadush Kebatu, who was released from prison after being jailed for sex offences. Quite rightly, there was a public outcry and widespread condemnation from politicians. The massive irony is that if the Bill had already been passed, he would have qualified for the presumption in favour of a suspended prison sentence and would not have been in prison in the first place.

Under my amendments 15, 16, 24 and 25, foreign offenders and sex offenders would not be included in the presumption in favour of a suspended sentence when an immediate prison sentence was deemed to be the right outcome by the courts, so someone like Kebatu would still be sent to prison. I hope that Labour Members agree with those amendments, especially given that the Health Secretary said:

“This man was behind bars because of serious sex offences...So the idea that he's loose on the streets is incredibly serious.”

Perhaps the Health Secretary will back my amendments, and perhaps he will have a word with the Justice Secretary to get him to back my amendments as well.

Following the Kebatu debacle, people have blamed the incompetence of prison staff in releasing him, yet if the Government do not accept my amendments we will not need to be concerned about the incompetence or otherwise of our Prison Service, because such offenders will not even go to prison. However, we can be sure of the incompetence of the Government in allowing these

sentencing changes to happen and in not sending offenders like Kebatu to prison. Even the Secretary of State for Justice said:

“Let's be clear, Kebatu committed a nasty sexual assault involving a young child and a woman, and for those reasons this of course is very serious.”

On Monday, he said to the House:

“Mr Kebatu's victims are rightly outraged about what has happened. I am livid on their behalf, and on behalf of the public.”

He also said:

“He is back where he belongs: behind bars.”—[*Official Report*, 27 October 2025; Vol. 774, c. 43.]

If it is so serious, and the Justice Secretary really means that Kebatu belongs behind bars, why on his watch will the Bill ensure that the next Kebatu will not be behind bars, and will not be sent to prison in the first place? These are serious questions that need to be answered. It is not too late for the Government to stop this dangerous aspect of the Bill and prove to everyone outside this Chamber that they are not hypocrites, by accepting my amendments.

While they are at it, the Government need to seriously consider accepting my amendments 20 and 29, which would prevent those who commit knife crimes from being eligible for suspended sentences. The Government should hang their head in shame for proposing a non-prison sentence for the offence of carrying a knife on our streets, and even for those who commit the offence more than once. I am sure that many Members will know of cases where someone has been injured or killed by a knife. Everyone who votes for the Bill without amendment will be voting to enable someone who carries a knife or threatens people with a knife, even repeatedly, to avoid prison.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): While I do not doubt for a second the right hon. Lady's impassioned belief in the need to keep dangerous offenders off our streets, does she agree that it was actually the Conservative Government that cut funding to our prisons? There was a 24% real-terms cut from 2010 to 2015, resulting in 30% cuts in staffing. That has clearly had an impact on the ability of any Government to send individuals to prison, and it happened under the last Government.

Esther McVey: I shall remind the hon. Member what happened. The last Labour Government collapsed the economy, and the coalition was brought into power to get the books back on track. Unfortunately, as always happens after a Labour Government, spending had to be cut because they had bankrupted the country. When there was more money in the bank, we did need to invest more, and that is why the last Conservative Government put £4 billion into building more prisons. Three have now been completed and there are a further three left to be completed.

Do Members really want it on their conscience that they are changing the laws for people with knives or who threaten with knives? I think not. Labour has always talked tough on this matter, but now that it is in a position to do something about it, it fails. The hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) stated:

“Under a Labour Government, there will be tough consequences for carrying a knife. A Labour Government will end the empty words and apology letters for knife possession, and will guarantee sanctions and serious interventions for young people who carry knives.”—[*Official Report*, 21 May 2025; Vol. 750, c. 332WH.]

Those were the words of the Labour party, but sadly, Labour will not do that. Time and again, Labour is proving to be a party of empty words and broken promises, and this will be yet another example. There will be plenty of people ready and willing to remind Labour Members of this, especially an outraged public. There will be no words of comfort for the family of a needless victim of this type of crime.

Members should also think twice about the fact that those who assault emergency workers will be included in this prison avoidance Bill. I know that many Labour MPs very much supported the introduction of the offence of assaulting an emergency worker, with its increased sentence for those who are convicted, yet all of that will have been for nothing if the Bill is passed in its current form, because people who assault emergency workers and receive sentences of 12 months or less will be likely to avoid prison altogether. Having worked hard to increase the sentence to 12 months in prison for assaulting an emergency worker, Labour will now effectively be agreeing to zero months in prison in many cases. The hon. Member for Rhondda and Ogmore (Chris Bryant), who introduced the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018, did so to ensure that those assaulting emergency workers felt

“the full force of the law”.—[*Official Report*, 27 April 2018; Vol. 639, c. 1159.]

The right hon. Member for Lewisham West and East Dulwich (Ellie Reeves) supported the legislation and said that it was “long overdue”. The trade unions supported it. The GMB national officer said at the time:

“It’s welcome to see arrests taking place, but we also need to see an increase in prosecutions and tougher sentences handed down for these unacceptable assaults.”

My amendments 17 and 26 would exclude the offence from the Bill and show support for those who risk their lives to keep us all safe. What a kick in the teeth it will be for emergency workers to know that this Government do not have their backs at all. It seems the Government would rather be on the side of many of those who assault our emergency workers or to keep them from being sent to prison—as they should be. The amendments would also exclude assaults on those generally providing a public service.

4.45 pm

My amendments 16 and 25 would provide a number of exemptions to the presumption of a suspended prison sentence based on the offending history of the criminal in question—for example, where someone has committed a particular serious offence that would be covered by the unduly lenient sentence scheme or one that required a mandatory minimum sentence. The unduly lenient sentence scheme covers sexual offences, stalking, putting someone in fear of violence, serious harm or distress, controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship, and inflicting grievous bodily harm or unlawful wounding, among other offences. The amendments would also prevent someone from being covered if they are due to be sentenced for three or more offences at the same time.

In addition, and crucially, the amendments would ensure that those who have been released early from prison and are out on licence would not be eligible for this presumption in favour of a suspended prison sentence for offending again when they should really be locked

up. Getting one “get out of jail free” card due to early release is bad enough, but getting a second one would be an absolute scandal, and yet that is precisely what the Bill proposes.

My amendments 18, 19, 21, 22, 27, 28, 30 and 31 would remove the suspended sentence presumption for those guilty of firearm offences, burglary or terrorism-related offences, and those who fail to surrender to custody. I cannot believe that it has been necessary to even put these amendments down—surely it makes sense that those people would go to prison—but with this Government I have to table these amendments to this abomination of a Bill before the House today.

As the Bill stands, the presumption of a suspended prison sentence will apply to those for whom the starting point for their sentence is 18 months. Sentences of that length are not given lightly—someone has to have done something pretty serious for that to be the starting point. However, by pleading guilty and getting a third off, the offender may have to be kept out of prison as they then would be at the 12-month sentence point and be covered by the Bill. Amendments 32 and 36 would mean that this would not be the case as the sentence would have to be one of 12 months or less before the credit for a guilty plea was taken into account.

Amendments 35 and 39 would mean that anyone avoiding prison thanks to this Bill should have the maximum length of a suspended sentence given to them. In other words, the sentence would hang over them for the longest possible time. Amendments 14 and 23 would ensure that those given a suspended sentence are electronically tagged throughout in the hope that it might reduce them reoffending or make it much easier to catch them if they commit further offences when, again, they should already be in prison.

The Bill currently says that if the court is of the opinion that making the order would put a particular individual at significant risk of physical or psychological harm, the presumption in favour of a suspended sentence would not apply. My amendments 33 and 37 would take that a stage further to include the public. Why not any individual as opposed to a particular individual? Amendments 34 and 38 would also take out the word “significant” so that any risk would be covered. If the court believed there is a risk to an identifiable person or an identifiable member of the public, they should be protected by ensuring that the person causing the potential risk to them is locked up. That does not seem like rocket science to me. It would be completely wrong to do anything other than protect those people from all kinds of unnecessary risk.

New clause 43 would mean that the Bill ceases to have effect two years after its introduction. If anyone is seriously supporting the Bill on the basis that it is a necessary measure to alleviate prison overcrowding, they should be happy to agree to the new clause in the light of how many prison places the Government will provide, including another three prisons coming on board with around 4,500 places. More importantly, we do not need a crystal ball to realise that the Bill will cause untold damage to the country. Offenders will be laughing all the way to their next crimes, and there will sadly be countless victims of those needless crimes. The public may not yet be fully aware of what is coming their way, but in two years they will have seen some of

the consequences of the Bill, and many will want it to be urgently reversed. The new clause would make that happen.

When describing the botched release of release of Hadush Kebatu earlier this week, the Secretary of State for Justice said:

“Any release in error is one too many.”

I say to him that any “get out of jail free” card under this Bill is one too many, and it would certainly not have been an error; it would have been very deliberate by the Government. My amendments try to restrict some of the damage that will otherwise be caused by the Bill. It is absolutely clear that the Government are proposing to let a whole load of serious criminals avoid prison and run amok in our communities. Any right-minded person here today will vote wholeheartedly in favour of my amendments and against the Bill.

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): I welcome the Minister, my former Home Affairs Committee colleague, to his place. I urge all Members to support the excellent amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller), particularly new clause 11 on the suspension of driving licences during bail on driving-related offences, which is a common-sense proposal. I echo her praise of our hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde) for his excellent, passionate and successful campaign on tagging for domestic abuse crimes—a policy that the Government have adopted. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester in urging the Government to go further than that by supporting new clause 8, which would make those aggravated crimes.

I tabled new clause 35, which has already received support from across the House, on behalf of the of the Saltern family from my North Cornwall constituency. Their campaign—known as Ryan’s law—was launched a few years ago by Helen and Mark Saltern after their son Ryan was tragically hit and killed by a car after leaving the village carnival in St Teath. The driver did not stop to check on Ryan, administer first aid or even phone the police or other emergency services. Instead, Ryan—a father of one—was left in the road to die. The driver drove into work the next day as if nothing had happened. What punishment was the offender given for that fatal hit and run? He avoided prison entirely and was handed just a four-month suspended sentence by the magistrates court.

The family of course acknowledge that accidents happen, but the driver left a young man dying in the road, did not even give it a second thought as he sped off—too cowardly to do the right thing—and did not spend a single day in prison for his crimes. I cannot imagine the pain that the family must feel. In response to that enormous injustice, they launched their “Ryan’s law” campaign and a petition that received overwhelming national support, reaching 167,000 signatures. Countless other families have been affected by similar cases right across this country.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): I would like to draw attention to two cases in my constituency, one of which I have spoken about before in this place, in which a lady called Lorraine lost her life. It involved somebody who was driving, possibly while looking at their mobile phone, and again, that person did not go to prison. It is tragic that my hon. Friend’s new clause has

to set out things that to most of us would seem absolutely natural. Someone should not have to be told to stop, to report, and to phone the police—to do all those things. I think this new clause is necessary, but it is a terrible shame that we live in a world where people do not think that is the right way to behave.

Ben Maguire: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. It is a horrible indictment on our society and our country that we have to table such a new clause. Sadly, however, because of the hundreds, if not thousands, of cases such as the one she rightly points out, unfortunately it is necessary.

Mark and Helen Saltern, and their daughter Leanne, have campaigned tirelessly for years on this issue. The family have set up RysHaven, a safe, dedicated space where grieving families of hit-and-run victims can escape to Cornwall to take a moment to breathe, process, and recover from their heartbreaking traumas. New clause 35, would introduce three new aggravating factors to the Bill. It would mean that offenders such as the man who hit and killed Ryan Saltern would have the failure to stop, the failure to administer first aid, and the failure to alert emergency services about the hit and run added as “aggravating factors”, specifically when it comes to sentencing those guilty of causing death or serious injury by dangerous driving.

I also support new clause 21, tabled by the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty). Death by dangerous driving should, of course, result in a lifetime driving ban—as my hon. Friend the Member for Wells and Mendip Hills (Tessa Munt) said earlier, that just seems common sense. I urge colleagues from across this House to support my new clause. This is not just for Ryan and his family; the new clause is for the hundreds of hit-and-run victims across this country. I urge Ministers to hear me, and the thousands of loved ones who are left to suffer such injustice. Please right this gross wrong. If the Government will not accept the new clause tonight, I sincerely hope that they will give it serious consideration.

Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con): The Bill illustrates a wider theme that we see across a number of debates in the House, which is the gap between the Government’s words and how they vote. Indeed, that is illustrated by a number of the new clauses that colleagues on the Opposition Benches have already spoken to.

New clause 14, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Leicestershire (Mr Bedford), highlights the inconsistency within the Labour manifesto that sets out a commitment to give 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote, but then says that even if they commit an offence so serious that it warrants a custodial sentence of four or more years, that person is too young to be named. I asked the House of Commons Library to clarify that. A custodial sentence of four or more years is not given out lightly by the courts, particularly not to those of that age, and it said that this would involve serious sexual offences, murder, or armed robbery. We see tweets from Members of Parliament when a boy or girl is stabbed to death, but Labour Members are not willing to vote to name those who commit such offences. It is wrong to deny victims transparency when such serious offences have taken place, but it is bizarre to do so when also saying that those same people are old enough to vote at that age.

Such inconsistency is not limited to new clause 14, so let me take a second example of new clause 18, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Dr Mullan). Many people now look at the Labour manifesto and say, “Well, what it said on energy bills isn’t what they have done; what it said on council tax isn’t what they have done; and what it said to farmers is certainly not what they have done.” With the Budget coming soon, I think that we will shortly see that what Labour said on tax is not what this Government are about to do. And yet the front page of that Labour manifesto had a single word on it: “Change.” I do not think that most voters realised that what Labour meant was change from the manifesto itself, as opposed to change in terms of policy—

Dr Mullan: Or for the worse!

5 pm

Steve Barclay: Indeed, change for the worse.

It is bizarre that when serious offences take place, quite often it is the judiciary who get the blame. Perhaps I have an unfashionable view in that I think that we have a very high-quality judiciary, but it is easy for people to look at sentences and then quickly leap to criticise the judiciary, saying that it is their fault that sentencing is wrong. Indeed, there are such cases—the shadow Justice Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), has highlighted some concerning conflicts of interest of some within the judiciary—but it is far more common that issues arise because the judiciary are operating within the tramlines imposed by sentencing guidelines.

I remember a constituency case where someone was killed by dangerous driving. It highlighted the fact that while this House had increased the sentencing for such crimes, the sentencing guidelines set so many obstacles to getting a maximum sentence that, in practice, hardly anyone ever reached the tariff that the House had intended. Key decisions on issues of public policy should not be outsourced to quangos, meaning—as my constituency neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), highlighted—the public often do not have any idea who is making the decisions.

I come back to the Labour manifesto. It promised change, but when it comes to the sentencing guidelines, it will be the same people, applying the same approach; that is anything but change. If the manifesto is to deliver change, it is right that democratic oversight is imposed and that this House and Ministers take more responsibility.

Dr Mullan: I do not think that it said anywhere in the Labour manifesto that a Labour Government would cut prison time for serious sexual and violent offenders. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is the case?

Steve Barclay: Indeed.

The new clauses under debate highlight a wider principle that is driving much of the public frustration with the democratic process: the sense of people voting and then seeing decisions that they do not feel were on the ballot paper. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings was right that this is not just an issue with this Government; the Government in which I served were guilty of this. Too many decisions

were outsourced to quangos. There are lessons to be learned from that, as today’s debate has highlighted well.

Let me turn to two new clauses on which the House will divide. New clause 19 applies to something that unites the House: the horror at the murder of a police officer or prison officer. This is particularly pertinent to me, as I have the privilege of representing a constituency that contains a maximum security prison, HMP Whitemoor, where the safety of prison officers is paramount. The new clause is also important because we all benefit from the safeguarding provided by the police—in my case, Cambridgeshire police. What message do Ministers think is being sent not just to police and prison officers, but to their families, if they decide to vote against new clause 19? It is not enough just to tweet after events to say how sorry they are. The Government have an opportunity to vote to do something, and we will see in the Lobby how they vote.

Finally, I turn new clause 20. I do not think that I was alone in being deeply moved by the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and Malling (Helen Grant). It is most effective when Members across the House, regardless of which party they are in, speak from their own deep professional expertise about issues that transcend party politics. Anyone hearing about Tony’s case cannot help but feel revulsion, horror and shame about the offence committed, and my hon. Friend spoke with such passion to highlight it.

As a former Minister who has sat where the Minister now sits, let me say that I hope he reflects on the case put forward in new clause 20. I do not believe that any Members want to see loopholes exploited—to see people move around the country to evade accountability and the tracking of any future offences. When someone speaks with the sort of professional expertise with which my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and Malling spoke, to raise very practical concerns, it is important that Ministers take those concerns on board.

The concern raised through new clause 20 is shared across the House. There is a defective element in this Bill, and Members have an opportunity to address it. The expectation is that there will be a vote on new clause 20. It is not about people’s words, but how they vote, that will determine the response. I hope that Members across the House will respond to new clause 20, bearing in mind the case of Tony, which was highlighted to the House, and that they will do the right thing.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): I speak today to new clause 42, which is in my name. It would require the Secretary of State to undertake an assessment of the potential merits of removing the cap on sitting days in the Crown court and to lay a report before Parliament.

I am pleased to bring this issue before the House. Our criminal courts are crippled under the weight of their caseloads. A system once respected for its fairness and efficiency is now struggling to deliver timely justice. One major cause is the limit imposed on the number of sitting days available to judges. In effect, we are deliberately rationing justice.

Successive Governments have chosen to restrict Crown court sitting days. The previous Conservative Administration cut them drastically up to 2020, and

[*Monica Harding*]

then reintroduced a cap in 2021. The current Labour Government, disappointingly, have continued that practice, fixing the number of sitting days for 2024-25 at 108,500. That figure, announced only in December, was thousands below what the courts had planned for, and nearly 5,000 days short of the 113,000 days that His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service advised were needed to meet basic operational capacity. Even 113,000 sitting days would not open every courtroom; as Sir Brian Leveson's review made clear, we would need at least 130,000 sitting days to bring all courtrooms fully into use. Anything less is a conscious choice to leave some courtrooms dark, some judges idle and thousands of victims waiting.

Meanwhile, the backlog grows. The Crown court caseload has reached historic highs, with more than 73,000 outstanding cases, and it is only growing. In the first quarter of 2025, 2,000 more cases were received than were disposed of. One in four open cases has been waiting for over a year, and in some instances trials are not being listed until 2029.

I saw the impact at first hand when I visited my local Kingston upon Thames Crown court. It is one of many courts across the London region that suffer as the region sees its backlog increase by 25%. Staff spoke of the frustration of empty courtrooms, which could be hearing trials but are instead shuttered by bureaucracy. For my constituents in Esher and Walton, that means longer waits for justice for victims of assault, of burglary and of sexual violence, who are left to relive their trauma every time that their trial is postponed. Witnesses lose faith, memories fade, and confidence in justice evaporates.

Caps on Crown court sitting days are not a matter of efficiency, but a false economy. We are paying for court buildings, for security, for staff and for judges, yet we prevent them from working to full capacity, and the consequences are severe. Victims and witnesses wait months or even years for closure, and defendants on bail remain in limbo, their futures in the balance. Some guilty defendants plead not guilty in the hope that delay will work in their favour.

In the process, public faith in the criminal justice system and politics deteriorates. Justice delayed is justice denied. Each time a case is adjourned or pushed back, a victim's faith in justice dies a little more. Communities lose confidence that the system will protect them, and that loss of trust is corrosive—it undermines everything from police co-operation to jury participation. It is deeply disappointing that the Government have not attached a money motion to this Bill, meaning that Parliament cannot directly remove the cap today. However, new clause 42 offers a constructive step forward. It would require the Government to confront the evidence and to assess, transparently and publicly, whether the cap serves justice or undermines it.

We cannot continue to ignore a crisis that every practitioner, every victim and every judge can see unfolding before their eyes. Removing the cap would not solve every problem in our courts, but it would allow them to function at their full capacity; it would mean fewer empty rooms, more trials heard, and faster justice for those who need it most. New clause 42 is a vital amendment that shines a light on the cost of capping justice and

would begin the work of restoring confidence in our criminal courts. Justice delayed is justice denied, and it is time to stop denying justice to the people we serve.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): Much of this Bill does not apply to my constituents, because in the main it does not apply to Northern Ireland. However, there is a key component of the Bill that is supposed to apply to Northern Ireland, because the extent clause says that part 4 applies—that is the part of the Bill that deals with the very important issue of deporting foreign criminals. My question to this House tonight is whether it will, in fact, apply to Northern Ireland.

Yes, this is said to be the sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom. It is therefore said that when this Parliament decides something, it is decided; when it applies a law to citizens of the United Kingdom, that is the end of the story. Sadly, though, I know—and this House needs to know, and needs to act upon that knowledge—that three times, this House has passed Bills that it said applied to the whole United Kingdom, and three times, the courts in this land overruled Parliament and disappplied parts of those Bills from applying to my constituents and my part of the United Kingdom. Those were the Rwanda Act, the Illegal Migration Act 2023, and the soon-to-be-defunct legacy Act.

How can it be that this sovereign Parliament decides that it is legislating on issues affecting constituents across this United Kingdom and passing laws that it says applies to them all, but it turns out that they do not? The answer, sadly, is article 2 of the Windsor framework, because article 2 purports to trump this sovereign Parliament. In respect of Northern Ireland, it says that where there are EU laws—laws not made by this House, but in a foreign jurisdiction; laws that we do not make and cannot change—that bestow on citizens or those in Northern Ireland rights that are different from those in the rest of the United Kingdom, those rights will trump this sovereign Parliament. That is a frightening reality that this House has been running away from ever since it agreed to the withdrawal agreement and the protocol that is now called the Windsor framework. It comprises a fundamental assault upon not just the sovereignty of this House, but the legitimate expectations of my constituents that they will be subject to the equal citizenship that is supposed to come from being a part of this United Kingdom. Paragraph 1 of article 2 of the Windsor framework states that protections

“enshrined in the provisions of Union law”—

that is European Union law—are “listed in Annex 1”. Many of those provisions are about rights.

5.15 pm

On top of that, we have the appalling prospect that in 300 areas of law—never mind rights—this Parliament cannot legislate for Northern Ireland, because a foreign Parliament that we do not elect will legislate for Northern Ireland on many matters touching on goods, trade and all other sorts of things. Rights ensconced through article 2 of the protocol can trump the will of this House.

Article 4 of the withdrawal agreement states that people can

“rely directly on the provisions...which meet the conditions for direct effect under Union law.”

That is delivered by section 7A of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which gives direct effect to such provisions automatically as part of UK domestic law, and states that other UK legislation must be read and applied subject to these EU provisions. That is what has happened, and that is how the three pieces of legislation to which I have referred have been overruled in respect of people in Northern Ireland, in the parts where that legislation offended EU rights and legislation.

Our Supreme Court has stated:

“The answer to any conflict between the Protocol and any other enactment whenever passed or made is that those other enactments are to be read and have effect subject to the rights and obligations which are to be recognised and available in domestic law by virtue of section 7A(2).”

In other words, if EU law says something different from our national law, then EU law applies. It was in the Dillon case that the Court of Appeal decreed that it would disapply parts of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 because it offended rights supposedly given to victims by EU law. Relevant parts of the Dillon judgment are before the Supreme Court presently, which will shed some light on how far the Court of Appeal is correct about the wide application of article 2 of the protocol. We await that judgment with interest.

The Illegal Migration Act 2023 was disappplied because it diminished asylum rights, as protected by EU law. The Dillon case makes it clear that it is the same logic that provisions applied by article 2 can trump this House. How does that apply to the deportation of foreign criminals? If that foreign criminal is an EU national, they already have the EU citizens’ rights directive, which gives them enhanced protection against deportation.

There may be two categories of people in the Northern Ireland courts. It seems beyond doubt that foreign criminals convicted who are EU citizens will have the added protection of the EU’s citizens’ rights directive. If they are not—if they are from somewhere else and they are a foreign criminal—they are also likely to have enhanced protections that they would not have in Great Britain. That is because of the importation of the reliance upon the European charter of fundamental freedoms.

According to our courts, the European charter is there to assist the interpretation of the European convention on human rights. Article 19 of the charter affords particular protections against deportation. It states that each deportation must be specifically examined—there cannot be a provision for collective deportation—and, of course, the thrust of part 4 creates a scenario in which, when a foreign criminal is convicted in our courts, the presumption is towards deportation, and so it should be.

It seems to me that we are again entering into territory where although a very laudable, very necessary and very proper provision of this House—that foreign criminals should be deported from wherever they are convicted in this United Kingdom—is apparently the will of this House, it is a will that is to be thwarted by our subjugation, in Northern Ireland, to the outrage of overriding European Union law and provisions.

When I asked the Minister about this issue on Second Reading I did not receive an answer, so I will ask the question again. The explanatory document accompanying the Bill is totally silent on the impact of article 2 of the

Windsor framework on its provisions. Is there a risk, and is it in fact the expectation, that it will not be possible for the provisions relating to the deportation of foreign criminals to apply in Northern Ireland? Is that conceded, is that the expectation, or is there an answer that can explain why that will not be the position?

Would it not be outrageous if a foreign criminal in one part of this United Kingdom faced deportation as the will of the House, but another foreign criminal convicted for the same offence in my part of the United Kingdom was cocooned from deportation? Would that not be an outrage to the sovereignty of this House? Would it not also create a magnet for foreign criminals, who, if they were to indulge in crime, would know that the best place to do so would be the place from which they could not be deported?

This is a serious issue. It is a serious issue for me and for my constituents, but it is also a serious constitutional issue that the House has yet to face up to. It does not just affect article 2 of the Windsor framework; it affects the very fact that there are 300 areas of law—shaping much of our economy in Northern Ireland and certainly controlling our trade laws—which are beyond the reach of the sovereignty of the House, and which lie at the whim and the wish of a foreign Parliament. That should offend each one of us, as Members of this House, and it should so offend us that we determine to do something about righting that wrong.

Jake Richards: I thank all Members who have contributed to the debate. This Bill is a landmark piece of legislation that gives us the chance to put an end to the prison capacity crisis and build a better justice system. Let me be clear at the outset: this Government believe that prison can work, which is why we are undertaking the largest prison building programme since the Victorian era. Many offenders must be sent to prison, some for a very long time and some for the rest of their lives. The Government have already opened 2,500 places since coming to office, and we have made a commitment to build 14,000 more. Despite what has been said by Opposition Members, by the end of this Parliament, under a Labour Government, there will be more criminals in our prisons than ever before.

However, we cannot only build our way out of this crisis; we must reform sentencing to ensure that our criminal justice system is sustainable. The changes in this Bill will ensure that we never face the situation that the Conservatives left behind: the very real prospect that the most serious offenders would not face prison at all. In a competitive field, the state that the last Government left our prisons in was perhaps the most appalling aspect of the Tory legacy. It was so appalling that, when the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), became aware of the scale of the crisis, he gave up and called an election. It was the last shameful act of a vandalising, incompetent Government. This Bill represents the work of a Government pulling up their sleeves and getting on with the job, however difficult that may be.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): I really welcome this Sentencing Bill, because I think my constituents want not only criminals being punished for their crimes, but the prevention of future crime. It should be about not just punishment—which is rightly

[Lizzi Collinge]

owed to a lot of people—but making sure that our communities are safe in the future. Could the Minister lay out how the intensive supervision courts in the Bill will help to do that?

Jake Richards: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; this Bill will not only stabilise the prison system, but go further and tackle reoffending. She mentioned the intensive supervision courts, but there are also our reforms to short-term sentences, which will cut reoffending. We know it will do that because of evidence that the last Conservative Government commissioned. That was why the exact provision on short-term sentencing, which the Tories are all howling with outrage at now, was in the legislation that the last Government put forward—completely hypocritical. My hon. Friend is completely right; this Bill represents a Government who step up to the challenge, rather than putting their head in the sand.

I want to turn to some of the amendments and the specific points of debate that we have heard today, starting with new clause 20, which stands in the name of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Dr Mullan). However, I will begin by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Maidstone and Malling (Helen Grant), who has put her name to that amendment and with whom I have had the pleasure of speaking on numerous occasions this week in the build-up to the debate. The hon. Lady spoke incredibly powerfully about her own experience in the family courts, and I share that experience. Before coming to this place, I was a barrister who spent a lot of time on legal aid cases, representing local authorities, family members or guardians in exactly the types of cases that she mentioned. I share her concerns.

I also want to pay tribute to the hon. Lady's constituent, Paula Hudgell, who has been campaigning for a child abuse register with such eloquence and passion for some time. Paula's work, life and dedication to Tony and others deserves enormous gratitude from across the House. On the Government's behalf, I thank her for all that she and her family have done and continue to do. I welcome the constructive comments from the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle, on this issue. I can be clear that Paula has identified a problem in the system, and we are determined to fix it.

Liz Twist (Blaydon and Consett) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's comments on new clause 20 and a possible child protection register. My constituents Gemma Chappell and Rachael Walls have been campaigning for stronger child protection measures after their great-niece, Maya, was murdered by her mother's abusive partner. Does the Minister agree that measures such as a child protection register and Maya's law can only help to protect our children—children like Maya, Tony and others? And what steps will he be taking to follow this up?

Jake Richards: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The answer is yes. A problem in the system has been identified, and we are determined to fix it. It simply cannot be right that some horrific child abusers can have access to children—to live with children or work with children—at the end of their sentences without any system of monitoring or notification after those sentences. The Government cannot support the change today because work needs to

be done to understand the demand that different options would place upon different public services. It would be wrong to legislate now without a fuller—or even basic—understanding of whether we have the capacity to safely deliver the register proposed in new clause 20. There are numerous options before us, and it is right that any new system is tailored, in terms of who holds that information and the duties placed upon them, to ensure that particular risks are adequately and proportionately managed.

James Cartlidge: The position that the Minister seems to be articulating is literally bizarre. He has said that he fully agrees about the problem and with the remedy set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Dr Mullan). The Government have had 14 years in Opposition and more than a year in Government, and have introduced the Bill at this time. But the Minister is saying that, notwithstanding the fact they have brought forward this Bill after more than a year in office and agree on the problem and the diagnosis, he is still going to vote tonight—and ask his Back Benchers to vote tonight—against fixing the issue.

Jake Richards: We have identified a problem, but it would be wholly irresponsible to legislate when we have not had the opportunity to ensure that public services can complete the task. The hon. Member criticises us for not taking action on this issue now, but what about the last 14 years? What about the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, which reported in November 2022? The last Government did absolutely nothing on those recommendations.

Helen Grant: I hear what the Minister has to say. Will he bring forward a Government amendment to introduce a child cruelty register when the Bill moves to the House of Lords?

5.30 pm

Jake Richards: We will speak to Home Office colleagues and others to look at the possibility of doing that, absolutely. The hon. Lady has my word—as does her constituent, who is no doubt watching this debate carefully—that I will work at speed on this issue, but I do not want to make promises that the Government cannot keep, so it is vital that we do the work. We understand the burden that it will place on the services that will need to do the work to make sure that this is done, but I want to be clear that this is a problem. We accept that it is a problem, and we are going to take action to solve it. I will continue to have conversations with the hon. Lady as part of that process, and I welcome the offer of cross-party talks. I am speaking to colleagues in the Department for Education and the Home Office, and I would be eager, if it is appropriate and possible, to speak to Paula herself to ensure that we get this right. But as I said, we want to do that quickly.

I have asked officials in my Department to look at what can be done within the criminal justice system, which sits within the Ministry of Justice, to track child abuse offenders and offences involving child cruelty. I again thank the hon. Member for Maidstone and Malling for her work on this issue. I look forward to working with her, and with other hon. Members who have shown an interest in this issue, to achieve an important change in safeguarding that is absolutely necessary.

I turn to new clause 12, tabled by the hon. Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller), which seeks to allow prisoners held on remand to access rehabilitative programmes, education, therapy and other support before the start of their sentence. She and I had a brief discussion outside the Chamber about this, and it is important to note that remand prisoners can already access such programmes where prisons run them. The Government accept that there is a lack of such provision in our prisons—something that we absolutely have to improve and work on—but we must remember that remand prisoners have not been convicted of an offence. They cannot be required to undertake any of these services, but it is an issue that I am very much aware of. I will continue to have conversations with her and other colleagues about that over the coming weeks and months as we look to improve those services within prisons.

Andy Slaughter: I congratulate the Minister on his Bill, which can undo the damage done to the prison system over the past 14 years of neglect and mismanagement, but while he is clearly in listening mode, let me say that it is capable of improvement. I tabled a number of amendments that were designed to improve the Bill in Committee last week. I will write to him to remind him what they are, but will he look at those proposals, which were made in good faith, to see whether changes can be made in the other place?

Jake Richards: As always, I welcome the contributions of the Chair of the Justice Committee. I am very aware of the array of amendments that he and I discussed before Committee stage last week. I have not returned to them in the last seven days, but we will no doubt do so in the coming weeks as the Bill progresses.

I will briefly touch on the issue of probation. A number of amendments have been tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and spoken to by other hon. Members. The Government accept that the Bill places an extra responsibility on the Probation Service. That is why we are investing £750 million in probation—a 45% increase, and the biggest upgrade to investment in probation for a generation. We are investing £8 million to improve technology, so that probation officers can undertake probation work rather than be stifled by the burden of paperwork. We recruited 1,000 probation officers in our first year and 1,300 this year. However, there is undoubtedly more work to be done, and we will undertake that work in the coming weeks and months.

This Government have been very clear that work must be at the heart of our prisons. Ensuring that offenders work will mean that they can be rehabilitated and, when they leave prison, can enter society with the prospect of employment. Clearly, some of the details of how that work provision is provided and the role of the private sector have to be worked out carefully. I am very happy to meet the justice unions parliamentary group to discuss that, but I will never apologise for ensuring that there is work provision in our prisons, because it is absolutely vital. Labour is the party of work. We believe in the inherent value of work, and work in our prisons plays a vital role in rehabilitation.

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his response on work in prison. I completely agree that it makes a huge difference in

enabling prisoners to stop their reoffending behaviour. When 80% of offending is reoffending, costing over £18 billion a year, it is clear that we need to enable people to turn their lives around. Does he agree that our communities will be safer when we are able to tackle reoffending rates?

Jake Richards: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. She raised this important issue in a recent Adjournment debate. We are taking steps to provide further work provision in our prisons, working with the private sector, the third sector and others, but we certainly accept that there is more to do.

I will briefly respond to the hon. and learned Member for North Antrim (Jim Allister) on new clause 24. He asked me a direct question, and simply put, we do not agree. The Government do not think that this new clause is necessary. Our view is very clear on the legal analysis of the proposed change. The deportation of foreign national offenders will not be prohibited by the provisions of the Windsor framework. If he disagrees with that analysis, I am very happy to meet him to discuss it and look into it. He is absolutely right that it would be wrong if, in the scenario he painted towards the end of his speech, different parts of the country had different provisions for the deportation of foreign national offenders. I want to give him that reassurance at the Dispatch Box.

Jim Allister: Will the Minister give us an assurance that, if there turns out to be a distinction in that foreign nationals cannot be deported from Northern Ireland because of article 2 of the Windsor framework, he will undertake to override that legislatively so that we do have equality right across the United Kingdom?

Jake Richards: As I have said, we do not accept that there is a problem, but if there is, we will look to fix it, because that would not be right. The scenario the hon. and learned Member painted, which we do not accept will happen as a result of this legislation, is not right.

Amendments 15 and 39 on short sentences are among several tabled by the right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey). They aim to widen the scope of the exemption or to eat away at the 12-month definition of short sentences. That is the wrong direction, and I will set out why. First, we need to clear up some myths that have been shared by the Opposition on this issue. Either they are being wilfully ignorant or they simply do not understand the Bill. We are not abolishing short sentences, as the shadow Justice Secretary, the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), wrongly stated in the House on Monday. He was briefly a corporate solicitor, and I would hope he knows better and that he had read the Bill before commenting on it.

Judges will always have discretion to send offenders to prison, and short sentences have an important function, especially in certain cases of domestic abuse and violence against women and girls. The Bill makes it clear that the presumption does not apply where the offender poses a significant risk of physical and psychological harm to a particular individual, where they breach a court order or in exceptional circumstances. In Committee, the Government went further by strengthening this provision to ensure that breaches of all civil court orders, such as the domestic violence protection order, were covered.

Catherine Atkinson: Domestic abuse remains the deepest scar on our society, and it demands our collective action to eradicate it. Please can the Minister outline the measures in the Bill that will help tackle this invidious form of violence and enable improved support for victims during the process?

Jake Richards: In that regard, the most important part of the Bill is the domestic abuse identifier. It has been worked on, on a cross-party basis, with outside organisations that are campaigning for it. It is an innovative and important step to ensure that these cases—it is a broadbrush so that different offences can all be covered by the one term—can be tracked through the criminal justice system and out to safeguarding agencies to ensure that women are kept safe from their abusers.

Dr Mullan: I note the interest of the hon. Member for Derby North (Catherine Atkinson) in domestic abuse and other offences. Will the Minister confirm for her that the vast majority of offenders convicted of offences related to domestic abuse will get out of prison much earlier as a result of this Bill?

Jake Richards: Again, as the shadow Minister knows, for each offence the judge will have full discretion over the sentence. When I have spoken to victims of domestic abuse—I have worked with and represented victims of domestic abuse in court—what they feared most was that, when the prison system was on the verge of collapse, some of the most serious offenders would never face prison at all.

Esther McVey: Will the Minister give way?

Jake Richards: I will finish this point before I give way, because I am dealing with the right hon. Member's amendments.

More broadly, we know that suspended sentences and community sentences can be more effective at reducing reoffending. The level of reoffending among those who serve short sentences is staggeringly high. As I have said already, research commissioned by the last Conservative Government—shadow Justice Ministers continue to cite it—shows that short sentences lead to more reoffending, meaning that tens of thousands more criminal offences are committed each year.

If the Opposition vote to drop this provision from the legislation—legislation that the last Conservative Government put forward—they will be voting for more crimes blighting our communities. They know that the measure is common sense because, as I have said, they proposed it; it was a Conservative proposal towards the end of the last Parliament, and they are now opposing it for opposition's sake. This provision on short-term sentences will begin to break the cycle of reoffending that does such damage to communities across the country, so we reject the amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for Tatton.

Esther McVey: I thank the Minister for allowing me to speak now. Members on both sides of the House were concerned about attacks on emergency workers, and such offenders who are sentenced to 12 months or less will now get suspended sentences. Can he state on the record that that will not be the case—that those offenders will still go to prison, as Members on both sides of the House want? Will he protect emergency workers or will he let them down?

Jake Richards: The judge on any given case, where there has been an awful offence such as that, will have the power under this legislation to send that person to prison. That is absolutely right and that has not changed at all.

I will turn to new clause 19, with which I have huge sympathy. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle gave me the opportunity to meet Lenny Scott's mother, and I will take him up on that. I am happy to do so and I look forward to it. As he knows, the Law Commission is undertaking a review of homicide law, and it would be wrong to pre-empt that, although I am sympathetic to the motivation behind the new clause. As he noted, that awful offender was convicted to life imprisonment with a minimum of 45 years. I understand the mischief that the hon. Member is trying to tackle with the new clause, but we will await the Law Commission's review of homicide law.

Dr Mullan: The Minister is perfectly capable of legislating on this issue and letting the homicide work continue. He says that that would be “wrong”, but it is not wrong—it is just his choice, and it is the wrong choice.

Jake Richards: As I say, I am not going to pre-empt the Law Commission's review of homicide law, but I am sympathetic to the new clause. I look forward to meeting the victim's family and we will be taking steps in due course.

I will turn to the earned progression model and new clause 36, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth) and spoken to passionately by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sarah Smith). I met my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley and understand the motivation behind the new clause. There is appetite within Government to go further and to offer positive functionality to the earned progression model, but primary legislation is probably not the appropriate mechanism for delivering a stronger system of incentivising rehabilitation in prisons.

I will briefly explain the current framework as set out in legislation. Bad behaviour, such as acts of violence or possession of a mobile phone, can mean more time in custody. We are making that tougher. To ensure that there is more bite and discipline within our prisons, we are doubling the maximum punishment from 42 days to 84 days per incident by secondary legislation. There will be no automatic release for badly behaved offenders. I accept that I and Lord Timpson should look at the current incentives policy framework to see how we can further incentivise engagement with self-improvement services, whether in work or education.

We expect prisoners to work in prison and, where they have educational needs, to engage in classes that support reading, literacy, maths and vocational skills. That is why we are building partnerships with employers and looking to increase the amount of time that prisoners work in industry to increase employment skills. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley in our meeting, I look forward to working with her and others to look at how we can expand and improve that framework to ensure that the earned progression model is as effective as possible.

Dr Mullan: Does the Minister accept that he is legislating to let those people out automatically? He expects Labour Members to accept the promise that later, at some point, he might introduce legislation so that some of those

people—a small proportion—do not get out, but whatever he says at the Dispatch Box, he is legislating to let them out automatically. That is the consequence of this legislation.

5.45 pm

Jake Richards: I am getting increasingly confused by these interventions, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I outlined before, the Government are setting out very clear measures to improve discipline in our prisons. That is part of the progression model, learned from the Texas model, which has seen crime reduce by 33%, with 16 prisons closed at the same time. I think we should learn from good examples abroad. The Opposition have no idea what their position is any more.

I will turn to new clause 14, tabled by the hon. Member for Mid Leicestershire (Mr Bedford). The most serious offences are already dealt with in the Crown court, even those involving offenders aged under 18, and whether an offender's identity is reported on is at the discretion of the judge. There is always a balancing act in the judge's consideration between the principles of open justice and the welfare of the child, and it is right that discretion remains with the judge. I also gently say to the hon. Member that the scope of the Bill was the adult estate. There is work to be done in the youth justice system; we will be taking steps to look at it in due course, and we may come back to this as part of that provision. However, the focus in this Bill is much more on the adult estate.

The same point also applies to new clause 1, again tabled by the hon. Member for Mid Leicestershire. I want to go into some detail on this new clause because it is an important issue. On parenting orders, it is right that those responsible for a child's care will be involved in their rehabilitation where possible. To that end, courts have the power to issue a parenting order where a child has been convicted of an offence. Parenting orders require the parents or guardian to comply with certain requirements for up to 12 months, and non-compliance can lead to breach proceedings in court.

While parenting orders can be a good option for some children, youth offending teams that I have spoken to often decide that it is more effective to engage and build relationships with parents on a voluntary basis wherever possible, without resorting to a parenting order. Many parents will engage readily and take part in specific parenting support activities and programmes.

On financial orders, children are naturally limited in their access to the funds necessary to meet the conditions of a financial order. To that end, where the child is under 16, any financial order must be met by the parent or guardian. For children aged 16 or 17, the fine may be imposed on either the parent or child. Whether they are used in each particular case is best determined by the court with professional advice from the youth offending team. It is right that the court, which has access to information on a child's individual circumstances, retains the discretion to determine whether such interventions are well placed to support their rehabilitation.

I undertake to the House today that I will look at this matter as part of our continued review of the youth justice system. We do not think that primary legislation is necessary for a dedicated assessment, which is vague in the form of the new clause. We therefore urge the House to reject this new clause, too.

I turn now to driving. There are an array of measures before the House that relate to driving offences, and there is an understandable sense from the House about the need to go further and to strengthen or tighten our use of driving bans for criminal offences. New clauses have been put down by the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty) and the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Chichester. I also pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich (Sarah Coombes), among others, and the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Ben Maguire), who has raised this issue in the House.

It should be noted that this legislation offers new provisions to order a driving ban for offenders who receive a suspended or community sentence even if their offence did not relate to driving. However, I have been persuaded in the course of the debates in this House, and in my relatively short period in this role, of the need to look again at driving bans and to do so properly and rigorously. I have organised a meeting with ministerial colleagues in the Department for Transport to discuss this issue and to ensure that the points and individual cases raised in this and last week's debates are considered in the Government's road safety strategy, which is being developed. It is right that we undertake proper and further analysis of the current situation and how we can encourage greater use of driving bans.

I promise that I will ensure that this House is updated on the development of that work. I have reached out to road safety charities to ensure that they are consulted and kept informed, too. It is right that we investigate this issue carefully, but it is also important to say that the courts already have the discretion to implement these driving bans in precisely the way that various new clauses seek to do.

I will turn now to new clause 31 on exclusions from recall measures, which was spoken to by the Liberal Democrat spokesperson. A number of offences listed in the new clause are already excluded from the fixed-term recall provisions, while many others carry sentences that would be beyond the scope of the provisions. However, we understand the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Chichester. There is a balance to be struck between recognising the risks posed and ensuring a sustainable system. Before any recalled offender is released, the Probation Service will undertake a thorough review of release plans and licence conditions, ensuring that needs and risks are managed, with a focus on mitigating risks against known victims. This will take account of any patterns of behaviour. Recall remains an important public protection tool where risk escalates. There are still challenges, looking at the 56 days and the provision of education for those who are returned on recall. We have had discussions outside the Chamber and we will continue to do so. It is an issue that Lord Timpson and I are aware of, and we will make progress on it in due course.

I turn very briefly to new clause 42, tabled by the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Monica Harding), regarding the awful Crown court delays we experience in this country—another element of the rotten legacy we received from the Conservative party. Brian Leveson has reported on this, and the Minister of State for Courts and Legal Services will bring forward the Government's response in due course.

[*Jake Richards*]

It is an urgent issue, because all these problems—prison capacity, justice, rehabilitation, reoffending—can be solved only if we have a functioning courts system. Sorting out and stabilising our prisons, reforming sentencing and dealing with the Crown court backlog will be at the heart of the Government's approach through this Parliament.

Ben Maguire: There was one small omission there. Can the Minister confirm that legal aid provision, which has been brought up by several Members today, will be addressed by the Government?

Jake Richards: Yes. Legal aid is vital, and the right to legal aid is important. The Government understand that right and will continue to look at it. There are financial constraints, which we are all aware of, but legal aid is very important. We have made certain commitments with regard to employment tribunals, and we will continue to look at that over the coming months.

Amendment 7 would remove clause 20 regarding changes to be made to the release of certain offenders. Let us start with the most basic promise of our justice system. When offenders are caught who pose a risk to the public, we ensure that there is capacity in our prisons for them to serve a custodial sentence. It sounds straightforward and a fundamental tenet of the social contract, but that is what was damaged and broken by the Tory Government. In July last year our prisons were essentially full, and the Government disgracefully could not fulfil that most basic promise to the British people. The Conservatives should be ashamed of themselves for the lawless disorder they caused.

The changes that the Bill makes are necessary to stabilise our prison system. There is no alternative. What have heard from Opposition Members, carping from the sidelines, are wholly unserious proposals. Reform UK say that we should build paperweight temporary prisons. Portacabins holding hardened criminals in our backyards? No thank you.

Let me clear: that would place the public at serious risk of harm. We cannot simply rustle up a secure setting to incarcerate dangerous offenders. This Government are building more prison places than we have seen for over 100 years. Following the changes to be brought in by this Bill, there will still be more criminals in prison than ever before—2,000 more by 2029 than there are now. On the other hand, Reform has no serious plans to keep our communities safe.

The Tory position is even more absurd, if that is possible. Last week the shadow Minister began to apologise for the legacy that the Conservatives left behind in our prisons. He said that if he had been Prime Minister or Chancellor it would not have happened. We had five Tory Prime Ministers and seven Chancellors in 14 years. I am not sure that giving another one a go would have made the difference. Meanwhile the shadow Justice Secretary, the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), says, "Deport more foreign offenders. That will solve it all." Completely unserious.

Under this Government, deportation of foreign national offenders is up by 14%. We have accelerated decision making on deportation, which can now happen when 30% of the sentence has been served. That is something

that the Tories never did. Because of this legislation, we can go even further and deport a foreign offender immediately upon sentencing. These are practical measures from a Labour Government who are cleaning up the Tory mess.

Kirith Entwistle (Bolton North East) (Lab): My father is a retired senior prison officer, and I know at first hand the devastation that 14 years of the Tories brought on our prison system. Does the Minister agree that it is incumbent on us as a Government to clean up the mess they left and fix the system urgently through reforms?

Jake Richards: I thank my hon. Friend's father for his service. Prison officers across the country do a brilliant and important job. My hon. Friend is absolutely right; I have sat through hours of this debate over the last few weeks, and while it has been important, the crowing from the Tories is galling considering the legacy that they left behind.

This Labour Government faced a crisis when we came into power last summer. The Tories had left our prison system on the brink of collapse, and lawless chaos was on the verge of breaking out. We took action, with plans to build 14,000 prison places—the biggest prison-building programme since the Victorian era—and 2,500 places in our first year, compared to just 500 places that were built during 14 years of the Conservative Government.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): Does the Minister recognise, from his written response to me, that every single one of those 2,405 prison places was authorised by the previous Conservative Government and that the 14,000 prison places he planned to build will not be delivered because the firm that was due to build them has gone into administration?

Jake Richards: The hon. Member always makes that point, and he thinks it a good point. Towards the end of 14 years of Conservative government, the Conservatives suddenly realised they had not done anything to our prisons—it was an absolute shambles—and they started to take action. We have actually delivered those places, with 2,500 in one year compared with just 500 in 14 years. It is shocking. That is not a good point, and he should not keep raising it.

The Government began an independent sentencing review, led by a former Conservative Justice Secretary, to ensure that our system was sustainable. The Bill is that vital step to ensure that we can keep that most basic promise to the British people. We will ensure that there is capacity in our prisons to keep law and order on the streets. We will ensure that our justice system clamps down on reoffending and delivers punishment that works. We will ensure that we will never again face the chaos of Tory misrule. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 170, Noes 328.

Division No. 332]

[5.55 pm]

AYES

Amos, Gideon	Babarinde, Josh
Anderson, Lee	Bacon, Gareth
Anderson, Stuart	Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi
Andrew, rh Stuart	Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Aquarone, Steff	Barclay, rh Steve
Argar, rh Edward	Bedford, Mr Peter

Bennett, Alison
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bool, Sarah
 Bowie, Andrew
 Brandreth, Aphra
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Cane, Charlotte
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Cartlidge, James
 Chadwick, David
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cocking, Lewis
 Coghlan, Chris
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Dean, Bobby
 Dillon, Mr Lee
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dyke, Sarah
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Franklin, Z e
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 George, Andrew
 Gibson, Sarah
 Glen, rh John
 Glover, Olly
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Grant, Helen
 Green, Sarah
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard

Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 Lowe, Rupert
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Maguire, Helen
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Bobby Dean*)
 Mathew, Brian
 Maynard, Charlie
 McVey, rh Esther
 van Mierlo, Freddie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mitchell, rh Sir Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moran, Layla
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Olney, Sarah
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Rankin, Jack
 Reed, David
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Sabine, Anna
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Simmonds, David
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stone, Jamie
 Stuart, rh Graham

Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Bradley
 Thomas, Cameron
 Tice, Richard
 Trotter, rh Laura
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John

Wild, James
 Wilkinson, Max
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Jerome Mayhew and
 Nick Timothy

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allister, Jim
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Si n
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brickell, Phil
 Buckley, Julia
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos

Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Dalton, Ashley (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel

Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kumaran, Uma
 Kyle, rh Peter
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca

MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Medi, Llinos
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Rhodes, Martin

Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Swann, Robin
 Tami, rh Sir Mark

Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Stephen Morgan and
 Taiwo Owatemi

Question accordingly negated.

6.8 pm

Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 16 September).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

New Clause 12

ACCESS TO REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES AND EDUCATION FOR INDIVIDUALS HELD ON REMAND

“(1) Where an individual is held in custodial remand pending sentencing, the probation service must provide access to the same rehabilitative programmes that are available to prisoners after sentencing.

(2) Where an individual is held in custodial demand pending trial, the probation service must provide access to the same—

- (a) education;
- (b) therapy; and
- (c) any other support that the probation service deems appropriate,

that is available to prisoners after sentencing.”—(*Jess Brown-Fuller.*)

This new clause would allow prisoners held on remand to access rehabilitative programmes, education, therapy and other support before the start of their sentence.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 82, Noes 314.

Division No. 333]

[6.9 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat
Amos, Gideon
Anderson, Lee
Aquarone, Steff
Babarinde, Josh
Begum, Apsana
Bennett, Alison
Berry, Si n
Brewer, Alex
Brown-Fuller, Jess
Cane, Charlotte
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chadwick, David
Chamberlain, Wendy
Chambers, Dr Danny
Chope, Sir Christopher
Chowns, Dr Ellie
Coghlan, Chris
Collins, Victoria
Cooper, Daisy
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Dance, Adam
Darling, Steve
Davies, Ann
Dean, Bobby
Denyer, Carla
Dillon, Mr Lee
Dyke, Sarah
Farage, Nigel
Foord, Richard
Forster, Mr Will
Gibson, Sarah
Gilmour, Rachel
Glover, Olly
Goldman, Marie
Gordon, Tom
Green, Sarah
Harding, Monica
Heylings, Pippa
Hobhouse, Wera
Hussain, Mr Adnan
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Liz
Jones, Clive

Kohler, Mr Paul
Kruger, Danny
Lake, Ben
MacDonald, Mr Angus
Maguire, Ben
Maguire, Helen
Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Bobby Dean*)
Mathew, Brian
Maynard, Charlie
Medi, Llinos
van Mierlo, Freddie
Miller, Calum
Milne, John
Moran, Layla
Morello, Edward
Morgan, Helen
Morrison, Mr Tom
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Susan
Olney, Sarah
Pinkerton, Dr Al
Ramsay, Adrian
Sabine, Anna
Savage, Dr Roz
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shannon, Jim
Slade, Vikki
Smart, Lisa
Sollom, Ian
Stone, Jamie
Sultana, Zarah
Taylor, Luke
Thomas, Cameron
Tice, Richard
Voaden, Caroline
Wilkinson, Max
Wilson, Munira
Wrigley, Martin

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ze Franklin and
Claire Young

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed, Dr Zubir
Akehurst, Luke
Alaba, Mr Bayo
Aldridge, Dan
Alexander, rh Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allister, Jim
Anderson, Callum
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Arthur, Dr Scott
Asato, Jess
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas

Atkinson, Catherine
Atkinson, Lewis
Baker, Alex
Baker, Richard
Ballinger, Alex
Bance, Antonia
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Baxter, Johanna
Beales, Danny
Beavers, Lorraine
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Billington, Ms Polly
Blake, Olivia
Bloore, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie
Botterill, Jade
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
Brickell, Phil

Buckley, Julia
Burke, Maureen
Burton-Sampson, David
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Cadbury, Ruth
Caliskan, Nesil
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell-Savours, Markus
Carden, Dan
Carling, Sam
Carns, Al
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Collier, Jacob
Collinge, Lizzi
Collins, Tom
Conlon, Liam
Coombes, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew
Cooper, Dr Beccy
Costigan, Deirdre
Cox, Pam
Coyle, Neil
Craft, Jen
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Ms Stella
Crichton, Torcuil
Curtis, Chris
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Dalton, Ashley (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
Darlington, Emily
Davies, Jonathan
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Dean, Josh
Dearden, Kate
Dickson, Jim
Dixon, Anna
Dodds, rh Anneliese
Dollimore, Helena
Dowd, Peter
Downie, Graeme
Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Eccles, Cat
Edwards, Lauren
Efford, Clive
Egan, Damien
Ellis, Maya
Entwistle, Kirith
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Falconer, Mr Hamish
Ferguson, Mark
Ferguson, Patricia
Fleet, Natalie
Foody, Emma
Foster, Mr Paul
Foxcroft, Vicki
Foy, Mary Kelly
Francis, Daniel
Frith, Mr James
Furniss, Gill
Gardner, Dr Allison
Gelderd, Anna
German, Gill

Gilbert, Tracy
Gill, Preet Kaur
Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
Glendon, Mary
Goldsborough, Ben
Grady, John
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
Hack, Amanda
Haigh, rh Louise
Hall, Sarah
Hamilton, Paulette
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Hatton, Lloyd
Hayes, Helen
Hayes, Tom
Hazelgrove, Claire
Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hinchliff, Chris
Hinder, Jonathan
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hopkins, Rachel
Hume, Alison
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hurley, Patrick
Ingham, Leigh
Irons, Natasha
Jameson, Sally
Jermy, Terry
Jogee, Adam
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Ruth
Josan, Gurinder Singh
Joseph, Sojan
Juss, Warinder
Kane, Mike
Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
Kendall, rh Liz
Khan, Afzal
Khan, Naushabah
Kinnock, Stephen
Kirkham, Jayne
Kitchen, Gen
Kumar, Sonia
Kumaran, Uma
Kyle, rh Peter
Kyrke-Smith, Laura
Lamb, Peter
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Noah
Leadbeater, Kim
Leishman, Brian
Lewell, Emma
Lewin, Andrew
Lightwood, Simon
Long Bailey, Rebecca
MacAlister, Josh
Macdonald, Alice
MacNae, Andy
Madders, Justin
Martin, Amanda
Maskell, Rachael
Mayer, Alex
McAllister, Douglas

McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah

Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Swann, Robin
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Stephen Morgan and
 Taiwo Owatemi

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 19

WHOLE LIFE ORDER: MURDER OF A POLICE OR PRISON OFFICER

“(1) The Sentencing Code is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph 2 of Schedule 21 (Determination of minimum term in relation to mandatory life sentence for murder etc), in sub-paragraph (2)(c), after “duty,”, insert “or if the motivation for the murder was connected to the police officer or prison officer’s current or former duties,””—(*Dr Mullan.*)

This new clause would expand the circumstances in which it is appropriate to apply a whole life order for murdering a prison or police officer, to include murder motivated by the victim’s current or former duties.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The Committee divided: Ayes 173, Noes 323.

Division No. 334]

[6.21 pm

AYES

Allister, Jim	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Amos, Gideon	Dyke, Sarah
Anderson, Lee	Evans, Dr Luke
Anderson, Stuart	Farage, Nigel
Andrew, rh Stuart	Foord, Richard
Aquarone, Steff	Forster, Mr Will
Argar, rh Edward	Fortune, Peter
Babarinde, Josh	Fox, Sir Ashley
Bacon, Gareth	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Franklin, Z e
Barclay, rh Steve	French, Mr Louie
Bedford, Mr Peter	Fuller, Richard
Bennett, Alison	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Bhatti, Saqib	Garnier, Mark
Blackman, Bob	Gibson, Sarah
Bool, Sarah	Gilmour, Rachel
Bowie, Andrew	Glen, rh John
Brandreth, Aphra	Glover, Ollie
Braverman, rh Suella	Goldman, Marie
Brewer, Alex	Gordon, Tom
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Grant, Helen
Burghart, Alex	Green, Sarah
Cane, Charlotte	Griffith, Andrew
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Griffiths, Alison
Cartlidge, James	Harding, Monica
Chadwick, David	Harris, Rebecca
Chamberlain, Wendy	Hayes, rh Sir John
Chambers, Dr Danny	Heylings, Pippa
Chope, Sir Christopher	Hinds, rh Damian
Cleverly, rh Sir James	Hobhouse, Wera
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Holden, rh Mr Richard
Cocking, Lewis	Hollinrake, Kevin
Coghlan, Chris	Holmes, Paul
Collins, Victoria	Huddleston, Nigel
Cooper, Daisy	Hudson, Dr Neil
Costa, Alberto	Jardine, Christine
Coutinho, rh Claire	Jarvis, Liz
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Cross, Harriet	Jenrick, rh Robert
Dance, Adam	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Darling, Steve	Jones, Clive
Davies, Ann	Kearns, Alicia (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra</i>)
Davies, Gareth	Kohler, Mr Paul
Davies, Mims	Kruger, Danny
Dillon, Mr Lee	Lake, Ben
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Lam, Katie
	Lamont, John
	Leigh, rh Sir Edward

Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 Lowe, Rupert
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Maguire, Helen
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 McVey, rh Esther
 Medi, Llinos
 van Mierlo, Freddie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mitchell, rh Sir Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moran, Layla
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Olney, Sarah
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Sabine, Anna

Savage, Dr Roz
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Simmonds, David
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stone, Jamie
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Bradley
 Thomas, Cameron
 Tice, Richard
 Trott, rh Laura
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Wilkinson, Max
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
David Reed and
Nick Timothy

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Adam, Shockat
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Si n
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brickell, Phil
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam

Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Dalton, Ashley (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary

Goldsborough, Ben
 Grady, John
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kumaran, Uma
 Kyle, rh Peter
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain

McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast
 by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare,
 Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam

Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaught, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeter, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Stephen Morgan and
 Taiwo Owatemi

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 20

CHILD CRUELTY OFFENCES: NOTIFICATION AND OFFENDER MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

“(1) A person (‘relevant offender’) is subject to the notification requirements of subsections (2) and (3) for the period set out in subsection (4) if the relevant offender is convicted of an offence listed in subsection (6).

(2) A relevant offender must notify to the police within the three days of the time of their conviction or their release from custody, and annually thereafter, providing—

- (a) the relevant offender’s date of birth;
- (b) their national insurance number;
- (c) their name on the notification date and, where using one or more other names on that date, each of those names;
- (d) their place of residence on the date of notification;
- (e) the address of any other premises in the United Kingdom at which, at the time the notification is given, they regularly reside or stay; and
- (f) any information that may be prescribed in regulations by the Secretary of State.

(3) A relevant offender must notify to the police, within the period of three days beginning with the event occurring, about—

- (a) their use of a name which has not been notified to the police under subsection (2);
- (b) a change to their place or residence; and
- (c) any other prescribed change of circumstances as defined in regulations made under this section.

(4) The dates of discharge from notification requirements under this section are the same as those set out in Section 88B of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

(5) The information required by subsections (2) and (3), once received, must be—

- (a) monitored regularly by the police and probation service; and
- (b) retained for the purposes of offender management.

(6) The relevant offences are—

- (a) causing or allowing the death of a child or vulnerable adult, or allowing them to suffer serious harm (section 5 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004);
- (b) child cruelty, neglect and violence (section 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933);
- (c) infanticide (section 1 of the Infanticide Act 1938);
- (d) exposing children whereby life is endangered (section 27 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861);
- (e) an offence under sections 4, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23 or 47 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1860, if the victim is under the age of 16;
- (f) an offence under any of the following provisions of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003—
 - (i) female genital mutilation (section 1);
 - (ii) assisting a girl to mutilate her own genitalia (section 2);
 - (iii) assisting a non-UK person to mutilate overseas a girl’s genitalia (section 3); and
- (g) cruelty to children (section 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933).”—(*Dr Mullan.*)

This new clause would create notification requirements for people convicted of child cruelty, analogous to the Sex Offenders Register. Their information and personal details would be kept on record by the police for the purposes of offender management, with the aim of reducing the risk to children from future offences.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 182, Noes 311.

Division No. 335]

[6.33 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat
Allister, Jim
Amos, Gideon
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Aquarone, Steff
Argar, rh Edward
Babarinde, Josh
Bacon, Gareth
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Bedford, Mr Peter
Begum, Apsana
Bennett, Alison
Berry, Si n
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bool, Sarah
Bowie, Andrew
Brandreth, Aphra
Braverman, rh Suella
Brewer, Alex
Brown-Fuller, Jess
Burghart, Alex
Cane, Charlotte
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Cartlidge, James
Chadwick, David
Chamberlain, Wendy
Chambers, Dr Danny
Chope, Sir Christopher
Chowns, Dr Ellie
Cleverly, rh Sir James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Coghlan, Chris
Collins, Victoria
Cooper, Daisy
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Cross, Harriet
Dance, Adam
Darling, Steve
Davies, Ann
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Dean, Bobby
Denyer, Carla
Dillon, Mr Lee
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dyke, Sarah
Evans, Dr Luke
Farage, Nigel
Foord, Richard
Forster, Mr Will
Fortune, Peter
Fox, Sir Ashley
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Franklin, Z e
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gibson, Sarah
Gilmour, Rachel
Glen, rh John
Glover, Olly
Goldman, Marie
Gordon, Tom
Grant, Helen
Green, Sarah
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Alison
Harding, Monica
Harris, Rebecca
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heylings, Pippa
Hinds, rh Damian
Hobhouse, Wera
Holden, rh Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Holmes, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hussain, Mr Adnan
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Liz
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Jones, Clive
Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Kohler, Mr Paul
Kruger, Danny
Lake, Ben
Lam, Katie
Lamont, John
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lopez, Julia
Lowe, Rupert
MacDonald, Mr Angus
Maguire, Ben
Maguire, Helen
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Martin, Mike (*Proxy vote cast by Bobby Dean*)
Mathew, Brian
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Charlie
McVey, rh Esther
Medi, Llinos
van Mierlo, Freddie
Miller, Calum
Milne, John
Mitchell, rh Sir Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moran, Layla
Morello, Edward
Morgan, Helen
Morrison, Mr Tom
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mundell, rh David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Susan
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Norman, rh Jesse
Obese-Jecty, Ben
O'Brien, Neil

Olney, Sarah
Patel, rh Priti
Paul, Rebecca
Philp, rh Chris
Pinkerton, Dr Al
Pritchard, rh Mark
Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Ramsay, Adrian
Rankin, Jack
Robertson, Joe
Rosindell, Andrew
Sabine, Anna
Savage, Dr Roz
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shannon, Jim
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Simmonds, David
Slade, Vikki
Smart, Lisa
Smith, Greg
Smith, rh Sir Julian
Smith, Rebecca
Snowden, Mr Andrew
Sollom, Ian
Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
Stafford, Gregory
Stephenson, Blake
Stone, Jamie
Stride, rh Sir Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Swann, Robin
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Taylor, Luke
Thomas, Bradley
Thomas, Cameron
Tice, Richard
Trott, rh Laura
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Voaden, Caroline
Whately, Helen
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wild, James
Wilkinson, Max
Wilson, Munira
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Wrigley, Martin
Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
David Reed and
Nick Timothy

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed, Dr Zubir
Akehurst, Luke
Alaba, Mr Bayo
Aldridge, Dan
Alexander, rh Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Anderson, Callum
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Arthur, Dr Scott
Asato, Jess
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
Atkinson, Catherine
Atkinson, Lewis
Baker, Alex
Baker, Richard
Ballinger, Alex
Bance, Antonia
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Baxter, Johanna
Beales, Danny
Beavers, Lorraine
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Billington, Ms Polly
Blake, Olivia
Blake, Rachel
Bloore, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie
Botterill, Jade
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
Brickell, Phil
Buckley, Julia
Burke, Maureen
Burton-Sampson, David
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Cadbury, Ruth
Caliskan, Nesil
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell-Savours, Markus
Carden, Dan
Carling, Sam
Carns, Al
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Collier, Jacob
Collinge, Lizzi
Collins, Tom
Conlon, Liam
Coombes, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew
Cooper, Dr Beccy
Costigan, Deirdre
Cox, Pam
Coyle, Neil
Craft, Jen
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Ms Stella
Crichton, Torcuil
Curtis, Chris
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Dalton, Ashley (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
Darlington, Emily
Davies, Jonathan
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Dean, Josh
Dearden, Kate
Dickson, Jim
Dixon, Anna
Dodds, rh Anneliese

Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Mike

Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kumaran, Uma
 Kyle, rh Peter
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael

Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevenson, Kenneth

Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Taiwo Owatemi and
 Stephen Morgan

Question accordingly negated.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to put it on the record that there has unfortunately been a blip on today's version of the Sentencing Bill's amendment paper. While I did put my name to several new clauses, I did not put my name to amendments 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 22, 23, 31, 32, 33, 34 or 35.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I thank the hon. Member for giving me notice of her point of order. I know that House staff would wish to apologise for the error. She has put the facts on the record, so it will now be clear which measures she actually supported, and those to which her name was added in error.

Third Reading

6.45 pm

Jake Richards: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is a pleasure to speak at the Third Reading of this landmark legislation. I begin by expressing my gratitude to all those who have worked tirelessly to deliver this important change to our criminal justice system.

It is difficult to exaggerate the scale of the crisis that landed on the desk of the previous Lord Chancellor—now the Home Secretary—and my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Sir Nicholas Dakin), when they entered Government on 5 July 2024. Prisons were at breaking point, with a very real risk that the most dangerous offenders would not face custody at all and that our communities would be left vulnerable. They took urgent, necessary and decisive action to stabilise the system and keep our prisons afloat, and then they went further.

I pay tribute to David Gauke, the former Conservative Justice Secretary, for his work in leading the independent sentencing review. It is a rigorous and serious piece of work, and while the Government did not accept all the recommendations, it is the basis of many of the provisions before the House today. We thank David Gauke for his work, and perhaps look somewhat regretfully back at what a serious Conservative Justice spokesperson looked like.

I thank right hon. and hon. Members for their careful scrutiny of the Bill, and particularly my hon. Friends the Members for West Bromwich (Sarah Coombes), for South Shields (Emma Lewell), for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth) and for Forest of Dean (Matt Bishop), and the hon. Members for Huntingdon (Ben Obese-Jecty), for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde) and for Maidstone and Malling (Helen Grant)—and a particular shout-out for my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Amanda Martin), for her tireless campaigning on tool theft. Through their personal experience, or the experience of their constituents, hon. Members have powerfully raised issues that the Government will continue to look at and address as this legislation progresses.

The debates we have had on this legislation neatly sum up the dividing lines in British politics. The Conservative party is in complete denial, with not a single word of apology. It is their mess that this legislation begins to clean up. The Bill goes further than simply stabilising the system; it confronts reoffending—the cycle of crime that blights so many of our communities—and learns from the Texan earned-progression model to encourage rehabilitation. Confronting reoffending and improving rehabilitation used to be policies that the Conservatives supported, but today they have provided nothing but opposition.

Meanwhile, Reform's Justice spokesperson, the hon. Member for Runcorn and Helsby (Sarah Pochin), has not bothered to attend this debate at all, and inexplicably said over the weekend that she gets angry when she sees Asian and black people on her TV. She should concentrate on coming up with workable policies; we cannot build portacabin prisons for hardened criminals and keep our communities safe. Reform UK is simply not credible.

This Government, on the other hand, are getting on with the job and making difficult decisions to ensure that we can keep our promise to the British people: we will never let our prison system collapse like the last Government did, when even the most serious offenders might have avoided prison altogether. This Bill will ensure that our prison system is sustainable, while reducing reoffending and crime, and it will keep our communities safe. I commend this Bill to the House.

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

6.49 pm

Dr Mullan: With the leave of the House, I will finish by explaining again that whatever good this Bill may do, the consequences for victims and their families' sense of justice in this country are grave—the very same victims who want to see prosecution rates improve, who want to see court waiting times reduced, and who want to have a criminal justice system that works better for them in so many ways, but who never agreed to a swap. Victims of crime will welcome the changes and improvements that the Labour party says it can deliver, but they should not have to accept that something is taken away just because something else is given.

I say to Back Benchers that the Government can agree spending settlements and come up with plans, but they cannot create the changes in legislation that are needed for this Bill; Back Benchers do that. When the Government need MPs to change legislation, they can say no, such as the Labour Back Benchers who recently said no to welfare reform.

I remind Members what this Bill will do. This Bill will mean that more than 80% of paedophiles who are sent to prison will get out earlier. This Bill will mean that more than 60% of rapists who are sent to prison will get out earlier. It will mean that, in total, more than 6,000 serious violent and sexual offenders will get out of prison earlier.

I ask Labour Members to imagine that, in a couple of years from now, they have secured all the achievements that they want in relation to the criminal justice system. Perhaps a victim of sexual assault comes to see them—perhaps somebody who feels that their experience was improved as a result of the changes that the Government say they are going to make and who, like many victims of sexual assault, has seen their perpetrator sent to prison for three years. That victim will come and see Labour Members, and say that the perpetrator is getting out of prison after just one year—a third of their sentence.

That will be the reality for two thirds of the people sentenced to prison for sexual assault in this country, because the Bill's measures will mean that they get out of prison after a year. What will Members say to victims? Will they say what they say to me: "It was the Tories," "I didn't know," or "We had no choice"? How hollow will those words sound to victims and their families? Whatever this Bill might do, the price that victims will pay is simply too high—much too high. The Government have no right to tell victims and their families that they must accept a trade-off: if they want things to improve in one direction, they must accept a betrayal in another.

I ask Labour Members to reflect again on the figures I have given them. They are the correct figures and they are the facts, no matter what those on the Government Front Bench have muttered as I have been speaking. I ask Labour Members to force this Government to make different choices. Do not support this betrayal of victims. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members can mutter. It will come back to haunt every single one of you when victims ask you, "Why did you vote for something that lets thousands of serious violent and sexual offenders out of prison earlier?"

Question put. That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 321, Noes 103.

Division No. 336]

[6.52 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Si n
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brickell, Phil
 Buckley, Julia
 Burgon, Richard
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil

Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Dalton, Ashley (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Downie, Graeme
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Ellis, Maya
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Hatton, Lloyd

Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hume, Alison
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Ruth
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kumaran, Uma
 Kyle, rh Peter
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Martin, Amanda
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Medi, Llinos
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu

Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shannon, Jim
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick

Smith, Sarah
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Swann, Robin
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet

Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Stephen Morgan

NOES

Allister, Jim
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Bacon, Gareth
 Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bool, Sarah
 Bowie, Andrew

Brandreth, Aphra
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Burghart, Alex
 Cartlidge, James
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Cocking, Lewis
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims

Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Glen, rh John
 Grant, Helen
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Kruger, Danny
 Lam, Katie
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 Lowe, Rupert
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran

Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mohindra*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Trott, rh Laura
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
David Reed and
Nick Timothy

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Privileges

7.4 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Alan Campbell):

I beg to move,

That this House—

agrees with the Committee of Privileges in its First Report of Session 2024–26, Matter referred on 14 July 2025: Omagh Bombing Inquiry;

welcomes the acknowledgement in the Petition from the Secretary of the Inquiry that the Inquiry has taken advice on the application of Article 9 of the Bill of Rights to its proceedings and will be mindful of the privileges of the House;

notes the assurance given by the Inquiry that it will handle material provided to it by the House in accordance with its disclosure protocol;

and accordingly orders that the unpublished transcript of unreported evidence taken by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 11 November 2009 be provided to the Omagh Bombing Inquiry and that the Inquiry shall have power to disclose or publish it if it thinks fit to do so, after taking relevant advice.

I welcome the consideration by the Committee of Privileges of this matter and its report. If approved, the motion will enable the unpublished transcript of unreported evidence, taken by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in November 2009, to be provided to the Omagh bombing inquiry, and enable the inquiry to publish that evidence if it thinks fit to do so, subject to relevant advice.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) and the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) for raising this issue in the House in July. I also thank the Chair of the Privileges Committee, the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), for his Committee's swift work in considering the matter. I commend in particular his Committee's sensitivity in handling this subject, as well as its commitment to facilitating the important work of the Omagh bombing inquiry.

In relation to parliamentary privilege, the report highlights important points on the matter of exclusive cognisance and the privileges of this House. Be in no doubt, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the Government support the rights of this House and will act to defend them. I hope that the House will support this motion today, and I commend it to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Chair of the Privileges Committee.

7.5 pm

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): I support the motion proposed by the Leader of the House and thank him for his kind words about me and other Members involved in this matter. The motion is, of course, about the report drafted by the Committee of Privileges. The task the House gave the Committee was, in essence, a simple one: to consider whether to release a document to the Omagh bombing inquiry.

Throughout our work, the Committee has had in mind that the Omagh bombing was one of the greatest atrocities committed in Northern Ireland during the period known as the troubles and afterwards. In Omagh, on 15 August 1998—a summer Saturday in the centre of a busy town where people were going about their everyday business—a 500 lb car bomb exploded, taking the lives of 29 people and two unborn children and injuring hundreds more people, with repercussions for thousands

of relatives, friends and people across Northern Ireland. In short, we felt from the beginning that there was an overwhelming public interest in our helping the Omagh bombing inquiry in any way we could.

The inquiry is charged with considering an allegation made by a former senior police officer that police investigators did not have access to intelligence materials that might reasonably have enabled them to disrupt the activities of dissident republican terrorists before the Omagh bombing. That allegation was made to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 11 November 2009.

I thank the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), who chairs that Committee today, and commend the words she has said previously about this matter and the work she has done. I also put on the record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who moved the original motion on behalf of the hon. Member for Gower, as the former Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.

Part of the evidence taken by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee was not reported to the House, and so has never been published. We were asked to make a recommendation on the desirability of releasing that evidence to the inquiry. There were procedural and, perhaps, constitutional difficulties in that.

The terms of reference drawn up by the then Government enabled the inquiry to consider the allegation made by the now retired police officer. The unreported transcript of his evidence was not, however, the property of that or any Government; it belongs to the House of Commons. As it is unreported, it has not been seen by current Members of the House, other than those who sit on the Committee of Privileges; nor will this motion make it available to the House of Commons. In short, in proposing that we provide the transcript to the inquiry, we are giving control of the transcript to that inquiry. This, so far as we are aware, is an unprecedented procedural step. However, I praise the inquiry for its careful, helpful and co-operative approach to the matters of parliamentary privilege raised by this step.

I also thank the inquiry for the assurances it has given my Committee about how it will handle the material, and in particular what steps it will take to ensure that any national security concerns have been fully discussed with the security services before it shares the document or relies on it for its own conclusions. Those assurances may be found in the appendix to our report. Thus, given the assurances received from the inquiry and in the light of the overwhelming public interest in providing aid to an inquiry into the murder of so many people, I trust that the House will feel confident that my Committee has recommended an appropriate course of action.

We have added to our report a recommendation that the Government remind Ministers and officials, when drawing up terms of reference for future similar inquiries or for public bodies, that more care might be taken when it comes to intruding on matters that fall within the exclusive cognisance of Parliament. That is not in any way intended to be a partisan point; the terms of reference for this inquiry were drawn up by the previous Government. We would wish all Governments to take more care in future to recognise the rights of the House of Commons. I hope that the Minister can provide some reassurance on that point.

I also place on record my thanks not only to fellow members of the Privileges Committee—I see one or two in their place this evening—but to the Clerks of the Committee and the advisers who helped us to navigate what is a challenging constitutional point. To conclude, the Committee believes that the House should do all it can to help the Omagh bombing inquiry in its work. We wish the inquiry well as it continues to seek the truth behind the terrible events of 15 August 1998. We should always remember that truly dreadful human tragedies lie behind what we are doing this evening. I commend the motion to the House.

7.10 pm

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for bringing this motion to the House, and I thank the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), Chair of the Privileges Committee, and the Committee's members for the work they have done on this matter.

On 9 July, I presented a petition from Tim Suter, the secretary of the Omagh bombing inquiry, asking the House to allow the inquiry to access unreported evidence from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. As current Chair of the Committee, I know how important it is that the inquiry should be able to do its work. I was happy to present the petition as the first step in getting the inquiry the information it needed.

It is an important principle that the House has control of parliamentary papers. Committees can choose to report those papers to the House, but if they do not do so, those papers are only accessible if the House so orders. It is also important that people who give evidence to a Committee know that if their evidence is not reported, it will not be released without proper consideration of the issues. As it was unreported evidence, my Committee—the current Committee—did not have access to the evidence. There was no way for the House to assess whether the information could be published in whole or redacted, or what the inquiry might need.

The Privileges Committee was asked to look at this matter and the papers were referred to it. I am grateful to the Committee for its work. As the Committee makes clear, it is possible that some of the information in the transcript may need to be restricted. It invites the House to take the unusual step of handing over material that it has not seen. I think that is entirely appropriate. The inquiry knows what information is useful to it. The Committee has received written confirmation that the evidence released to it will be treated according to its disclosure protocol to check material relevant to national security and that there will be a security check. In these circumstances, I support the motion, since I am confident that careful consideration has been given to the issues involved.

7.14 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank everyone involved in producing the report and the Leader of the House for bringing it to the House for us to consider. I recall very well where I was on that fateful day when

the news came through. It has always been very important to me, and indeed to everyone in this House, to ensure that justice is done. I was born in Omagh—I remember little about it, because I was only there as a wee baby—so I always want to see justice done for all those who lost loved ones.

I therefore warmly welcome the report, which is a positive step forward. My party leader—my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson)—my party and I have encouraged full co-operation, which is what we want to see. I thank the Chair of the Committee for all the swift conclusions brought forward. It would have been untenable for the House of Commons to withhold information that might aid the inquiry's understanding and assist the families in their quest for truth and justice.

7.15 pm

Sir Alan Campbell: I am grateful to all hon. Members for their contributions to this short debate. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), who is an excellent Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, and the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), the Chair of the Committee of Privileges, who spoke with the typical sensitivity and thoughtfulness that we have come to expect from him. I also thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for welcoming the action that we are about to take. As ever, he brings personal reflection and experience to our debates, and I thank him for it.

I will of course draw Departments' attention to the words of the Chair of the Committee of Privileges, and indeed those of the Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. As they both will have seen, my right hon. Friend the Northern Ireland Secretary is with us on the Front Bench and will have heard those words directly.

Question put and agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): With the leave of the House, we will take motions 5 and 6 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

PRIVATE INTERNATIONAL LAW

That the draft Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Act 2020 (Extension of Operative Period) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 2 September, be approved.

SPORTS GROUNDS AND SPORTING EVENTS

That the draft Football Governance Act 2025 (Specified Competitions) Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 13 October, be approved.—(*Gen Kitchen.*)

Question agreed to.

Offshore Wind Supply Chain: Tyneside

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Gen Kitchen.*)

7.17 pm

Mary Glindon (Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend) (Lab): I thank Mr Speaker for granting the debate. I do not underestimate the challenges that the Minister and her colleagues face, because the transition is a monumental task. Tonight I will set out the case for further Government support being needed for the offshore wind sector in places such as Tyneside.

Smulders Projects UK, which I have worked with for many years, is a critical employer in the sector and in my constituency. Smulders is not only a key global player but the UK's leading provider of offshore wind substations and foundation structures, including monopiles, transitional pieces and jackets. Those form the essential building blocks of the critical infrastructure required for UK renewable energy security.

Smulders, based in Wallsend, is one of many businesses along the Tyne that are markers of the Tyne's proud and enduring legacy. Throughout history, the Tyne has stepped up when the country has needed it most. *[Interruption.]* Today it stands ready to aid the transition to renewables. Do excuse me, Madam Deputy Speaker; I am very proud of the Tyne.

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

Mary Glindon: I certainly will.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Jim Shannon on the offshore wind supply chain in Tyneside.

Jim Shannon: I spoke to the hon. Lady before the debate and explained the connection between her constituency and mine, and why it is so important. I also want to encourage the hon. Lady, who has been a great friend of mine in the House in all the time I have been here. We share many things, including an interest in this subject matter, but we also share our faith. It is important that we have that relationship across the Chamber. Does she not agree that while Tyneside is a major hub for offshore wind supply, we must continue to invest in new and better methodology in renewable energy, such as harnessing tidal energy through Strangford lough and Newcastle University's wave energy device, which contributes to the area's role in marine energy innovation? These are things that we can do better together.

Mary Glindon: The hon. Gentleman has long been a friend of mine, and he not only speaks well of his own constituency and Northern Ireland, but is very supportive of all of us across the Irish sea. He is right in what he says, and I think we are both justly proud of what is being achieved by the universities and industries in our areas. That is why we are standing here tonight and making our plea to the Government.

This week, the Government set the budget for allocation round 7 to support new offshore wind projects. RenewableUK, along with other industry voices, has expressed concern that the amount allocated is likely to procure only a quarter of the 20 GW capacity available in this year's tender. This is a very recent announcement,

so I would be grateful if the Minister could set out how the budget aligns with the Government's plans to maximise the number of green jobs in Britain.

Against the backdrop of AR7, there is real concern regarding the alarming drift towards UK offshore wind turbine foundation structures being procured from lower-cost regions such as the middle east, the Asia-Pacific region—APAC—and China. Recent examples of this include EDF's Neart na Gaoithe offshore wind farm, Ocean Winds' Moray West OWF and the Inch Cape OWF. For these UK projects, all the foundation structures were imported from lower-cost fabrication yards located in the middle east, Indonesia and China. I understand the approach taken by the previous Government and developers to drive down and minimise capital expenditure, but that approach adversely impacts the operations of our own UK companies, which are unable to compete on cost alone.

Recent mechanisms and initiatives such as the clean industry bonus included in AR7 are of course welcome, but there is a fear that these alone will not prevent the further drift of foundation fabrication away from the UK to these lower-cost regions. With reference to the AR7 clean industry bonus allocation framework, there are two CIB criteria that developers could meet. Criterion 1 refers to "investment in shorter supply chains", where an investment may be made in a deprived area in the UK. Given the socioeconomic challenges that Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend face, option 1 is a welcome incentive, and I look forward to the outcome of the AR7 projects, when announced. Criterion 2 refers to "investment in more sustainable means of production", where investments may be made in one or more manufacturing facilities or installation firms that have either committed to, or set their science-based targets by, the application date anywhere in the world.

There is real concern that this approach opens the door to unfair competition from lower-cost regions such as China, APAC and the middle east, specifically for the supply of critical offshore wind infrastructure such as wind turbine generator foundations, jackets, transition pieces and monopiles. Therefore, outside the AR7 framework, and given the criticality of this infrastructure to our energy security, will the Minister set out what additional measures or guarantees can be put in place to ensure that a significant portion of offshore wind infrastructure is secured and fabricated by UK companies such as Smulders? It is essential that businesses in the UK continue to invest, innovate and introduce new technologies and processes to optimise efficiency as well as competitiveness, as my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult for UK companies to compete equally with overseas yards on such an uneven playing field.

On the Tyne, not only are supply chains held back by unfair competition; they are also constrained by physical barriers. The power cables over the Tyne are an obstacle to businesses securing work for large renewable energy structures, which risks possible net gross value added benefits of up to £1.2 billion. The height restriction in place is 87 metres. However, wind turbine jackets for AR7 and future rounds will be in excess of 100 to 120 metres high. It means that Smulders cannot bid for certain contracts despite having world-class facilities and the sharpest minds ready to go. It has been proposed that the removal of the cables will be completed in 2032.

I have campaigned since 2017 for a solution to this issue—2032 is too late. The jobs of the future have become the jobs of today, and this is an international race. Yards in the middle east will not wait for 2032, APAC will not wait, and neither will China.

In July, I welcomed the Secretary of State's commitment to engage with me and Ofgem to try to accelerate the work. I look forward to meeting the Energy Minister next month to discuss it further. I would be grateful if the Minister reaffirmed the Department's support for bringing forward this work and reaffirm that the Government will press the National Grid for an earlier completion date.

I turn to the issue of ensuring a more consistent revenue stream for our domestic fabricators. We have seen disruption, delay and postponement in the promised pipeline of offshore wind projects because of failures during earlier leasing and allocation rounds. Projects from AR5 and AR6 are all now complete, or very near to completion. Unfortunately, however, insufficient projects were approved and insufficient contracts were awarded to the UK to ensure a continuous pipeline of work for companies such as Smulders. The result of that failure is a very real two-year chasm in UK offshore wind manufacturing. From the start of 2026, effectively, zero UK offshore wind projects will be in fabrication.

The next tranche of projects will be dependent on the successful outcome of AR7 and the clean industry bonus incentives offered to developers. The results from AR7, however, will not be known until quarter 1 in 2026, thus creating a two-year gap. This is the effective period from project approval and contract award, to finalising engineering and procuring materials before industry can start cutting steel. Optimistically, that could begin in quarter 3 or quarter 4 of 2027, with offshore infrastructure in place again two years after that in the final quarter of 2029. However, the first power generation from AR7 projects before August 2029 is a stretched target.

Smulders has already invested over £100 million at its Wallsend facilities based on previous Government assurances of continued UK offshore wind fabrication projects. What level of operational or other support is the Government willing to provide to established tier-1 fabricators such as Smulders to secure the jobs of over 600 well-paid workers during this two-year gap in fabrication?

I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State's commitment during party conference to a clean energy jobs plan, which will see the sector grow from 430,000 jobs today to 830,000 by 2030. That will include tens of thousands of new roles for engineers, welders, electricians and construction workers. I support the Government's ambition for further growth. The skills for these jobs are being developed and nurtured by companies in Tyneside, as well as by the Energy Academy in my constituency, which is set to expand following the combined authority's commitment to invest £8.5 million in the college. Well-paid, secure jobs can be created through the awarding of contracts to existing UK tier-1 fabricators.

For UK companies, the outcome and results from allocation round 7 are critical to their continued operations in this country. More crucially, the outcome of the foundation contract awards will ultimately determine the long-term success or failure of our businesses—and, I believe, the future of the UK offshore wind fabrication sector. Only foundation contracts awarded domestically can provide the necessary volume of serial, repeat fabrication

needed to achieve the Government's clean jobs target, and secure the necessary skills required for a high-paid clean energy sector. I repeat my call on the Government to take further steps to ensure that a substantial allocation of AR7 foundation fabrication is awarded here in the UK.

As I said, at its peak, Smulders supports over 600 high-skilled and well-paid local jobs in Tyneside and across the region, and its primary concern is to secure those jobs in the long term. It is in the national interest for UK businesses to succeed with those projects, as they are creating highly skilled and dependable jobs that will not only strengthen the offshore wind industry but support training in skills required for associated industries such as defence, nuclear and the wider engineering sector, as well as supporting other major British infrastructure initiatives. The drifting overseas of such work threatens domestic jobs, future economic investment and the UK's long-term security.

This is a critical juncture for the UK offshore wind sector, so will the Minister meet me, representatives from Smulders and the wider Tyneside supply chain to discuss urgently the concerns that I have set out about the areas in which industry needs further support, and so that we can present our aspirations for the clean energy future? Although the transition presents challenges from all angles, it presents even more opportunities. The Tyne is open for business, and it stands ready to play a defining role.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Minister. I believe that this is her first time at the Dispatch Box for an Adjournment debate.

7.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Katie White): It certainly is!

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend (Mary Glendon) on securing a debate on this important issue, and on her passion, authenticity and representation of her area. I do not think that any of us are in doubt of those qualities tonight.

I know that this matter is close to the hearts of many Members and their constituents, particularly in our industrial heartlands. This Government are on a mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower, delivering clean power by 2030 and accelerating to net zero. Offshore wind is the beating heart of that mission. The sector is already providing secure clean energy, as well as thousands of skilled jobs, bringing growth and opportunities to communities such as those in Tyneside.

The sector is also an international success story. At the end of June, the UK was generating 16.7 GW from offshore wind. That is the highest amount in Europe, and worldwide we are second only to China—a country with a population roughly 20 times the size of ours. We have consented 4.2 GW since we came into office, and we have 75 GW of capacity in the pipeline, which equates to a 450% increase on our current, world-leading amount. We also have the second most installed floating offshore wind capacity—after Norway—and, at over 25 GW, the largest pipeline of floating offshore wind projects in the world. And yet we are confident that the best is yet to come.

From north-east England to Scotland and the Celtic sea, incredible things are happening across the country in this industry. The Government are determined to do everything we can to help our offshore wind sector to

[Katie White]

thrive and to deliver for the British people. The contract for difference scheme is vital to our mission to make the UK a clean energy superpower. Allocation rounds 7 to 9 are crucial for the delivery of our goal of clean power by 2030 and for protecting households from volatile fossil fuel prices.

On Monday, we confirmed that a total budget of £900 million is available for fixed-bottom offshore wind in allocation round 7—an increase on the previous allocation round's initial budget when comparing on a like-for-like basis. That is the initial budget for fixed-bottom offshore wind, but we have the ability to view unsuccessful bids and adjust the budget later if we deem that doing so is good value for consumers. We have fundamentally reformed the offshore wind system to get better value for money. Under the old system, the Government set a budget and had no further control over quantity and price.

We recognise the importance of robust domestic supply chains both in supporting the continued growth of this industry and in ensuring that British workers and communities benefit from the jobs that are created. The Government have therefore set out a package of support, worth up to £1 billion, for offshore wind supply chains. This includes £300 million from Great British Energy to provide upfront public investment, £400 million from the Crown Estate to support new infrastructure, including ports, manufacturing, and research and testing facilities, and £300 million from the offshore wind industry to deliver new investment into supply chains such as advanced turbine technologies and foundations.

Jim Shannon: I welcome the Minister to her place and wish her every success and happiness in her role. I will try not to be too hard with my questions. She referred for the contracts for difference scheme. I know it is something that Northern Ireland has to do itself, but at this early stage will she please engage with the relevant Minister in the Assembly, and perhaps help us to move our scheme forward?

Katie White: I will ensure that the Minister for Energy is aware of his issues and feeds them in. I am sure he will—I believe he is a friend of the hon. Gentleman.

This is a genuinely transformative package of investment, and by providing that support, as well as clarity in our plans, we are giving investors and developers the confidence to invest in the future. It is expected that the £1 billion package of investment will directly and indirectly mobilise billions more, as well as supporting thousands of jobs in our industrial heartlands. We have also introduced a clean industry bonus to reward projects that invest in coastal communities, industrial heartlands and cleaner supply chains.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend said, criteria 2 of the clean industry bonus rewards investments in cleaner supply chains, measured by sign-up to the science-based target initiative for decarbonisation. It so happens that the overwhelming majority of qualifying suppliers are in the UK or the European Union—very few suppliers outside the region qualify under criteria 2. It was great to see the clean industry bonus auction smash bid expectations earlier this year, and we look forward to seeing the investments come in after auction round 7, showing that when the Government lead with ambition, industry is ready to match it.

We also know that we will need even more skilled workers to achieve our mission in the years ahead, and with our analysis suggesting that the offshore wind sector alone could support up to 100,000 jobs by 2030, we are determined to ensure that our industrial communities benefit. That is why we have set up the Office for Clean Energy Jobs, which will provide training and support to the workforce in the clean energy and net zero sectors. Our priority is creating good jobs in Britain's industrial heartlands, including a just transition for the industries based in the North sea. On 19 October, we published our clean energy jobs plan, which sets out how the Government will work in partnership with industry and trade unions to help workers in all parts of the country to benefit from these opportunities, supporting our existing workforce to find new opportunities, training up the next generation, and supporting our young people to get good, unionised jobs.

Let me turn to our support for the north-east. Tyneside is ideally placed to service the offshore energy sector, including one of the world's largest offshore wind markets. The Tyne has the capacity to become a major hub for the installation and maintenance of offshore wind farms, and to service the supply chain that will grow from it. In 2023, the UK Infrastructure Bank invested £50 million in the Port of Tyne as part of a debt refinancing package of up to £100 million. That finance was provided to regenerate and redevelop land, building a base for a growing number of clean energy industries in the area, including offshore wind, advanced manufacturing and other renewable activities.

In September, the Port of Tyne announced that it is investing £150 million to transform 23 acres into the Tyne clean energy park, adding 400 metres of deep-water quayside to support offshore renewables, clean energy and advanced manufacturing. According to the Port of Tyne, the redevelopment could create up to 12,000 jobs and deliver £5.6 billion to the economy. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend to help us realise that potential. On the transmission cable over the River Tyne, I confirm that the Government are open to discussing the progress of the proposals to underground the cable with National Grid. The decision for approving the project lies with Ofgem as the independent regulator, which must demonstrate that there are benefits to consumers when approving network projects.

To sum up, our offshore wind sector is a British success story of which we should all be proud. Thanks to the perfect conditions provided by the North sea, as well as our legendary offshore workforce and supply chains, we are perfectly placed to keep leading the way. But this Government are not content with simply winning the race for clean power; we want to build the industries of the future here in Britain and, in so doing, we want to create a new generation of good, skilled jobs for the communities we depend on and to ensure that the economic benefits of the clean power transition are felt in Tyneside and in every corner of our country.

I know that the Minister for Energy had a fantastic visit to the Smulders UK yard in Wallsend in the summer, and he will be happy to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend.

Question put and agreed to.

7.39 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 29 October 2025

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

International Baccalaureate: Funding in State Schools

9.30 am

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Before we start, it has been drawn to my attention that a photograph is to be taken in the Chamber at 11 o'clock. We have no power to suspend this sitting to accommodate that, but I will try to get a message to the Speaker's Office to say that there are Members here who would like to be in the Chamber for that and that if it could be held off until about 11.5 am, that should give Members here time to get across. Those of us taking part in the second debate will not have that luxury.

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered funding for the International Baccalaureate in state schools.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Roger. The international baccalaureate—which I will henceforth refer to as the IB, but I hate acronyms, so I wanted to say it properly to start with—establishes the global standard for education and is recognised by universities, employers and educators worldwide as a symbol of academic excellence.

For those who are unaware, the IB diploma is an alternative to A-levels that offers a breadth of subjects across the curriculum: languages, humanities, sciences, maths and arts. Students complete extended projects, theory of knowledge and service in the community, making for a well-rounded education. Studies have shown that IB students in the UK are three times more likely to enrol in a top 20 higher education institution, 40% more likely to achieve a first-class or upper second-class honours degree and 21% more likely to continue to the second year of university. That is why thousands of British families choose to send their children to schools offering the IB diploma.

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for giving way. I have constituents who attend the Europa School in his constituency, and they have been in touch with me about this issue. He speaks of choice. If we can have faith schools, free schools, maintained schools, academies, grammar schools, state boarding schools and colleges—

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. Let us get the ground rules right: this is an intervention, not a speech.

Freddie van Mierlo: Does my hon. Friend agree that choice is an extremely valuable part of the education system, and we should be supporting the Europa School?

Olly Glover: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point and articulately summarises the wide range of choice in schools that there is separately from the IB. He is right to mention the Europa School in Culham in my constituency; I will say more about that school later and explain why it is so important to the Government's objectives for the Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor.

Since 2013, the Government have provided a large programme uplift—another acronym: LPU—in funding to state schools and colleges in England to support high-quality 16-to-19 study programmes exceeding the standard 600 hours of teaching. That helps to fund state schools to deliver the IB diploma programme. On 1 October this year, the Department for Education wrote to affected state schools and colleges to notify them that the Government are axing the LPU funding for the international baccalaureate diploma programme from the 2026-27 academic year.

As with so much in life, the “what” is important, but in many ways the “how” is even more so. Many schools and parents are hugely concerned that there was no consultation or impact assessment on the changes and no warning that this was coming. It could hardly have come at a worse time, as schools are having open days, showing families around and letting them know what they offer.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): A governor of the Europa School in my hon. Friend's constituency wrote to me to object to the short notice that the Government have provided, at a time when children and their parents are making decisions about the future and choosing the opportunity that an IB programme provides. Does he agree that this was short-sighted and ill considered by the Government?

Olly Glover: I very much agree. The fact that there is a governor of this school in my hon. Friend's constituency shows that these schools often have wide catchment areas, because of the fairly unusual and very popular offer that they make, which is attractive to many in the surrounding areas.

It is unclear what these schools should be saying to parents as they look to enrol their children for the next calendar year. This will be deeply damaging for those schools.

Charlotte Cane (Ely and East Cambridgeshire) (LD): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Students in my constituency are served by Impington Village college for the IB. They are deeply unhappy that the college received a letter from the Department announcing the change with no warning or consultation. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government decision has caused an unacceptable amount of stress for pupils, parents and staff, and that how the Government are acting is the complete opposite—

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. This is an intervention, not a speech. The Chair deprecates scripted interventions; they are supposed to be spontaneous.

Olly Glover: My hon. Friend gives a strong example of another school offering that type of qualification. It is also in that Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor, which is so important to the Government.

[Olly Glover]

The Government have committed to increasing the number of those pursuing further education, whether academic or technical, and they talk about a “broad and bold curriculum”. Removing funding for the IB in state schools does not seem to align with the Government’s stated aims. State schools losing the funding will make it unviable for some of them to deliver the IB programme, as it takes more teaching hours and highly trained specialists.

Some of the state schools offering IB are selective, but many are not, including Europa School in my constituency. Removing the funding ensures that only independent schools can offer the IB, creating a two-tier system so only those who can pay will get it.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): I was lucky enough to go to a school in Cheltenham called the Cheltenham Ladies college where the IB was offered. It is grossly unfair that children who cannot afford school fees should not have the opportunity for this wonderful international qualification. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Olly Glover: I very much agree. The risk, the consequence, of this Government decision is that it pushes people towards independent schools. Surely that is not in line with the Government’s strongly stated views on private versus state education. Additionally, those teachers trained to deliver the programme may also opt to move to the private sector, meaning our state schools lose yet more teaching talent—both pupils and teachers could be pushed away.

Europa School is a single academy trust based at Culham in my Oxfordshire constituency; I was lucky enough to visit it on 7 March this year. It provides a broad, challenging and internationally minded curriculum with specialisms in modern European languages, in particular French, German and Spanish, and the STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering and maths. The Department for Education provides a grant of £100,000. I am happy to say that Europa School is successful and thriving, with 1,150 pupils, long waiting lists in all cohorts and 106 in the midst of doing their IB diplomas.

My constituency is home to myriad public and private sector science and tech research companies, such as the UK Atomic Energy Authority, in Culham just down the road from the school, the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy and, slightly further from the school, those at Harwell campus and Milton Park. Cutting-edge research and commercial innovation take place every day and, as such, the area attracts a world-class scientific community that very much relies on people coming from wherever in the world has the specialist expertise to contribute to world-class scientific efforts.

For scientists choosing to relocate to the UK to pursue such cutting-edge research, the option of the Europa School is without doubt a draw, and it enables their families to continue their international education. The origins of the school very much lie there, in that it used to be a European Union-funded institution, affiliated to the JET—Joint European Torus—fusion testing facility

that was next door in Culham. Clearly, the school has evolved since our decision to leave the European Union, but it still has that international ethos.

There is a real risk that the UK will lose global talent hubs and STEM industries as cutting-edge scientists relocate to other global destinations in the event that the education available to their families loses its relevance. It is hard to see, therefore, how the policy we are debating supports the Government’s stated aim of pursuing cutting-edge scientific research and their goals for the Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor. Only last week, the Government announced funding for the Oxford to Cowley branch line. The funding needed to support Europa School and others is just a drop in the ocean compared with the costs those needed to deliver the Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor.

Additionally, the Europa School is unique. It operates a bilingual model, enabling European students to continue some learning in their native tongue and UK students the opportunity to reach an unusual level of proficiency in another language. That would be lost if the school had to resort to GCSEs and A-levels, which other schools in the area offer.

Never mind what I think, however. There is a real-world impact on students and their families, and I want to share a little of what students and parents themselves have said. I was told about the Europa headteacher meeting a year 11 student who had applied for a scholarship to a nearby independent school. She would not have considered it but for this announcement. She has her heart set on studying the IB but is now unsettled. Unfortunately, she is not the only one. The existing lower-sixth students have expressed concern about whether the school will be able to continue to offer their choices of subjects without the transitional funding for their final year at Europa.

Uma from the lower-sixth said:

“As an IB student at Europa School UK, my classmates and I are really concerned about the Government’s decision to reduce support for IB students in state schools. It’s a really challenging curriculum that encourages a strong language base, critical thinking, scientific depth and research, with extra requirements to broaden our skills. We are all so passionate about the program and the school, and the opportunity to complete this additional challenge, which now is at risk for us and younger children. If the Government want to invest in the future and believe in equality in education, they should reverse their decision.”

The school has reassured the lower-sixth but cannot offer those reassurances to year 11 students. Amalia in year 11 said:

“Due to the unnecessary uncertainty surrounding this proposal, a significant number of my friends, who I have known for almost my entire life, have started to look into different IB schools. I know I will stay in Europa to pursue subjects such as physics, maths and German, as I want to be an engineer, and the IB is helping me develop all the skills I will need, along with giving me a wider outlook on culture and teaching me problem-solving skills and improving my creative and conceptual understanding. However, my learning of these skills is being put at risk, as some of the classes I hope to take, such as art and philosophy, may not be able to be taught next school year, which would cause such a loss in my and others’ academic development. I also hope to continue with my languages next year, as Europa has provided me with such an enriching and cultural curriculum that has inspired me to continue learning languages, so that I can use them in my later life.”

I would add to those comments that surely, in our globalised world and talk of global Britain, it is more important than ever to improve our language proficiency.

We could aspire to be like the Netherlands, where everyone—even in the middle of nowhere, cycling along by the North sea—speaks fluent English. I am not suggesting that Dutch should be the language of choice for us, lovely though it is; I will stop digging at this point.

About 70 parents wrote to me as constituents and have signed a Change.org petition. They told me:

“Many of our families are attracted to work in cutting-edge technology and innovation here, precisely because there is a credible education option for their children who will leave with an internationally recognised qualification. The Government’s stated reason for the change is evidently to encourage schools to focus on the study of STEM subjects. This suggests to us that someone in the Education Department does not understand anything about the IB. The IB ensures that all students must continue to study mathematics and all the sciences up to the age of 18. For a bilingual school like Europa, the IB offers the only suitable framework that allows our students’ language proficiency to be properly assessed and challenged. If we are forced to revert to GCSEs and A-levels, we will lose the ability to provide the depth of language education that Europa was designed to deliver.”

I hope the Minister can provide clarity on a point that is not clear to me or Europa School. At present, schools get core funding per student for 16 to 19 and then the large programme uplift that I mentioned. The LPU for IB schools was 20% of core funding. Will the increase to core funding of £800 million cover the proposed cut to the LPU? I understand that that £800 million will cover only rising school costs and the increased teacher pay awards. I also understand that there is a parachute payment for the academic year 2026-27 that will be approximately 40% of the previous LPU payment. That might go some way to supporting the current year 12 students to complete their IBs, but still represents a significant shortfall.

In conclusion, it is clear that the education pathway of the IB offers a choice for students and parents that is of high quality and appealing to many. By removing funding for it, the Government are reinforcing a two-tier system, where only those children whose parents can afford independent schools will be able to take the international baccalaureate. That goes against the Government’s stated policies on state versus private education.

The curriculum review should be viewed as an opportunity to learn from the success of the IB diploma, so that more students can benefit from a rigorous programme that balances breadth and depth without narrowing options too early. I ask the Minister to reinstate the funding, at a cost of just £2.5 million a year. When researching for this debate, I was astonished to discover that the Department for Education’s budget is more than £100 billion annually. Assuming that my maths is up to scratch—alas, I did not go to Europa School—that represents 0.0025% of the Department’s annual budget.

I ask the Minister to reinstate that funding so that we do not close the door to a high-quality programme for a generation of state school pupils and their families. I thank everyone for attending the debate and look forward to hearing their comments, in particular the Minister’s.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. Before we proceed, I should say that eight hon. Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I propose to call the Front

Benchers at 10.30 am. We have tried to get a message to the Speaker’s Office and I have not had a response, so we do not know what the score is. If the Front Benchers curtail their remarks, I can suspend the sitting slightly early. Those who are participating in the following business will have to remain here, but other Members should be able to make it to the Chamber by 11 o’clock. I am minded to put a time limit on speeches, but for the moment, if we can work on a self-denying ordinance of five minutes, we should be able to get everybody in. I call Josh Dean.

9.45 am

Josh Dean (Hertford and Stortford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Roger. I thank the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) for securing this morning’s debate.

Hockerill Anglo-European College in Bishop’s Stortford is one of the 20 or so state schools across the country to offer the international baccalaureate diploma. A vibrant day and boarding school, Hockerill’s post-16 provision is based entirely on the IB diploma, and it is the only school in our community to offer the programme. The removal of the large programme uplift funding for the international baccalaureate programme by the Department for Education would seriously impact Hockerill’s ability to offer the IB.

Hockerill’s sixth form open morning for the next school year takes place in just under a month, and the letter notifying the school of the changes arrived on 1 October—the same day its promotional material for the sixth form was signed off. The school had received no previous indication of potential changes and had not been consulted. The letter professed to let it know about them “in good time” in case it needed “to consider changes” to its “provision and plans”. However, when I met the principal last week, he was clear that, with the prospectus signed off and families due to walk through the door for their open morning, there simply is not time to make drastic changes to provision and that the school will be unable to offer the IB following the changes.

That decision does not take place in a vacuum. Hockerill is an international boarding school as well as a local state school, but the additional income that that once provided has been severely impacted by changes following Brexit. Furthermore, like many state schools, Hockerill has seen a dramatic rise in the number of children with special educational needs and disabilities and education, health and care plans, and the additional provision it offers has also had a significant impact on its budget.

The IB diploma has made up Hockerill’s sole post-16 provision for many years. The school has already advertised that provision to its current year 11 and to year 11 students across our community, and it intends to honour that offer. That means that it will run the provision with reduced transitional funding next year and without the LPU the following year, meaning it will have to consider taking money from elsewhere in an already stretched budget.

Will the Minister reflect in his response on what consideration the DFE has given to schools such as Hockerill, which did not expect to make drastic changes to their post-16 provision in such a short timeframe, and on how it intends to support them to make any

[Josh Dean]

changes? Will he also set out what consideration the DFE has given to, at minimum, extending the transitional funding for a further year to allow schools such as Hockerill to complete the IB programme for current year 11s going into the sixth form, thus reducing disruption? Finally, will he urgently meet me to discuss Hockerill's case, how the changes will impact the school community and our town, and the wider challenges being faced?

9.48 am

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) for bringing forward this debate.

The international baccalaureate sets a global benchmark for education. It is trusted by universities, employers and educators worldwide as a mark of academic excellence. It equips young people with the skills they need for life, producing confident and well-rounded citizens. It therefore makes no sense for the Government to slash large programme uplift funding for the IB diploma programme—a deeply damaging and short-sighted move that will affect only 20 state schools that offer the IB. That funding makes it possible for state schools to deliver the IB programme, and removing it jeopardises access to the programme for state school students across England, entrenching even further the divide between state and private schools. That directly contradicts the Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity.

The cut, worth just £2.5 million, as my hon. Friend the Member for Didcot and Wantage said, is a drop in the ocean for the DFE, given its £100 billion budget, but the impact on state schools and students currently taking or planning to take the IB is devastating. Why are the Government discouraging ambition and preventing social mobility to save such a comparatively small sum of money?

I recently heard from Torquay Boys' Grammar School, which is in the neighbouring constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Steve Darling) and is attended by many of my constituents. The school was shocked to learn that its large programme uplift funding would end with no prior warning, cutting £116,000 from its budget in 2026 and £90,000 in 2027. It warned that this was an irreversible change. Establishing the IB involves years of preparation and teacher training, something the school has been building up since 2009.

Losing the IB would happen quickly and with no turning back, but the impact extends beyond that. Torquay Boys' said that without the IB it could not sustain A-level language courses. Those usually have only four to five students per class, but the IB programme keeps 40 students learning languages at 16 to 18. The cut could therefore lead to the death of certain subjects altogether in some state schools. As a language graduate myself, this is something I care about deeply. We can all plainly see the damage that cutting our ties to our nearest neighbours on the European mainland has done. Effectively wiping out language learning in schools is yet another hammer blow to intercultural understanding and relationship building.

We know that the IB is a pathway to top universities, apprenticeships and employment for young people in the state sector, so the cut is at direct odds with the Government's pledge to increase the number of students pursuing further education. It provides a broad and balanced curriculum, including maths, science, humanities, arts and a language. This decision therefore also actively conflicts with the Government's promise in opposition to deliver a "broad and bold" curriculum.

Not every student is ready to limit their choices to three A-levels at 16 years old. The IB enables them to keep their options open for longer, ensuring they reach the right decision about what to go on to study later in life. Why are the Government taking a decision that actively narrows curriculums and limits skillsets? Why are they undertaking this hypocritical action that goes against their own commitments, missions and promises? And what do they seek to gain from a cut that will free up so little cash, but take away significant opportunities from ambitious state school students?

Our education system should nurture every child's full range of talents by embracing a broader curriculum rooted in curiosity, creativity and critical thinking. The Liberal Democrats want a system that supports aspiration and opens opportunity. We need a more diverse education system, not a more homogenised one. The Government must reverse this cut and go further. The upcoming curriculum review should draw on the success of the IB diploma programme so that more students can benefit from its rigorous and balanced approach. The UK should learn from international models like the IB, not shut them down.

9.52 am

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Roger.

Truro and Penwith College in my constituency is a very successful tertiary college. It is fully ready to take up the mantle of two thirds of students and learners being in further education, higher education or apprenticeships by the age of 25. It works closely with businesses to set up courses relevant to the industrial strategy and the high-priority sectors the Government are pushing. It is doing a really good job at getting Cornwall ready for new sectors, particularly things like renewables. It also offers high-level maths, which my own son benefited from a great deal.

The college has been offering the international baccalaureate for a number of years on a non-selective basis. It is one of the most successful IB providers in the country, with a 98% pass rate in 2025 and with nearly a quarter of students achieving 40 points or more, which is equivalent to four A* A-levels. It is also the only provider of the IB in the whole of Cornwall, so students travel from across the duchy, from Launceston to Land's End—sometimes more than two hours each way—to pursue the IB at Truro college. In fact, some parents relocate specifically to Cornwall because the provision is world class.

The college counts many young people from all areas of deprivation in Cornwall among its students, as well as young carers and people on free school meals. In 2023-24, eight disadvantaged learners took the IB, as did 13 learners with special educational needs and disabilities. I have been contacted by several parents

and teachers, who emphasise that the IB's strength comes from the breadth of learning opportunities. It is enriching and allows young people to pursue a diverse range of academic subjects, alongside volunteering and participating in sports and creative projects. It prepares them not just for higher or further education, but for employment and contributing to their communities.

Truro college offers such wide provision, and that is just part of what it provides, but it is a very important part. I therefore ask the Minister to assure me that if and when the financial situation improves, he will look again at this type of provision.

9.55 am

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) on obtaining this important debate. A number of powerful points have already been made, but I want to put on record the concerns that have been expressed to me by constituents who have children at, or who work at, the Anglo European School in Ingatestone in Essex. Like the schools that have already been mentioned, the Anglo European has an outstanding reputation locally and attracts children from a wide area, not just the immediate vicinity.

One reason for that is that the Anglo European is the only school locally that offers the international baccalaureate. The IB course is extremely rigorous, but it provides a breadth of curriculum that is not available in other courses. Many parents choose for their children to undertake it because the result, as has been mentioned, is a higher chance of gaining admission to top universities or employment.

The IB is rigorous, requiring a lot of extra teaching time as a result, and it is in recognition of that that the large programme uplift was instituted. In the case of the Anglo European, the IB requires something like 1,500 hours of teaching time over two years, compared with 1,280 for the standard programme. The value of the uplift to the Anglo European is something like £55,000, and if it is withdrawn, the school will probably be unable to continue to offer the IB.

Like other schools that have been mentioned, the Anglo European draws pupils from a range of different backgrounds and contributes to social mobility. If that course is not available there, it will be available only in the independent schools. Of course, this policy is being introduced at the same time the Government are pursuing their vendetta against independent schools by putting VAT on school fees, which will result in them being further out of reach for the vast majority of people. The result of all this is that only the very richest are likely to be able to attend schools that offer the international baccalaureate.

As has been said, the policy was also introduced without any warning. One of the assistant headteachers at the school said:

"The Department's letter arrived with no prior warning or consultation, right in the middle of sixth-form information events for next year. This results in...uncertainty for school leaders and governors about whether the full IB Diploma will be viable for this school next year."

You have made it clear, Sir Roger, that you do not want a lot of these points repeated, so I will not speak any longer, other than to quote what another of the teachers said to me in a letter:

"Without a resolution by the end of this term, the school will be forced to consider alternative curriculum pathways, which would close off the full IB Diploma course from future generations of state school pupils, directly contradicting the government's promise of a 'broad curriculum.'"

Like other Members, I hope the Minister will think again.

9.58 am

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Roger. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) for securing this important debate and for his thoughtful opening speech.

Dartford grammar school is a historic institution in my constituency, which has been providing exceptionally high-quality education for pupils of all incomes and backgrounds for a very long time. It is one of the 20 or so schools affected by the decision to remove the large programme uplift for 16-to-19 study programmes, including the IB diploma, from the 2026-27 academic year. Since the election last year, I have been fortunate to visit the school, which is a state school fully funded from the public purse, to see in person the education it offers. It is a privilege to have the school head and members of the board of governors here today, but it is unfortunate that they are with us in such trying circumstances.

As others have said, the international baccalaureate diploma offers pupils from a wide range of backgrounds the opportunity of world-class, rigorous education and a programme of academic study that is second to none. Beyond that, it encourages the development of essential skills and values through extended projects, theory of knowledge and service in the community. Crucially, it also encourages pupils to broaden their horizons and adopt an international outlook in the way they develop their understanding of the world, resulting in Dartford grammar winning the prestigious British Council international school award not only in 2025, but in previous years too.

One of the most memorable occasions during my first year representing Dartford was witnessing the enthusiasm and joy of students involved in the long-standing international exchange programme run by the school with two partner schools in Wakayama, Japan. It is those wider educational opportunities and activities that mean that the sixth form attracts young people from across south-east London and Kent who want to study the IB diploma.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) on securing this debate. Dartford grammar sounds much like Dane Court school in my constituency, which offers the opportunity of the international baccalaureate to children from across the academy chain—I know that some of your constituents benefit from that provision, Sir Roger. The headteacher told me that the wider implication of the cut is that the IB diploma will probably disappear entirely from the state sector. Does my hon. Friend seek reassurance from the Minister, as I do, that the IB does have a future role in breaking down barriers to opportunity, not only in his constituency and mine, but across the country?

Jim Dickson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In my constituency, the IB is available to children from low-income backgrounds and is particularly attractive because it provides young people with additional stretch and challenge and breaks down barriers to opportunity—not only in top universities, which is very important, but in apprenticeships and employment. It would be a tragedy if that were lost, and the point that my hon. Friend asks the Minister to respond to is exactly the right one.

The challenge we face is that the longer teaching hours mean that the IB costs more to deliver. The LPU funding has been crucial in allowing state schools such as Dartford grammar to deliver it. It is clear to me that without that funding, the IB diploma will no longer be available at Dartford grammar and will become the preserve of private schools that can afford to offer it, cutting off those in the state sector from the limited access that currently exists.

I understand that there may be some transitional funding in place for the next academic year—40% of the current value has been mentioned—but I am unclear what that will mean for a school such as Dartford grammar, where the entire sixth form takes the IB. The school faces the prospect of needing to replace its entire curriculum and restructure staffing for the sixth form over the next year, with extremely limited notice that this was coming.

I hope that the Minister will be persuaded to think again about the future of the large programme uplift, but if the Government are determined to pursue this course of action, perhaps they could provide more detail and a longer period for any transitional funding for schools, and let us know of any other source of assistance for state-funded schools that wish to keep the IB diploma.

10.3 am

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) on obtaining this debate. I myself applied for a debate on this subject, so I am pleased to be here today.

Torquay boys' grammar school in my constituency has discharged the pleasure of teaching the international baccalaureate for the last 16 years. It results in an influx into the school of young women, as well as youngsters from across the south-west and even Europe, who want to study the incredible, enhancing baccalaureate. My own son participated in the international baccalaureate. He volunteered in a care home and, a little over 10 years later, he is now a registrar at Torbay hospital and about to enter into a programme to become a consultant with an interest in care for the elderly. That demonstrates how the IB drives positive change. I am aware from universities that the IB is very often—just as in my son's case—seen as a good standard for gaining entrance to medical schools.

I had a conversation with the head of Torquay boys' grammar school, who said that the international baccalaureate offers those youngsters who develop later in sixth form greater opportunity to flourish more they would have in an A-level setting. I hope that the Minister reflects on how the international baccalaureate truly helps social mobility—something that I would hope a Labour Government would want to propagate rather than negate.

Colleagues from across the Chamber have highlighted the short notice of the change to funding. My hon. Friend the Member for South Devon (Caroline Voaden) rightly mentioned how it will impact the ability to offer languages, which will affect schools like Torquay boys' grammar. I am sure that will be echoed across the country. The reality is that the £5 million in question is 0.004% of the education budget—a drop in the ocean. I say to the Minister: please, think again. The IB is about enriching our society and offering greater social mobility. Surely, that is what this Government should be all about.

10.6 am

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) on securing this important debate.

Post-16 education is a vital stage of a young person's life. Whether they are following an academic, vocational or technical pathway, it is the stage at which they can focus more on the subjects they love, exercise greater choice over their learning, and begin to think more about where they want their education to take them, whether into further or higher education or employment. It is also a stage at which wider enrichment is vital, helping young people to develop broader transferable skills, find their talents, grow in confidence and expand into their growing freedom and independence.

However, funding for 16-to-19 education in schools and colleges has been significantly cut in real terms. Per-pupil funding had fallen by approximately 11% for colleges and 23% for school sixth form by 2024-25, compared with 2010-11 levels. That decline is the largest in any part of the education sector from nought to 19, and it has not been fully addressed, even with recent increases in funding. That has left many schools and colleges working hard to deliver a broad and enriched education for their 16 to 19-year-old students in the context of severe resource limitations.

There is no doubt that the international baccalaureate is a welcome development in 16-to-19 education. Its programme of study allows students to maintain a broader base, studying six subjects compared with the three of four that are typical for students taking A-levels. The IB also has a focus on broader skills and on creativity, as well as a more diverse range of assessment methods. It has many features that should be common to all post-16 education. But the IB is taught in just 20 of the 2,132 schools and colleges in the state sector that offer 16-to-19 education—less than 1% of those institutions—and in less than 10% of independent schools.

The Government's decision to redeploy funding from the large programme uplift for the IB must be seen in the context of the broader challenges they face. Given the education funding landscape they inherited, how can they deliver an excellent education for every 16 to 19-year-old student across academic, vocational and technical pathways?

Caroline Voaden: The hon. Member talks about redeploying funding so that it can be spread across the landscape to improve 16-to-19 education, but we are talking about 0.004% of the education budget. Does

she think that the tiny amount of funding that goes into the IB would make any difference at all if it were spread across the entire education landscape?

Helen Hayes: I think the Government are right to focus on how to improve education for every young person. If the hon. Member will bear with me, I will come on to some wider points about the importance of the IB, and the features of the IB that should be applicable more widely across the education sector. We need to be clear that we are talking about 1% of schools across the country, and that the other 99% of schools and colleges have many deep challenges. The Government are right to turn their attention to them as well.

How can the Government ensure that every young person has opportunities for enrichment and opportunities to develop broad transferable skills? Given the shockingly high figure of one in eight young people who are not in education, employment or training, how can the Government ensure that post-16 education is engaging, inspiring and exciting for all young people?

Where I take issue with the Government is in relation to the lack of consultation underpinning their decision to redeploy funding within the large programme uplift.

Freddie van Mierlo: In so many policy areas, the Government seem to be unable to break wind without consulting for 18 months. Does the hon. Lady agree that they should reverse their decision and hold a consultation before proceeding?

Helen Hayes: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will elaborate on consultation and engagement in a moment, but I encourage Liberal Democrat Members to reflect on the role that their own Government played in the shockingly deep cuts to 16-to-19 education across the board from 2010, and the implications of those decisions in what the current Government are now trying to tackle.

Engagement with schools and colleges on the decision would have been helpful. Given the Government's objectives for the economy, I understand the focus on STEM subjects and pupils taking four or more A-levels, but STEM subjects are not the only ones with a higher cost base to deliver. Some creative subjects with direct links to employment in the creative industries also carry higher costs, which can exclude students from lower-income backgrounds.

In the context of the Government's objective of ensuring parity of esteem between vocational and technical routes and academic ones, it is possible to imagine how the redeployment of the large programme uplift could have helped to increase quality in vocational and technical courses. Evidence of consideration of a range of options and an understanding of the views of those working in the sector would have been helpful in the context of the decision.

The Government's ambitious programme of education reform will have significant implications for post-16 education. The curriculum and assessment review, the post-16 White Paper, the introduction of V-levels, the youth guarantee and technical excellence colleges will all have potentially profound and positive implications for the opportunities available to young people and the quality of the education they receive.

Caroline Voaden: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Helen Hayes: I am not going to take any further interventions.

The international baccalaureate is an important part of the landscape, and I am pleased that the Government have confirmed that all schools can continue to offer it if they wish, but the bigger challenge for the Government is to ensure that there is excellence and enrichment across the board for post-16 education, which is a challenged part of our education landscape. Every young person should be able to benefit from an engaging, inspiring and exciting course of study, whether they are on an academic, vocational or technical route and wherever they live in the country, and every school and college should have the resources it needs to deliver.

10.13 am

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) on securing this debate on what we have heard from Members across the Chamber is a really important subject.

Varndean sixth-form college in Brighton is the only state-funded provider of the international baccalaureate in the whole of Sussex. I was lucky enough to visit earlier in the year. It is a remarkable institution that gives young people from across the region, including many of my Mid Sussex constituents, the chance to pursue a truly world-class qualification, as other hon. Members have set out. I am pleased that Varndean's principal, Donna-Marie Janson, joins us in Westminster Hall today.

The opportunity that Varndean offers is under serious threat. Varndean has warned that, without the large programme uplift, the IB will simply become financially unviable. The IB could—and, by the looks of it, will—disappear entirely from state education in our region, and potentially across the country. Let us be clear: that would be a tragedy for young people from Brighton and for those who travel to Varndean from places such as Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath and Hassocks to take the IB and go on to study engineering, medicine and mathematics at some of our leading universities. Claude from Hurstpierpoint told me that his decision to study the IB was

“One of the best choices I've ever made”.

The IB is recognised across the world for its quality. It encourages breadth, critical thinking and an international outlook, developing well-rounded students who go on to thrive. Most IB schools are independent, although as we have already heard, Varndean is one of the few state schools keeping this opportunity open for every student, irrespective of their family's financial situation. If the Government allow these cuts to go ahead, it risks entrenching a two-tier education system, where access to this globally respected qualification is reserved for the wealthy. That cannot be right.

Caroline Voaden: The Government obviously have good intentions about improving the standard of post 16-education; I have seen that for myself on the Education Committee, so I do not doubt their intentions. However, this decision feels like levelling down rather than levelling

[Caroline Voaden]

up. Does my hon. Friend agree that instead of removing the opportunity for students in state schools to study the IB, the Government should consider broadening it and helping other schools to offer this world-class qualification?

Alison Bennett: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I wholeheartedly agree with her.

The Government say they want to widen participation in higher education and to boost skills, but cutting funding for the IB does the opposite; it narrows opportunity and stifles aspiration. Therefore, I again urge the Minister to reconsider this decision, to ensure that schools such as Varndean can continue to offer this world-class qualification in the future.

Last Monday, during Education questions, I asked the Minister whether he would consider meeting students from Varndean. Given that Donna-Marie Janson, the school's principal, is sitting behind me in the Public Gallery, I am sure that his officials could swap numbers with her and set up such a meeting, so will he arrange that meeting?

The IB is a symbol of what education should be—ambitious, inclusive and world class. We must not let it become the preserve of the few.

10.17 am

Ian Sollom (St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) for securing this debate about a decision that demonstrates at the very least a profoundly flawed approach to policymaking and at worst a wilful dismantling of excellence in state education.

Let me begin by examining the Government's stated rationale for this decision. The ministerial response last week said that the Government would

"focus large programme uplift funding...on those large programmes which include mathematics, further mathematics and other high value A levels."

The stated aim is to prioritise STEM education and to support the pipeline of students for priority sectors in the industrial strategy.

Let me ask the Minister some questions directly. What evidence does the Department have that this targeted approach will achieve better STEM outcomes than maintaining IB funding? What analysis has been conducted comparing the STEM university destinations and career pathways of IB students with those of A-level students? What data supports the assumption that cutting IB funding while maintaining it for multiple STEM A-levels will improve our STEM pipeline? Can he produce that evidence today?

Every IB diploma student studies mathematics and a science to the age of 18. They develop research skills through writing a 4,000-word extended essay, critical thinking through studying theory of knowledge and real-world problem-solving through community service. Those are exactly the skills that universities and employers tell us that STEM graduates need.

The profound irony is that this Government tell us that they want to prioritise science, technology, engineering and mathematics. However, in making this decision about STEM education, the Department appears to have conducted no impact assessment, carried out no consultation with schools or families, and given no consideration to any unintended consequences.

As has been mentioned, the letter that 20 state schools received on 1 October—right in the middle of sixth-form open day season, with prospectuses already printed and families already making choices—gave them no warning. If this is how the Government approach policymaking about scientific education—making decisions without evidence, consultation or even a basic assessment of consequences—one questions what kind of example they think they are setting for young people about the value of scientific thinking.

I can declare an interest: I took not just two but three mathematics A-levels. I wanted to specialise early, and I am a strong supporter of university maths schools, such as Cambridge Maths school, which serves my constituency. I note that several university maths schools have been left in limbo for many months, unable to open or expand their offer during the Government's pause of the free school programme. That is not exactly an example of joined-up thinking from the Department.

My point is about choice. A good education system offers pathways to those who want to specialise early and to those who want to maintain breadth. Tony Blair—I am sure the Minister remembers "education, education, education"—understood this. His Labour Government promised an IB school in every local authority. This Labour Government are going in precisely the opposite direction.

There is an even more troubling dimension to this choice—one that I sincerely hope will trouble the Minister as well as the Secretary of State. On 15 October, less than two weeks ago, I stood in almost exactly this spot during the Ada Lovelace day debate and highlighted how early specialisation at age 16 disproportionately impacts girls' participation in STEM. Research shows that students are more likely to take maths A-level if their maths grade is higher than their other grades at GCSE. Girls generally achieve higher GCSE grades than boys across the board, so they often choose other subjects at A-level. That reflects the wider pool of opportunities available to them as generally higher achievers.

The international baccalaureate solves this problem. Research from the Engineering Professors Council showed that IB graduates are disproportionately women and twice as likely to pursue further STEM study after their first degree. The research explicitly states that actively recruiting IB candidates would be a pathway to getting more women into male-dominated engineering fields.

Here is another direct question for the Minister: how can the Government claim to want more students—particularly more girls—on STEM pathways while cutting funding for a qualification that demonstrably helps to achieve exactly that? The Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson), also holds the Women and Equalities brief, so can the Minister say whether she is comfortable with a policy that reduces women's participation in STEM? Women make up just 15.7% of the engineering and technology workforce. Jobs in those sectors are

expected to grow faster than other occupations through to 2030, and the Government's response is to defund the programme that helps to keep girls in STEM.

This is close to home for me: Impington Village college, which has been mentioned already, is in my constituency. It was named the UK's top comprehensive school for 2025. It credits its IB programme as the key to success. I have met students who have told me that the IB gives them breadth, critical thinking and confidence to succeed throughout their whole lives. However, losing £2,400 per student will force impossible choices about staffing and subject range. The Government are forcing the UK's top comprehensive to compromise the very quality that earned it that recognition.

This is already happening: Tonbridge grammar school, the *Sunday Times* IB school of the year, announced this week that it will stop offering the IB because it cannot afford to continue. The Secretary of State told the Confederation of School Trusts conference that she wants to "spread excellence" from one school to another—"the best of the best."

Impington Village college is the best; Tonbridge grammar is the best. The Government are defunding them. Is that what the Secretary of State meant by spreading success?

Let us examine the value for money argument. This decision will save £2.5 million per year from a Department budget that has been mentioned as exceeding £100 billion. It is invisible in the accounts. For this microscopic saving, we are creating a two-tier system, where a brilliant, internationally recognised qualification becomes exclusive to those who can afford private school fees. Currently, 76 independent schools offer the IB, compared with just 20 state schools, and more state schools need to be able to offer it. This decision does not narrow the gap; it devastates the provision. Indeed, Sir Anthony Seldon wrote in *The Times* just the other day that this is

"the most regressive elective action towards state schools taken by government in the last 25 years."

I have three asks of the Government. First, reverse the decision and reinstate the large programme uplift funding for the international baccalaureate diploma programme. The saving is negligible; the damage is profound. Secondly, protect current IB students and those enrolling to begin in the next academic year, and do not pull the rug out from under young people who have made or are making choices in good faith now. Thirdly, learn from the IB's success, rather than destroy it. Examine the evidence, consult with schools, students and families, and consider how we can give more, not fewer, students access to this broad and rigorous education.

I will close by quoting the international baccalaureate's mission statement:

"The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect...These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right."

I hope that the Government have listened to that.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): I call the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson, Saqib Bhatti.

10.26 am

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to take part in this important debate on funding for the international baccalaureate in state schools. I thank the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) for securing this debate and for his eloquent opening remarks. In fact, we have had a number of eloquent speakers, all the way from Truro to Dartford, as well as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale), who made the case for his constituents who attend the Anglo European school.

I have to put it on record, if there were any doubt, that His Majesty's Opposition are beyond disappointed that funding for the international baccalaureate has been scrapped. It is nothing more than another example of this Government's educational vandalism. IB teaches nearly 2 million pupils in 6,000 schools in nearly 160 countries. It is, by its very nature, global and provides a knowledge-rich curriculum that is deep while at the same time broad. Yet rather than seeking to produce confident and well-rounded citizens who benefit from a schooling system where pupils, parents and educators have plenty of choice, the Government seek to impose a disastrously linear, one-size-fits-all approach on our education system.

Without warning, the Government wrote to state schools and colleges on 1 October to notify them that the large programme uplift funding for the international baccalaureate programme will be axed from the 2026-27 academic year. According to Public First, that will make it unviable for state schools to deliver IB, effectively creating a two-tier education system for independent and state sector students, contrary to what the Minister said at the Dispatch Box last week.

For a long time, pupils, parents, educators and employers have valued the highly respected IB qualification. It provides a broad and balanced curriculum, allowing students to study maths, science, humanities, art and, of course, a language. It offers more breadth than the A-level route and equips young people with the skills they need for life, through extended projects, theory of knowledge and community service. Additionally, as the co-founder of the World of Languages, Languages of the World programme told me, it helps to make language learning much more effective—a point made by a number of hon. Members from across the House today.

The IB provides opportunity through social mobility and has opened students' minds via a well-balanced and globally respected curriculum. It is academically rigorous and broadens opportunity and aspiration. Like many, I share the disappointment in this policy decision and feel that it will impact the most disadvantaged students disproportionately. Will the Minister clarify whether there was any consultation in the light of the cut to the large programme uplift, and whether the Department has made any assessment of the number of state school pupils who will be forced to seek different routes post GCSE? In other words, which stakeholders did the DFE speak to?

Funding for the IB comes at a cost of a mere £2.5 million: a drop in the ocean of the Department's huge £100 billion annual budget. Given the IB's first class reputation, surely the Minister recognises the value it provides. The decision is reckless and already having consequences.

[Saqib Bhatti]

Tunbridge grammar school, which has been mentioned, is a high-performing state provider that previously delivered the IB to all sixth-formers. It has now announced that it will, regrettably, move to A-levels from next year, because of the funding cuts. That is a huge change, and it will not be the last school no longer to offer the IB. I know the Minister, and I believe him to be a good man. He must know the effect, and he should acknowledge the impact of the decision.

As many Members have been at pains to point out, the IB is a globally recognised qualification that allows UK students to compete with their peers in other countries. In cutting funding for IB in state schools, the Government have tried to claim that they are prioritising subjects that lead to good jobs and drive economic growth, but no one at the Department for Education seems to have done their homework, given that students with an IB diploma are more likely to be admitted to a top 20 UK university than A-level students, in matched samples, and have gone on to become world leaders in their chosen fields.

Will the Minister confirm the rationale behind the funding cut and explain why the Government have taken this decision? Do they have any assessment of the number of state schools that will be forced to stop offering the IB? As I said, I have a lot of time for the Minister, but he has to know that no one buys this being a money-saving exercise; it must be an ideological one. Perhaps the Minister does not believe in the IB? If so, he should say so. In which case, will he confirm what subjects are classed as priorities for economic growth? Moreover, given the IB requires students to study a variety of subjects including mathematics, the sciences and humanities, does he not consider those subjects to be priorities for economic growth?

I ask the Government to listen to the concerns of distinguished educational experts, such as Richard Markham, the chief executive officer of the IB Schools and Colleges Association, who started a petition that has already garnered more than 4,000 signatures, calling for this decision to be reversed. Furthermore, the Government would do well to listen to the schools that will suffer as a result of the decision. State schools such as Europa in Oxfordshire, which has been mentioned, have called the decision a “kick in the teeth” that will lead to inevitable cutbacks in the curriculum that they can offer to aspiring students.

We have to be clear what the decision will mean in practice for those pupils studying IB in state schools. It is not simply a decision to reduce the amount of funding available for state schools to offer the course; in effect, it abolishes the IB in state schools altogether. Dartford grammar school, as has been mentioned, is the largest provider of the IB in the country. It has already warned that it cannot afford to offer IB to its pupils without the funding, and countless other schools have issued similar warnings. I thank Members for mentioning their individual cases.

No advance warning was given of this announcement and no debate had before the decision was made. The sad truth is that the decision, like many of the others the Government have made, will hurt the very pupils the Government claim they want to protect. White working-class boys in state schools will in effect be barred from

studying the IB because of the Government's reckless decision. Why should those boys not have access to the highly respected and globally competitive curriculum that their more affluent peers will still be able to access? Can the Minister provide specific evidence to show that the IB was failing white working-class students, or prove that other routes lead to categorically better outcomes? Does the Minister accept—this is purely a point of logic—that by taking this decision, those who can afford to will continue to do the IB, and for those who cannot, namely in our state sector, the cut has made the IB unviable? That is fact. Does the Minister acknowledge the result of the decision?

The truth is that this policy decision, which reverses nearly half a century of academic excellence, is the latest in a series of failures by the Education Secretary and her Ministers. In cutting funding for level 7 apprenticeships, the Government deprived public sector employers, such as the NHS, of the means to train their workforce properly, and yet the Education Secretary has made it clear that she makes no apology for denying people the chance to reskill later in their careers.

In taxing education, the Government punished parents who have worked hard and saved up to invest in their children. In one breath, the Government promise to spend the money on more teachers, but in another use the VAT on private schools to justify spending elsewhere. Furthermore, in announcing a lower level qualification aimed at white working class pupils, the Government have embraced the bigotry of low expectations. They have told some of our most deprived children that they have no chance at succeeding in school on the same terms as their peers.

With every announcement this Government make, it becomes increasingly clear that their policy on education is simply to cut back, dumb down and deny opportunities to the most disadvantaged children in our country. Instead of expanding parental choice and making opportunities such as the IB available to more families, they are narrowing the options available to parents and making parental choice a premium that only those who can afford it have access to. It is the same as what happened with the Latin excellence programme, which was discontinued by this Government in another one of their terrible decisions.

Ministers seem completely unable to understand why a family might choose to look at different options for their children's education, rather than the bland uniformity they seek to impose—a fact that became obvious within the first few months of this Government entering office, when they said they would scrap the freedoms that academies have used to turn around failing schools and give children from some of the most deprived areas of the country the best chance of succeeding in life.

We have heard plenty from the Government about their missions, milestones and road maps, yet they only have one mission that we can see, and that is to vandalise our education system and rob schools and parents of the ability to make the choices they think are best for their pupils and children, led by an Education Secretary who prioritises finishing second in the deputy leadership contest for the Labour party, rather than championing children. I know the Minister cannot make an announcement today from the Dispatch Box, but I ask him to at least reconsider this.

10.35 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Josh MacAlister): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) for securing this debate and all the Members who have contributed to it. The international baccalaureate can be a fantastic qualification for young people. I commend all the staff and students in international baccalaureate teaching settings. The debate has highlighted the incredible contribution that those teachers and those settings can make to opportunities for young people—we have heard an awful lot about that today.

I want to stress a few things in responding to the points made in the debate, first regarding the role that A-levels play in our school and education system. The hon. Member for Meriden and Solihull East (Saqib Bhatti) referred to a school “regretfully” moving to A-levels, as if they are lesser qualifications. A-levels are fantastic qualifications. They are stretching for students. They offer variety, choice and combinations of qualifications that leave doors open for young people at 16 and beyond. They are recognised by the top universities in the world, including those here in the UK. I urge Members to be careful not to suggest that A-levels are somehow secondary or second order to the international baccalaureate, while recognising the contribution that the international baccalaureate can make.

Alison Bennett: A-levels are undoubtedly brilliant, but does the Minister agree that they are more narrow than the international baccalaureate?

Josh MacAlister: No, I do not agree with that. Combinations of A-levels allow young people to have a wide and rich curriculum. In fact, the large programme uplift changes that we are making prioritise choices of A-levels that extend beyond the standard three, up to five, to include advanced maths and other well regarded A-level subjects. I do not recognise what the hon. Lady suggests.

Steve Darling: My two sons both went to Torquay boys’ grammar school. One undertook the international baccalaureate. The other went down the A-level route and got three A*s. Universities do not like students taking more than three A-levels. We often joke with him that perhaps he should have stretched himself and undertaken the international baccalaureate. What would the Minister’s advice be?

Josh MacAlister: I think the logic of that point is that universities will accept three A-levels, and they will accept more than three A-levels, and they will accept an international baccalaureate. The point here is not that the international baccalaureate is the gateway to universities; it is an addition to the system and allows extra stretch for students. I will make a bit more progress and then am happy to take further interventions.

The other point to make at this stage is that it is not correct to say that funding has been scrapped for the international baccalaureate. In fact, some of the statements put out by settings that offer the international baccalaureate have been clear to say that the funding has not been scrapped. The large programme uplift application has

been changed, and that additional 20% will no longer be available for settings that want to offer the international baccalaureate.

I want to spend a few minutes setting this decision in context. We are focused as a Government on raising standards across the 16-to-19 education system. We want to offer opportunity for all young people, and we want stretching and rigorous qualifications for them. The large programme uplift will focus on those taking four or more A-levels that include advanced maths and offer a broad and challenging curriculum.

What do we know about the international baccalaureate and how the uplift funding is being used? Only 0.2% of students in 16-to-19 settings are studying the international baccalaureate, and the large programme uplift is only 0.1% of the entire 16-to-19 funding made available. Many of the institutions offering the international baccalaureate are themselves selective in their pre-16 intake. Far fewer students are drawn from disadvantaged backgrounds; I have a list of the rates of free school meals in the main institutions offering it, and they are very low. I am aware of only one LPU-backed setting that offers the international baccalaureate in the entirety of the north and the midlands combined.

This is the challenge I put back to those who have contributed to the debate: if their argument is that they want the international baccalaureate to be offered in many more settings across the country, and for it to be a genuinely equal opportunity that lifts up many students, where do they propose finding the money to do that? The Government are putting additional money into the 16-to-19 system, which I will come on to in a moment, but Members are defending a system that applies to only a very small minority, and that is not equally spread. It is a fantastic opportunity for students, but this Government’s focus, as it will always be, is on opportunity for all.

Ms Billington: I gently remind the Minister that, simply because people live in the south-east, it does not mean they are dripping in gold. My constituency in particular experiences distinct levels of deprivation; only 10% of our children manage to pass the Kent test in East Thanet. The opportunity to access the international baccalaureate is vital for those deprived communities. We all know that there are extreme levels of deprivation in this country both across geographical areas and in pockets. I remind the Minister that, in these circumstances, we need to ensure that we have an education policy that reaches the most deprived in places like mine, as much as in places like his.

Josh MacAlister: I agree that we need to ensure that opportunity goes to those who are furthest from it. My point is that this system does not provide an equal opportunity for many young people in how it is allocated at the moment. Even in institutions in the south where there are large numbers of young people frozen out of opportunities, the ones offering the international baccalaureate are overwhelmingly not offering it to those young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. That is an important point to make in this debate.

Before I move on to overall funding, my final point is that we gave notice of this decision in October, which is ahead of other notifications about the 16-to-19 funding

[Josh MacAlister]

system. We have put in place transitional arrangements for those students who are currently midway through the international baccalaureate.

What is the reality of the funding that the Government are giving to sixth form and FE colleges? The Government have made the decision to increase overall spending on the 16-to-19 system, from £7.6 billion last year to £8.6 billion this year. That reflects a significant increase in not only the number of students but the funding rates, including the base rate of funding per student across 16-to-19 settings, going up by 5.4% to over £5,000. The extra funding for low prior attainment and for children in care is going up by 6.8% this year, and an extra level of funding for resit English and maths is going up by 11.5% this year.

That represents a significant increase in the 16-to-19 funding settlement for the whole system. Within it, colleges and sixth form settings have the freedom of choice to prioritise across their programmes what they teach, including the international baccalaureate. The LPU adds an additional 20% on top of that. I have already highlighted that the LPU is tiny as a percentage of the overall funding for 16 to 19. As a Government we want to make sure that goes into opportunities for the broadest number of students.

Finally, some broad points reflecting on this debate about opportunity and the Government's priorities. I appreciate the points that hon. Members have made about the choices made by the Government and that many hon. Members wish us to keep the large programme uplift focused as it now is. However, when we add all of the things that hon. Members want to prioritise across the education system, while they may not seem like huge amounts of money individually, taken together they always lead to choices about priorities. The Government are absolutely focused on raising standards, in part because the soft bigotry of low expectations that we have inherited from the 14 years of the previous Government.

I want to say a few things about that. Our work on early years and the huge investment in childcare and breakfast clubs—so that young people can start their education on an even basis—is built off the fact that the coalition Government demolished 3,500 Sure Start centres. The long tail of that for young people's attainment, especially those from deprived backgrounds, is felt to this day.

Saqib Bhatti: I have to challenge that point. I said that the Minister was a fair man—if I did not, I will say it now—but, if he is being fair, will he acknowledge that the Conservatives started the investment in childcare programme that the Government have continued?

Josh MacAlister: What the Conservative Government did not do was ensure that there was a fiscal position left to fund those sorts of commitments. I will give the hon. Gentleman and the previous Government credit for building on some of the excellent work that had been started under the last Labour Government around phonics, a focus on improving maths and some of the curriculum changes. I give credit where it is due on those.

We now see year 8 students falling behind in their reading—and the Government will be saying more about that in the curriculum and assessment review. That is why we will be introducing reading checks with a focus on standards. Those will mean every young person—regardless of the cash their parents have in their pockets—does well and that on finishing secondary school has equal opportunities and choice to take their talents as far as they can in 16 to 19.

Finally, we will have record levels of investment in the 16-to-19 system. That will include a focus on the scandal of the constant cycle of young people not reaching the level of English and maths needed by the time that they finish secondary school, and being washed around again and again in a resit system that is not fit for purpose. We are rebuilding and investing in that system to ensure that we get that second, third or fourth chance for every young person so that they can get into work and benefit from the opportunities that come from it.

The soft bigotry of low expectations is growing educational inequality. That is what we inherited. It is a million young people not in education, employment or training and the moral scandal that that represents. It is underfunding our 16-to-19 education system year after year so that far too few young people get the quality of teaching needed and there is not support for staff to ensure that young people have their needs met. It means that we have not had equal and widespread access to a rigorous curriculum for children and young people in the 16-to-19 system across the country—which is what they deserve.

10.48 am

Olly Glover: I shall be concise so that we can be away well before 11. I thank everybody for attending the debate. It is welcome to have had contributions from all three main parties. It was predominantly a well-spirited debate, with a lot of agreement.

It was good to hear about schools other than Europa that offer the IB: Hockerill Anglo-European college, Torquay boys grammar school, Truro and Penwith college, the Anglo European school in Ingatestone, Dartford grammar school, Dane Court grammar school and Varndean college—and Impington Village college, which my hon. Friend the Member for St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire (Ian Sollom) mentioned; I must not forget that one. All hon. Members who talked about the schools in or near their constituencies highlighted the huge benefits and value that they bring to parents, local communities and children—and at a relatively small additional cost, as the Minister himself acknowledged.

The Minister's wider comments about what he and the Government are doing to boost education were welcome. I understand what he said about constrained budgets, but too often in politics, and in life in general, we hear false dichotomies—"It is either this or that", and things are pitted against each other—and many in my constituency will have been disappointed to hear what he had to say.

The debate was well-spirited, with the exception of the remarks of the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). Of course, when a Government encounter difficult financial circumstances, they have to make difficult choices, as we did when we were one seventh of a Government. However, I find staggering

the hypocrisy of a Government with a gigantic majority who, having lectured everybody else about tuition fees for 15 years, decide to increase them by pegging them to inflation. The key thing I often hear from constituents on the doorstep, whether in relation to this issue or others, is that this Government simply do not listen, and that they have authoritarian, monolithic instincts—expecting everybody to be the same.

Although the Minister said a lot of good things that the Government are doing, sadly, from what has been said today, my constituents and Europa School will feel that this Government have the listening skills of a slab of concrete. I hope to be proven wrong; I hope that in time the Minister will listen to the representations here and elsewhere, reflect, and reconsider.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered funding for the International Baccalaureate in state schools.

10.51 am

Sitting suspended.

Wet Wipes: Plastic Ban

11 am

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the potential merits of banning plastic in wet wipes.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Roger. I thank colleagues across the House who have supported my campaign to ban plastic in wet wipes. I am also grateful to: the Marine Conservation Society; Thames21; World Wide Fund for Nature; Green Alliance; Water UK, which brings together all the water companies in the country; and Surfers Against Sewage, for their campaigning on this issue.

I thank the Minister for being here and for sharing my passion for cleaning up our rivers and driving this policy forward. I congratulate her on the progress she has made and look forward to hearing more about that later. After years of delay and indecision from the previous Government, it is refreshing to see real momentum. The previous Government talked about this issue since 2016, launched consultations and made promises, but failed to deliver. This Minister has shown determination and clarity, and I commend her for taking action where others stalled.

Since November 2021, I have campaigned relentlessly to ban plastic in wet wipes. I have introduced three bills in Parliament: two private Member's Bills in 2021 and 2022 and a ten-minute-rule Bill in 2022. I raised the issue directly with the Prime Minister during questions at that time. I am proud the subject was in the Labour manifesto and I hope to hear from the Minister when the ban will be brought in for England.

All four UK nations have notified the World Trade Organisation of their intention to legislate, and Wales leads the way. Congratulations to Wales as the first country in the world to pass a ban on plastic in wet wipes, which will come into force on 18 December 2026.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing this forward. She is right to mention the four regions. Back home in Northern Ireland, wet wipes are a major cause of what are referred to as fatbergs of non-biodegradable waste in local sewers, which leads to pollution and costly clean-ups. Although the regional Administrations should do something and legislate, there is also an onus on individuals and households to do something. Does the hon. Lady agree that a joint partnership is needed to address this issue?

Fleur Anderson: The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has put his finger on the button, because this is about not flushing wet wipes, no matter what they are made from. Banning plastic in wet wipes is one step forward, but we need to do more. This is a UK-wide issue; no part of the UK is unaffected.

What is the problem? Why am I talking about it so obsessively? First, microplastics from wet wipes pollute our rivers, lakes and oceans. They are ingested by marine animals, from plankton to whales, disrupting feeding, growth and reproduction. Microplastics cause internal injuries, digestive blockages and reduced nutrient absorption. They leach harmful chemicals such as bisphenol A, phthalates and flame retardants. They

[Fleur Anderson]

also absorb pollutants from sea water, such as heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants, which are then released into animals' tissues upon ingestion.

Those substances can cause hormonal disruption, immune suppression, developmental defects and death. Filter feeders, such as oysters and baleen whales—from very small to very big—are especially vulnerable. Microplastics can also alter sediment composition, affecting bottom-dwelling species, and they can destabilise entire marine ecosystems. They are very small, but they have a huge effect.

Secondly, wet wipes block sewers and drive up water bills. They form fatbergs, trigger storm overflow spills, and cost a lot. In my water company area of Thames Water, it costs £40.7 million every year to clear the blockages. That is £200 million over the current five-year investment cycle.

Liam Conlon (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): In Beckenham and Penge, there were 167 call-outs related to wet-wipe blockages in 2024. Given the precarious state of our water sector after 14 years of Tory-enabled under-investment, does my hon. Friend agree that we should do all we can to reduce the number of unnecessary call-outs such as those in Beckenham and Penge and across the country?

Fleur Anderson: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The water companies need to invest in new ways of stopping sewage going out of their systems and in cleaning up our rivers, and not having to spend so much money coming out to clear up the blockages. That is down to wet wipes, so my hon. Friend is exactly right.

The third reason I want to ban plastic from wet wipes is that plastic is made using fossil fuels—it is made from oil—and it is very hard to get rid of. This is one form of plastic that we can cut relatively easily, because alternatives are available to put into wipes to make them stronger. The UK uses over 11 billion wet wipes a year—that is 163 per person. As a mother of four and a grandmother of a little two-year-old, I know how useful they are, but convenience should not come at such a high environmental cost.

Thames21 pulled 5,000 wet wipes from just 116 metres of the Thames. Its annual surveys have evidenced the impact of so many wet wipes on just the banks of the River Thames. I pay tribute to it. The Marine Conservation Society found that wet wipes containing plastic had been found on nearly two thirds of English beaches surveyed. This issue exists across the UK. I have seen the damage myself at the Beckton and Mogden treatment works. They have a special sifting part of the process to clear wet wipes because they are so prevalent.

There is also wet wipe island near Hammersmith bridge, which was surveyed by the Port of London authority after Thames21 revealed the extent of the problem. It is about two tennis courts wide. When you stand on it, you can feel the jelly-like texture because there are so many wet wipes below to such depth. Thankfully, it was cleared this summer because the Tideway tunnel is coming in, so there is far less—95% less—sewage going out into the Thames, which means fewer wet wipes. It will not just fill up again. Five million wet wipes were taken out of wet wipe island. It really demonstrated the damage.

The public are behind us and retailers are stepping up. Boots stopped selling plastic wet wipes in all their stores in 2022 because I have been talking about bringing in this ban and because the Government are promising to do it. Tesco did the same in 2023. Government action now will ensure that all the other retailers follow suit.

Alongside the ban, the message must be clear: do not flush any wipes. Only the three Ps go down the toilet: pee, poo and paper. I support Water UK's "Bin the Wipe" campaign. Instead of having lots of different campaigns from all the different water companies, which was confusing, there is now a joined-up attitude towards campaigning on this and encouraging people to have bins in their bathrooms so that they throw wipes away instead of flushing them.

I know that the Minister has considered the wider issues, so I would like to hear about some of them. The first issue is the lead-in time. There is an 18-month lead-in time at the moment. After all the delay in bringing in the ban, could that be cut to 12 months to align England and Scotland with Wales, which is bringing in a ban in 12 months' time in December 2026?

The second issue is labelling. "Fine to flush" labelling is confusing. A little image showing a turtle crossed out means that wipes contain plastic, but it is difficult to understand. We need mandatory "Do not flush" labels on all wipes. Has that been given consideration?

The third issue is about the polluter paying. Has consideration been given to making manufacturers contribute to the cost of the blockages? That could be done through an extended product responsibility scheme.

The fourth issue is exemptions. The proposed legislation contains exemptions allowing pharmacies and some businesses to sell plastic wipes. Could those loopholes be reduced or removed?

The fifth issue is the impact assessment. We do not want an unintended consequence of substitute materials being just as strong or dangerous as plastic. Will there be a full impact assessment alongside the regulations on what happens as a result of the ban, including the safety of substitute materials? I hope to see some good results.

Above all, let us be clear: wipes should be binned, not flushed. I raise that in every school I visit in Putney. I say, "I am going to say something unusual for a politician". Then I tell the students about it and they are instantly onboard. Children get it. Young people care deeply about the planet.

Liam Conlon: My hon. Friend is making an important point about community engagement; education is a really important part. Richard Barnes from the London Wildlife Trust is a constituent of mine in West Wickham in my constituency of Beckenham and Penge. He and the trust do fantastic work engaging local communities across London in education campaigns. Does my hon. Friend feel that that is an important part of her campaign?

Fleur Anderson: This is a whole-of-society campaign. I think it is equivalent to when we reduced the use of plastic bags. There had to be some Government regulation, but there also had to be a change of attitude among the people using plastic bags—we need that here. We need Government regulation to push it through faster, otherwise the retailers will be too slow. We also need people to change their behaviour and not flush wet wipes. Groups such as the London Wildlife Trust do a fantastic job in

this, as do Thames21 and others. We need a whole-society approach and today is a big step forward in that. Let us show that Parliament listens to young people in Putney and across the country, and understands the issue. I look forward to hearing when action will be taken.

11.11 am

Mr Bayo Alaba (Southend East and Rochford) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) for securing this important debate. I appreciate her tireless work to ban plastic fibres in wet wipes.

Wet wipes are an everyday household item. When flushed, they do not break down. They block sewers, pollute waterways and harm marine life. I represent a beautiful coastal community whose coastline must be protected. Unfortunately, I continue to hear from residents on Thorpe Hall Avenue who are distressed by flooding in their homes time and again—only last week they were flooded. Alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West and Leigh (David Burton-Sampson), I continue to campaign for cleaner water, improved flood defence infrastructure, and greater accountability from Anglian Water.

Through Southend's water quality summits, which I co-chair, we have heard directly from residents and local organisations. The message is clear: our communities deserve better. Under the previous Government, water companies were left unregulated, polluting our coastlines while executives paid themselves millions in bonuses. That is unacceptable and not what this Government stand for. Our Government have acted. The Water (Special Measures) Act 2025 is a landmark piece of legislation that bans bonuses for water company bosses, and it introduced criminal charges for individuals who attempt to cover up sewage spills. The goal is to fundamentally transform the culture of the water industry. This summer the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced measurable targets for the first time. Those targets will hold water companies to account. Previous Governments have failed to ban wet wipes. It is the Government's will to bring a ban into effect. We are a Government of action, not words.

Every year the UK uses approximately 11 billion wet wipes, and industry reports indicate that most of those contain plastic fibres. According to research, more than 90% of fatbergs found in our sewers are made up of wet wipes, which cause blockages that result in sewage flooding in homes and pollution in our rivers.

Anglian Water estimates that about 500,000 wet wipes are flushed into the east of England's sewer system every day. That figure highlights the significant scale of the problem, which is why I fully support our Government's commitment to banning the sale and supply of wet wipes that contain plastic fibres. Such action will reduce marine litter, decrease pollution and support progress towards a zero waste economy. However, we must continue with this progress.

I urge the Minister to ensure that manufacturers cannot label wet wipes as flushable or disposable. Those misleading claims cause confusion and directly contribute to sewer blockages, flooding and environmental damage. Will the Minister commit to meeting me to address the marketing and labelling of wet wipes, so that together we can put an immediate stop to these harmful and misleading practices that damage our environment?

Southend's coastline is vital to our community and local economy. Flooding continues to cause stress and disruption to residents across my constituency. We must ensure that our rivers, seas and beaches remain clean and safe for generations to come. I am proud to support the ban and look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

11.14 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I welcome the chance to set out the actions this Government are taking to tackle the problems caused by wet wipes that contain plastic.

I start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) for the work she has done to raise this important topic, and for her years of campaigning to bring it to the fore. She has had a high-profile campaign to ban wet wipes that contain plastic, including tabling a private Member's Bill in November 2021. Her campaign has earned cross-party support and backing from major environmental groups, which have paid tribute to her, including Thames21, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Marine Conservation Society and Surfers Against Sewage. She has also worked with major retailers, including Boots and Tesco, to encourage them to remove plastic wet wipes from their shelves.

My hon. Friend has been instrumental in getting us to this point. In fact, I would go as far as to say that without her contribution, we probably would not be at the stage we are now. I pay a full and complete tribute to her. She shows exactly what we can do when we persist. "Persist! Persist!" was the recommendation given to me as a new MP.

The Government are aware of the growing concerns about wet wipes as a source of plastic pollution often found in our natural environment, including in our waterways and on our beaches. They break down into smaller pieces in the water environment, causing huge problems with microplastic pollution, which is harmful to human and animal health.

The good news is that, on 16 September, we laid an affirmative statutory instrument to ban the supply and sale of those harmful products, alongside which we published a full economic impact assessment and explanatory memorandum. The SI debates in Parliament are scheduled to be held shortly, with the Commons debate on 3 November, and the Lords debate on 10 November.

Banning wet wipes that contain plastic will reduce plastic and microplastic pollution, as well as the volumes of microplastics entering waste water treatment sites when wrongly flushed. Additionally, it will reduce marine plastic pollution. There is strong public support for a ban. Very little unites the nation, but 95% of respondents agree with the proposal to ban plastic-containing wet wipes. We are pleased to be taking forward this long-awaited action.

We have been working closely with devolved Governments across the UK to agree a joined-up approach, which is going well. We welcome the decision that some retailers have already taken to stop selling wet wipes

[Emma Hardy]

that contain plastic, but, of course, the Government need to show leadership from the top and introduce a ban.

Banning wet wipes that contain plastic is part of our wider commitment to encourage more sustainable behaviours around the consumption of single-use plastics. We are also looking more widely at the circular economy for plastics—a future where we keep our resources for longer, where waste is reduced, where we accelerate the path to net zero, where we see investment in critical infrastructure and green jobs, and where our economy prospers and nature thrives. We will publish the first ever circular economy strategy for England in the coming months.

The Government recognise the scale and impact of plastic pollution on the environment, and we are focused on preventing and reducing plastics, along with other litter, from entering the environment.

Liam Conlon: We have some fantastic local groups in Beckenham and Penge, including the Crystal Palace Park Trust, Friends of Cator Park and the Birkbeck community initiative, as well as eco-councils at schools such as Stewart Fleming primary and Langley Park school for boys. Will the Minister join me in thanking them for their incredible work to protect our local natural environment? Does she agree that the changes we are making in this place will support that effort to protect our natural environment for future generations?

Emma Hardy: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in thanking all the local groups and children. As has been mentioned, children are hugely interested in this topic, and in the disgusting stories about what ends up down the toilet—I find young children are particularly fascinated with that. I heard an amusing story about a mattress that ended up in the sewer. How on earth does a mattress end up in a sewer? But I was told that if it can be produced, it can end up in the sewers.

People are not always aware of how the actions they take in the home can have a damaging impact on their drains, sewer network and water quality. Admittedly, they may not be able to flush a mattress down the toilet, but they are certainly flushing many other things, including wet wipes, sanitary products, nappies, cotton pads, cotton buds, cigarette butts, plasters and dental floss—I am sad to say that, when I was a child, a few goldfish were flushed as well.

The public have a role to play in ensuring that cooking fats are also not poured down the sink, and that wet wipes and other unflushables are binned rather than flushed. Those are small steps, but they are significant when added together, and they will improve the quality of our rivers, natural environment and wildlife.

The Government are supportive of campaigns that encourage the correct disposal of wet wipes, including Water UK's "Bin the Wipe" campaign, and we welcome the innovative steps that water companies and others are taking to tackle blockages. One of my favourite developments is Northumbrian Water's Pipebot patrol. Pipebot is a tiny robot that goes around the sewerage network, inspecting the pipework and raising blockage alerts before a sewer floods. When I first saw it—a tiny robot that has little tools to break down fatbergs or

whatever else it comes across—my reaction was, "You are putting WALL-E down the sewers!" [Laughter.] Good for WALL-E, but if he is patrolling the sewers, I do not think he will have quite the same happy ending as he did in the film. Such innovations are emerging, with devices being used to clear blockages, capture wipes and help to identify from which homes or businesses the wipes are coming, with the aim of educating people and advising them on the correct disposal methods.

I am also pleased that the Port of London Authority and Thames Water have cleaned up "wet wipe island", which has already been mentioned—a huge, 180-tonne fatberg on the River Thames. I have also heard of an example of the circular economy at its best, because we are looking at ways to use fatbergs as valuable sources of biofuel and biodiesel to power buses and trucks. Trucks and buses powered by fatbergs—who would have thought it?

As for the next steps that the Government are taking, the Independent Water Commission has recommended that we take measures to stop pollutants, such as wet wipes, entering the system. We will consider all of the commission's recommendations.

I will now answer the specific questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Putney. On the lead-in times, we have had to act carefully. We are working with businesses to make sure there is time for them to adapt and to mitigate the risks of excess stocks of wet wipes containing plastics being sent to landfill or being incinerated, which is a concern. That is why we have given the time that we have; our ban is expected to come in from spring 2027, which provides for an 18-month transition period. We are working as quickly as we can, taking into account some of the unintended consequences that might arise from going more quickly.

There is also a medical exemption. Consultation responses and stakeholder engagement with healthcare professionals have indicated that a medical exemption is required until viable plastic-free alternatives are available for medical use. Obviously, research is ongoing and things are developing quickly in this area. However, it is essential to ensure that those who require these products for medical purposes still have access to them.

To account for those who require wet wipes containing plastic for medical care in their own home, the medical exemption will allow for the supply and sale of wet wipes containing plastic by registered pharmacists. This is particularly important for infection control purposes. Wet wipes containing plastic will not be permitted for sale on the shelves; people who require them will need to get them through a pharmacist. This is a similar model to the plastic straw ban, where there was a particularly strong reason why certain people might need to continue using plastic straws. It is the same situation with wet wipes.

We are obviously continuing to look at labelling and to consider further action in that area, if needed. And one of the recommendations from the Independent Water Commission was to look at extended producer responsibility for waste water treatment, and we are considering whether we would want that. As we know, a lot of this ends up in: "Write in at the end".

I hope my responses have also helped to answer the questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend East and Rochford (Mr Alaba). I thank him and my

hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham and Penge (Liam Conlon) for their contributions to the debate today, in which there is huge interest.

Together with the building blocks that the Government have already put in place, this change will mark the most fundamental reset of our water system in a generation, as we consider and take forward the recommendations of the Independent Water Commission on dealing with many of the problems facing water, including pollution, problems around waste water, and what ends up in our rivers, lakes and seas.

In conclusion, I reiterate that banning wet wipes containing plastic is a necessary measure that we are taking forward. I look forward to the debates on the draft regulations to ban these harmful products. I hope the proposals will have the support of all colleagues here today.

Question put and agreed to.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

Independent Lifeboats: Government Support

[CAROLYN HARRIS *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for independent lifeboats.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this important debate to Westminster Hall, and grateful to hon. Members attending the debate for championing their local independent lifeboats. I thank Chloe Swinbank, in my office, who managed to acquire me this tie, which has life rings on it to suit the theme of this debate.

When people think of saving lives at sea, they often think of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution—and rightly so: it is a world-renowned organisation that has saved countless lives, and it remains one of the most respected charities globally. But there are other crews who do profound work to serve our coastal communities and to save lives in times of need.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. In my Havant constituency, we are fortunate to have both the Hayling Island RNLI lifeboat, funded by the RNLI, and the Hayling Island coastguard rescue team, funded through the Department for Transport. Together they do outstanding work in our community and around Hayling. Will my hon. Friend and the Minister join me in thanking the crews and support staff on Hayling Island? And will my hon. Friend explain why independent lifeboats should receive similar funding and support?

Paul Holmes: I thank my hon. Friend, who is nearly my constituency neighbour. He is absolutely right to pay tribute to Hayling Island RNLI lifeboat and the coastguard rescue team based in his constituency. It is important to realise, as I will discuss later in my speech, that although the RNLI does an amazing job, there are independent lifeboat stations around the country. They particularly struggled with fundraising during covid. Fundraising for independent lifeboats is wholly voluntary; it is done by members of the public in our constituencies.

The crews of independent lifeboats across the country do profound work. Volunteer-run, community-funded rescue services provide an essential lifeline to coastal communities. As of March 2024, there are approximately 80 independent lifeboats around the UK, many of which are represented by the National Independent Lifeboat Association—a fantastic organisation founded by the former Member of Parliament for Totnes, Anthony Mangnall, who was a champion for his local area and for independent lifeboats across the whole UK. NILA has done extraordinary work to increase public awareness of these profound organisations. However, that work remains an uphill battle. They lack resources in comparison with the RNLI, and there is still a long way to go.

The majority of the public assume that all lifeboats and water safety services fall under the remit of the RNLI, meaning that independent lifeboats lack recognition, which impacts funding, recruitment and inclusion in

[Paul Holmes]

search and rescue provisions in the UK. NILA has a probational seat on the UK Search and Rescue Operators Group, which is a fantastic achievement and a testament to NILA's dedication to saving lives at sea. It is a positive and practical step to bring greater support for independent lifeboats. However, a permanent position would allow independent lifeboats a stronger strategic voice in national planning. It would mean that when national standards, such as the rescue boat code, are revised, NILA can ensure that the standards also work for independent lifeboats. A permanent position in the search and rescue frameworks would increase recognition and representation for independent lifeboats and for the immense work that the volunteers do.

I welcome the Minister to her place, and ask her what discussions are taking place to ensure that NILA has a permanent position on the UKSAR Operator Group. Does she agree that a permanent position is a necessary step to shape policy and ultimately save more lives? She can answer that question in this debate if she wants—that would show her calibre—but if she cannot, will she commit to write to me and NILA, clearly communicating an answer, after this debate?

Helena Dollimore (Hastings and Rye) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Member for securing this important debate on independent lifeboats and their support. In my own constituency of Hastings and Rye, we have the Pett Level independent rescue boat, which does amazing work saving lives at sea all year round. They are all volunteers and all the money they raise comes from public donations. Will the hon. Member join me in paying tribute to them, as well as our local RNLI in Hastings and Rye harbours?

Paul Holmes: I could not have put it better myself, and of course I pay tribute to the organisations that the hon. Lady set out. It is good that she has an RNLI lifeboat and an independent lifeboat working in lockstep in her constituency, to ensure that her constituents are protected. I know a bit about that independent lifeboat because her predecessor, alongside Anthony Mangnall and myself, was involved in setting up NILA—although Anthony did most of the work. I absolutely pay tribute to those organisations, and it is a credit to her constituents that she is here today to share in this debate.

At this opportune moment, I would like to commend the Hamble lifeboat, which provides a vital service in my constituency. Operating in some of the most challenging marine conditions, Hamble lifeboat has been the cornerstone of rescue operations, saving lives since 1968. The Solent presents intense challenges as it is one of the busiest waterways globally, accommodating cruise ships, freight vessels, naval ships and smaller boats, while also witnessing double tides and a few sand bars, which means that rescue operations are far more likely to encounter complications.

The River Hamble also offers its own unique challenges due to extremely fast tides and obstacles. In both 2023 and 2024, Hamble lifeboat was the busiest independent lifeboat in the UK, responding to more than 230 call-outs. They work they do is tremendous, and I am honoured to be their voice in this debate. However, the recognition of independent lifeboats touches on one of the many challenges that these organisations face: they are funded

entirely through local donations, grants and the power of community, as the Member for Hastings and Rye (Helena Dollimore) mentioned.

I am proud that, under the last Conservative Government, the rescue boat grant fund donated £5.7 million to more than 100 charities around the UK, including Hamble lifeboat, which as I mentioned is a fantastic independent lifeboat in my constituency. Sadly, the fund finished in 2020—and before Government Members shout at me about that, that decision was made by the last Government and I deeply regret it.

Many independent lifeboats have felt the financial pressures ripple through their organisations. The grant provided a lifeline of support to independent lifeboats, helping to upgrade equipment and allowing for quicker and safer launches in emergencies. Many independent lifeboats depend on community funding, which can take years to build up, in order to replace old and outdated boats.

For example, Hamble lifeboat operates two vessels, which together cost around £90,000 a year to maintain. Both are past their expected life service, having been in operation since 1997, but replacing them is estimated to cost around £1 million. It would take a small community, such as the people of Hamble village, years to raise such a sum, despite the amazing fundraising job those people do. That places significant pressure on the reliability of current boats and raises real concerns about operational resilience in future coastal emergencies.

My local lifeboat is just one example of the financial constraints that independent lifeboats face. I am sure we will hear from other Members from across the House about the difficulties that their independent lifeboats endure. Government funding would make a major difference, including by helping to upgrade vessels, crew equipment and communication devices, which are all vital to saving lives at sea. Volunteers risk a lot on these life-saving missions, so it is important that they are equipped with the appropriate gear to do their jobs.

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing this important debate. He is being uncharacteristically modest in downplaying his involvement in setting up NILA; I congratulate him on that, too. He mentioned the volunteers. I wanted to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the volunteers in Lyme Regis who have responded to 27 call-outs already this year and are responsible for saving many lives. He talks about supporting independent lifeboats, but it is also about supporting the brave volunteers who give up their time to do this hard work.

Paul Holmes: The hon. Member, my friend, makes a very good point. When writing this speech, I wanted to talk about the nuts and bolts of funding, and the operational difficulties that some decisions have involved for independent lifeboats. He is right, however, that we have to talk about the fantastic volunteers, who will be called out in wet and windy December—hopefully, not too many times this year, but they will be called out. They might have to be down at the harbour within four minutes, not knowing what they are going into. They take tremendous risks for the people of this country and their communities, and they do so on a voluntary basis. I also echo the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to volunteers who do not do those kinds of things, but something equally important—shaking the tins and

going out every weekend of the year to raise money for local independent lifeboats. I pay tribute to his lifeboat in Lyme Regis, which has had 27 call-outs, showing the amazing job that they do.

Our seaside towns are vibrant areas that draw high levels of tourism, but with that comes more call-outs for seaside emergencies. Changes in climate, such as rising sea levels and more unpredictable weather conditions, are making rescue operations increasingly challenging. Additionally, rising temperatures are driving more tourists to our seaside towns. That is great, but in Hamble, which boasts an affluent sailing community, it is increasing the risk of accidents at sea and in our rivers. As we work to revitalise coastal communities, as the Government have said they want to do, we must ensure that our local rescue services and resources are equipped to meet these evolving challenges.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): In my glorious coastal constituency, we have the fantastic RNLI stations in Scarborough and Whitby, but we also have a brilliant independent lifeboat—the Runswick bay rescue boat. That is based in the scenic Runswick bay, popular for fishing, water sports and coastal walks. The volunteer crew play a critical role in saving lives and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Helena Dollimore) mentioned, we have an increasing need for these boats. In just the last few weeks, they have rescued a mother and son blown out to sea from a paddleboard, and rescued two walkers and their dog cut off from the tide. There is no alternative lifeboat based at Runswick bay, and the rescue boat is facing serious financial challenges. Does the hon. Member agree that the Government have a role to play in securing its continued presence?

Paul Holmes: I have been known to have some scampi and chips in the hon. Lady's constituency, and I agree that it is beautiful. I challenge her to say whether it is as beautiful as Hamble Valley, as my constituents would expect, but she is absolutely right. I join her in paying tribute to the Runswick bay crew.

The hon. Lady hit the nail on the head about the role for Government. This is not a party political debate. I am a Conservative, and I think the state should remove itself from our lives on that basis. We have clear differences about some of the Government's decisions on their fiscal responsibilities, but they have a democratic mandate to undertake that. What we are discussing involves such small resource, however, and would support the "invest to save" mentality of the services they provide around the whole of the country—£5 million was the last amount of money allocated to the rescue boat fund. That is worth doing, so that the Government do not have to take a greater role in our search and rescue services, whatever form they take in the years ahead. I entirely agree with the hon. Lady, and I am sure that she would have more success than I do in securing a meeting with the Maritime Minister to make that point.

Independent lifeboats save 25% to 30% of all lives on navigable waters. Independent lifeboats are a vital part of our national rescue capabilities, yet they operate under financial constraints. The work of Hamble lifeboat and all independent lifeboats around the country is fundamental to keeping our coastal communities safe. Their dependency on community donations underscores

the need for Government support. A reinstatement of the rescue boat grant fund would not only alleviate the significant financial constraints on independent lifeboats, but ensure that life-threatening emergencies can be tackled without compromise. I strongly urge the Minister to take decisive action, reinstate the grant and support our independent lifeboats as they support our constituents. The grant would serve as more than just a financial relief; it would serve as Government recognition of their invaluable work.

Finally, I encourage all Members here, when they leave the debate, to tweet and put a Facebook post up to raise awareness of the role that our independent lifeboats play. They should also raise a tin for them as well—volunteer to raise money—so that some of the issues that come up this afternoon can be alleviated without our necessarily looking just to the Government for help.

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): I remind Members to bob if they wish to speak.

2.45 pm

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Harris, not least because you will be very familiar with many of the places I will mention. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) for securing this important debate on Government support for independent lifeboats.

I have the great privilege of serving as the MP for the constituency of Llanelli, which is surrounded by water on three sides. There is the Loughor estuary and the Burry inlet, which goes past Burry Port harbour to the stretches of Pembrey sands and reaches up to the estuary of the three rivers: the Gwendraeth, the Towy and the Taf. We enjoy spectacular views, including of the Gower peninsula—we have the best views of it, although my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) often disputes that. The peninsula is indeed spectacular, with its iconic Worms Head, which has itself been the scene of several lifeboat rescues this year alone.

However, it is important to note that that spectacular scenery hides the very treacherous waters beneath, which a huge tidal range, strong currents, shifting sands and mudbanks. There is also a lot of activity—notably the local cocklers and fishermen—as well as the usual range of leisure activities.

The area is served by three lifeboat stations. First, there is the independent Ferryside station. Although it came into my constituency only at the July 2024 general election—I visited it last year—it has served the area for almost 200 years. Just a few weeks ago, the station dealt with a very complex rescue involving three small fishing boats. Secondly, there is the independent Loughor lifeboat, which, although stationed on the Gower side of the Loughor, serves the whole area. Thirdly, there is the RNLI lifeboat in Burry Port, which is well supported by the local community there.

I pay tribute to the bravery and dedication of lifeboat crews. Their experience and knowledge of their local area is absolutely invaluable. They are willing to go out in all weather to rescue people who have got into difficulty. They are hugely professional, meaning that they can dovetail with the coastguard and the other statutory emergency services. Crews put in many hours of vital training to be ready for call-outs.

[*Dame Nia Griffith*]

There is a significant amount of work and responsibility involved in maintaining a lifeboat station. Hours of work are put in by the crew and supporters to maintain buildings and equipment and to undertake training. That is, of course, in addition to the call-outs.

Then there is the cost. For example, running the Ferryside lifeboat costs around £20,000 each year. It costs £289 per year to buy and maintain a crew member's drysuit, lifejacket, locator beacon and flare. The cost of a crew member's helmet, which is absolutely essential for their protection, is £110. Those helmets have to be replaced every five years, and the helmets at Ferryside are shortly due for renewal. A can of petrol costs £16 and will power the Ferryside vessel in the water for about 30 minutes. Those are just some examples of the costs involved.

Our local communities are amazing in their fundraising efforts, whether that is the children of Ysgol Glanyfferi, the White Lion in Ferryside staging events for the Ferryside lifeboat, Llanelli Rotary club raising funds for the Loughor lifeboat, or the Burry Port community supporting the RNLI lifeboat there.

Then there is the valuable support from business, whether that is local businesses making donations in money or in kind, or specialist equipment companies providing supplies that are heavily discounted or provided for free. As the Ferryside lifeboat crew have said,

"It takes a team of people and industries to keep a lifeboat afloat. Beyond the volunteers are companies that support us with their generosity...such as Tohatsu Marine and Navisafe"

which supplied the crew with

"reliable navigation lights that can endure the elements".

I pay tribute to the National Independent Lifeboat Association for the work it does on advocacy, advice and co-ordinating training. In total, NILA estimates that its members saved the taxpayer some £2.6 million in 2024. Of course, costs continue to escalate, whether it is insurance, repairs or equipment. As the Minister will know, the previous Conservative Government closed the rescue boat grant fund back in 2020. In spite of the entreaties from the chair of NILA and the warm words from Lord Davies of Gower, there was no commitment to reinstate it. The fund was not huge—£5 million over the previous five years—but the Ferryside lifeboat had a grant of some £7,000, and the Loughor lifeboat some £10,000. Again, those are not huge amounts, but it takes a lot of plant sales or pub gigs to raise that sort of money.

We all appreciate that financial times are difficult, but my plea this afternoon is for the Minister to look at whether there is any way additional support could be made available for lifeboats, to complement the valiant fundraising efforts of local communities and pay a real tribute to the dedicated and dangerous work of our lifeboat crews. We know that these small organisations manage funds very carefully and are good at making a small amount go a long way, so even a modest amount could make a significant difference. We also know that the public are very supportive of our lifeboat crews and would think that this was money well spent. So my plea to the Minister is, please look at this.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): Order. I am going to impose an informal six-minute time limit. I will start the winding-up speeches at 3.28 pm. Apparently, we are expecting a Division on a ten-minute rule Bill, but until we hear the bell, we will stick with 3.28 pm.

2.51 pm

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I congratulate my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes), on securing the debate.

People from my constituency have been saving lives at sea for hundreds of years—we are a coastal community. In fact, legend has it that Gosport even gained its name as a result of one such incident, in which King Stephen and his brother, Bishop Henry de Blois, were on a little medieval ship that was caught in a fierce storm in the Solent. In danger of drowning, they were rescued by brave local fishermen, who took them ashore, at which point the bishop declared the place "God's port, our haven." That is apparently the romantic lineage of the town's name.

That tradition continues to this day. We have a couple of National Coastwatch Institution stations, staffed by a range of wonderful volunteers, and Lee-on-Solent in my constituency is home to HM Coastguard search and rescue helicopters, but I really want to talk about the team down the coast at the Gosport lifeboat station in Stokes bay, where the Gosport and Fareham Inshore Rescue Service—known as GAFIRS—is based. I pay tribute to the incredible work of that team, who work 24/7, 365 days a year. Anyone who watched "Rescue 999: Seconds to Save a Life" on Channel 5, which I am sure everyone here did, will have seen them in action, and seen the pressure our lifeboat crews are under on the water. Gosport lifeboat station is one of the busiest in the country; remarkably, on one day in July alone, the crew were called out for six separate incidents, beginning at 6 am and finishing 12 hours later.

The dedication of these crews is remarkable, but it is even more astounding when we consider that they are all volunteers who are being asked to disrupt their lives to save lives for free. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee, which I chair, has heard from organisations that they rely very much on these volunteers to continue operating. However, things could not be tougher. The trend in people volunteering is downwards, with 1.5 million fewer people volunteering in 2024 than in the previous year. It is particularly difficult for independent lifeboat charities, because their volunteers have to have a very high level of expertise, and there is a cost to them in terms of the training that volunteers have to be given.

As we have heard, there is also a huge capital cost involved in maintaining the station and the assets. These boats are technical pieces of kit, and GAFIRS does not have the facilities to request replacements for boats where necessary—it has to fundraise. And that is not to mention the cost of fuel.

Those costs have become increasingly difficult to meet. Research by the Charities Aid Foundation has found that fewer people are now giving to charity, compared with before the pandemic. I am especially concerned about the 34% real-terms fall in corporate or philanthropic giving by FTSE 100 companies in the last 10 years. That means that organisations such as GAFIRS

have to spend much more time trying to fundraise, as opposed to doing what they are best at, which is saving lives at sea.

GAFIRS is helped perfectly in that by the people of Gosport, who come out in droves to help those fundraising efforts. Indeed, we have a local new year's day swim, which I have taken part in. We are all encouraged to get dressed up in fancy dress and brave the cold waters of the Solent. I can tell you, Mrs Harris, that it is refreshing after a new year's eve.

However, GAFIRS really needs more support. I am glad that it received a share of the rescue boat grant fund between 2015 and 2020, and I restate the pleas to the Minister—there is a strong argument for doing this—to reinstate it in recognition of the vital work rescue boats do and the lives they save.

In the context of rising demand and dwindling volunteers and funds, will the Minister also have conversations with colleagues about what more can be done to encourage philanthropy and charitable giving to organisations such as GAFIRS? I put the same question to the Prime Minister earlier in the summer. His constituency is the second-least generous in the country, based on the proportion of income given to charitable causes, so he has skin in the game and an interest in ensuring that people are encouraged to donate more to charities.

I know that there are reasons why fewer people volunteer. One is the economy: times are tough, people work for longer and they do not have much time to spare. But another is the bureaucracy that sometimes acts as an obstacle to people getting involved in volunteering. Will the Minister look at that as well?

The work GAFIRS does is literally life-changing; like many other organisations around the UK, its work is fundamental. I hope the Minister will comment on how the independent lifeboat sector can be supported into the future.

2.56 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I thank the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) for securing today's important debate. I also thank all those who work and volunteer in the independent lifeboat sector, as well as those who support the RNLI.

I would like to raise the issue of safety in rivers, although I pay tribute to colleagues who have raised the serious issue of safety at sea. My constituency includes a number of rivers and is densely populated. We have the River Thames, as well as the Kennet, which is one of the major tributaries, and smaller tributaries such as Holy Brook and Foudry Brook. These are all right next to large numbers of people: we have Reading festival every year, with nearly 100,000 visitors; there are people who walk along the Thameside promenade; and we have lots of boaters, and people who enjoy wild swimming and other activities on the river.

Sadly, as an inland area with a major river and some tributaries, we do not have the level of provision that we would wish. There are important services provided by the emergency services, such as Thames Valley police and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue. However, I have been contacted by a resident asking what more could be done in our context, and whether it might be possible to empower local businesses and sports clubs to help rescue anybody who got into difficulty in the river.

Paul Holmes: The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. I thank him for indulging my having a second bite of the cherry, because he makes an important point. Recently, the hon. Member for Southampton Itchen (Darren Paffey) and I spoke in a debate about water safety education. Does he agree that we in this House should be working together to ensure that people who live in constituencies like ours have better access to water education from a young age, through our schools and the businesses that he is describing?

Matt Rodda: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. Education is a vital part of this. Where local businesses or sports clubs, such as those involved in rowing, canoeing or other activities on the river, have a supply of trained personnel available—not necessarily 24 hours a day, but certainly for large parts of the day—can the Minister look into what scope there is to support them? What more could be done to help those organisations provide a service in the first instance if they spot an emergency happening? I commend one of my constituents who did exactly that. His part-time role as a volunteer is to help ferry people to an island on the River Thames that is used by a local bowls club—it is the only bowls club in the world on an island, as far as we know. He saw somebody fall into the river and went to rescue them. I commend that type of behaviour and I believe that many more people would want to do exactly the same if they saw that happen.

In our town centre and nearby areas there are three boatyards, a number of sports clubs and other businesses with access to boats, with trained people who are familiar with handling a small boat and who might be able to rescue somebody at very short notice, before other boats could be launched. I wanted to raise that important matter with the Minister and ask whether she might be able to look into it for me.

I also want to mention the growing challenge of people living on boats that are not property registered, and where the Environment Agency and the police have concerns. I have had meetings and I commend our local councillors, the local police and the EA for their work on this matter. In and around our town centre, there are growing numbers of boats where people are living, and there is the danger of incidents related to them. In one of our meetings with these services, we heard about an incident where a boat that had a poorly maintained engine drifted towards a lock, which could have resulted in a tragedy. There have been other sad incidents where there have been problems relating to people living on a river or canal across the country, so I also wanted to raise that and ask whether the Minister has anything to add about trying to enhance safety for people who live on rivers and canals in boats and similar accommodation.

Mrs Harris, I appreciate that time is at a premium and I am certainly grateful for the opportunity to speak today. I hope the Minister will be able to answer some of these queries and I look forward to hearing more when she speaks later.

3.1 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I commend and congratulate the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) on bringing this debate to Westminster Hall and thereby giving us all a chance to participate.

[*Jim Shannon*]

As the MP for a coastal constituency with a very large length of coast—the name of Strangford is the giveaway and tells the story—I am incredibly familiar with the role of lifeboats and the vital nature of having a well-trained and well-equipped lifeguard in post. We have lifeboat stations dotted throughout the coastline. Indeed, Portaferry—on the Ards peninsula, where I live—has one of seven RNLI lifeboat stations operating a lifeboat funded by viewers of the BBC television programme “Blue Peter”. I am old enough to remember the first “Blue Peter” programme, and it has had a commitment to lifeboats ever since.

In the last 10 years, the lifeboats of the charity’s 10 lifeboat stations in Northern Ireland have launched some 9,500 times. Their volunteers have saved 1,535 lives and come to the aid of thousands of other people. There is so much they have done and so much more they can do. In the last five years, there have been almost 3,000 incidents. The lifeboats have come to the aid of 3,500 people, and 47 lives were saved. If anyone wants a reason for backing this, that is what it is all about—the lives saved and the commitments given. The coastguard operates from Bangor marina, in the neighbouring constituency, but without charitably funded lifeboats, it simply could not handle the need and the load. It is sad that the RNLI really is the last emergency service, yet—I say this very respectfully—the Government pay less than 1% of its funding. I believe that the service deserves more than that.

As well as the RNLI, which I argue is basically independently funded, Northern Ireland has independent lifeboat services, such as Lagan Search and Rescue in Belfast and Lough Neagh Rescue. These services operate on inland waterways and estuaries and are not part of the RNLI, but are part of the focus that the hon. Member for Hamble Valley put forward at the beginning. Other independent groups, such as Foyle Search and Rescue, also provide water rescue services, and many are recognised by the coastguard as declared resources.

Part of our tourism strategy for Strangford is to try to highlight the availability of great family fun on the water, and a lot of that is found on the beautiful waters of Strangford lough, in my constituency. I live just on the edge of it, so I am very privileged to be able to wake up in the morning and look out across the lough. The activities range from paddleboarding to standard sailing and from jet skis to canoes. Anyone who drives around our coastal areas will see people enjoying the lough in all seasons.

However, with all that fun must come safety, and we know how much we rely on the good men and women who volunteer on the lifeboats. The availability of those crews means that we can welcome families to the lough and know that there will be help if the worst happens. That offers great reassurance for me as the MP for the area, but also for those who want to mess about in the water. I think there is a song that goes along those lines. I probably can remember it very well. I can even sing it, but if I sing the rain comes so that would not be a good idea.

The fact of the matter is that the lifeboat service really should be recognised as an emergency service and funded accordingly. Whether we are talking about the coastline in Scotland, England, Wales or beautiful Northern

Ireland, as people have less disposable income to give to charities, the need for Government to step up will increase. I am pleased to see the Minister in her place; I wish her well. In her reply, maybe she can indicate what the possibilities are to help lifeboats. There might be some law that prevents it, but she will clarify that when the time comes.

My last comment will be to once again thank every volunteer, past and present, who gave their time and talent to fundraise and co-ordinate fundraising events, every person who so generously gives and every volunteer who gives their time and puts their life on the line to carry out the rescues. There is nothing quite as dramatic as those RNLI lifeboat adverts that come on between the films on a Sunday afternoon. If we need a reason for supporting them, seeing the drama of the rescues that they do will convince people to do that. To them, I say: we could not do without you, and we respect you as we respect all those who serve our communities in emergencies.

3.6 pm

Anna Gelderd (South East Cornwall) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) for securing this important debate. As someone who previously worked for the RNLI and now represents the beautiful rural and coastal constituency of South East Cornwall, I see every day how lifeboats sit at the heart of our community. In Cornwall, all our lifeboat cover is provided by the RNLI, and those crews are part of our shared identity, heritage and economy. However, I recognise the huge contribution made by independent lifeboats, including in the constituencies that have been mentioned.

The south-west is one of the busiest regions to keep safe, with over 300 miles of Cornish coastline. Saltash in my constituency is the proud home of the RNLI’s south west flood rescue team, and I commend its work in having a regional response to such a crucial issue. The dedication is remarkable and the crews deserve real, practical support.

During the summer, I had the privilege of visiting the RNLI station in Looe during one of its training evenings. I met several dedicated volunteer crew members, including operations manager Clive Palfrey and crew member Vicky Thomas. Many of the crew, as hon. Members might imagine in an area such as mine, are also busy members of the local inshore fishing fleet, and it is truly inspiring that they make the time to be volunteers as well. I was deeply impressed by the team’s professionalism. I saw how vital every piece of equipment is to its operations, particularly the two lifeboats, and I had the opportunity to try on some of the safety equipment. As we watched the lifeboat launch, I have to admit that it quickly became one of my favourite visits.

The crew’s passion for keeping both the local community and visiting tourists—so important in Cornwall—safe on our waters is really inspiring and shared across all lifeboat crews, including independent lifeboats. The country knows about their dedication and the fundraising efforts involved, with communities coming together in support of crews. We owe a great deal to those volunteers, and I want to take the opportunity to thank them for their dedication and courage.

While the RNLI does such a fantastic job keeping our Cornish communities safe, I appreciate that those operating elsewhere perform the same lifesaving work, often through local fundraising alone. I believe that the Government should continue to recognise both RNLI and independent services as essential partners in maritime safety, ensuring that every coastal community, including mine, has the support that it needs to stay safe at sea.

3.9 pm

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mrs Harris. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) on securing this important debate. It is only right that, as the Member for Poole, I should speak today. My constituency is the location of the RNLI's headquarters, including the lifeboat support centre and the RNLI college, where crew and lifeguards are trained in their important work.

It is no surprise that, as a coastal town, Poole has a special relationship with the sea. The first lifeboat was stationed in Poole harbour in 1865, and this year the local station celebrated its 160th anniversary. Like other hon. Members, I have had the pleasure of visiting my local lifeboat station on a number of occasions since being elected, to see the tremendous work the station does 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It has 30 seagoing crew, with another 30 or so managers, medical advisers, water safety officers, administrators, fundraisers and those who look after the boat house.

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): Order. The sitting is suspended for 15 minutes.

3.11 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.24 pm

On resuming—

Neil Duncan-Jordan: I shall pick up where I left off when the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) rudely interrupted me.

In 2023, the Poole lifeboat crew launched 146 times. It launched 102 times last year, and 109 times so far this year. I therefore pay tribute to all those at Poole lifeboat station, and place on the record my admiration and respect for their tremendous work.

Those volunteers also work extremely hard to raise the funds they need to make all that possible, while also raising awareness of sea safety and encouraging people not to take risks in the water. An issue they have noticed recently is that, because many children no longer have swimming lessons in school, the basic safety messages are needed more than ever. Those volunteers still perform that vital role, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) said.

Poole station costs about £83,000 a year to run, and every shout that the crews attend means refuelling, replenishing medical equipment, carrying out mechanical repairs, training crew and paying for things such as radio licences, utility bills and general equipment that the crews need. In fact, Poole is one of the busiest coastal stations. The whole effort relies on volunteers and donations from the public to keep going; it is important that we understand that it does not have the largesse of a national organisation.

Locally, although the RNLI pays for lifeguards' training and equipment, the council pays the lifeguards' wages. Regrettably, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council is considering stopping that. That would place local water users at risk, so I urge the council to think again.

Figures show that 98% of all RNLI rescues are within 10 nautical miles of the shore. What makes the charity and the movement generally special is their mission to save those in need at sea, irrespective of their bank balance or their country of origin. We would do well to remember that approach. I appreciate that RNLI is not lobbying for Government funding, because it is concerned that that might impact on its independence, but the National Independent Lifeboat Association has a different framework and it is calling for funding to be reinstated, as we have heard this afternoon. I would therefore welcome the Minister's response to that call.

We have heard today about the lifesaving work carried out by independent lifeboat charities across the country, almost entirely crewed by volunteers. Our duty in this place is to lift that burden where we can and help to keep those boats ready to launch whenever the call for help comes.

3.27 pm

Alison Griffiths (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes), a fellow south coast MP, on securing this important debate.

I am an avid sea swimmer and sailor who enjoys every opportunity to be in the sea, so it brings me great joy that more and more people are enjoying open-water swimming, paddleboarding, kayaking and coastal sailing. I am happiest when I am in the sea, but I am aware of the dangers of the sea: even on apparently calm and sunny days, it can be unpredictable and unforgiving. Tides change and winds rise rapidly, and that can turn a fun-filled day on the water into a tragic accident.

When disaster strikes, it is our brave lifeboat crews, many of them volunteers, who launch into the sea to keep people safe and to save lives. My wonderful coastal constituency, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, is lucky to be served by the incredible RNLI. There has been a lifeboat house in Littlehampton for more than 140 years—since 1884. Today, the RNLI's inshore station on the bank of the river Arun provides vital lifesaving services along our beautiful stretch of Sussex coastline.

This year, that crew has been called out more than 50 times. It supports yachts and fishing vessels in difficulty, and waders and swimmers caught in strong currents. It also rescues pets who have fallen into the water and become stranded. I was delighted to attend the christening of its new D-class lifeboat, Spirit of Fidelity, in September.

I really cannot speak highly enough of the fantastic work that the RNLI and its many volunteers do to keep seagoers in Sussex safe. A true national treasure, the RNLI deserves all the plaudits it rightly receives internationally. But not every constituency is as fortunate as mine is to benefit from an outstanding RNLI lifeboat station. Maritime rescue off the coast of the British Isles is often provided by a remarkable network of independent lifeboats. Community-run and locally fundraised, these vital lifesaving organisations provide the same services as the RNLI, but often in areas far

[*Alison Griffiths*]

larger than they can reach quickly enough, with a fraction of the funding needed and without the same public and Government recognition of their work. The dedicated volunteers and generous donors who keep independent lifeboats afloat deserve acclaim equal to that of their RNLI colleagues.

Last year, independent lifeboats attended more than 1,800 incidents and assisted more than 2,000 people in the UK. We cannot take them for granted and must support their efforts to keep people safe at sea. The rescue boat grant fund was a key source of funding for independent lifeboats between 2015 and 2020. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley in calling for the Government to reinstate it. To do so would not only celebrate the tireless dedication of the volunteers who run independent lifeboats but invest in the future of those vital lifesaving services.

We would not settle for under-equipped ambulances, fire engines or police cars. We need to ensure that our lifeboats are properly funded, so that their crews can purchase the equipment they need and complete essential maintenance to keep their boats seaworthy and their stations fit for purpose.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): Hope Cove lifeboat station in my constituency is considering purchasing a new rescue boat, which could cost in excess of £220,000—a vast amount of money for such a small organisation. Does the hon. Member agree that a specific grant scheme should be introduced to help independent lifeboat stations with capital expenditure?

Alison Griffiths: The hon. Member makes a good point. She would probably agree with me that asking the Government to reinstate the rescue boat grant fund is a first step in that direction. I hope the grant would include capital expenditure.

This is not a topic for political point scoring; it is about saving lives. The reintroduction of the rescue boat grant fund would send a clear message that this House values the commitment and bravery of our lifeboat crews. I hope the Minister has listened carefully to the calls being made, led by my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Hamble Valley, and that she reaffirms the Government's support for all those who risk their lives to protect others at sea.

3.33 pm

Steff Aquarone (North Norfolk) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I am delighted to respond to this debate on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, and congratulate the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) on securing it.

In coastal communities such as North Norfolk, independent lifeboats are not just a valued community asset but a vital part of our network of emergency response on the coast. North Norfolk is proudly home to two excellent independent lifeboat services in Mundesley and Sea Palling. Both have a long history of offshore rescues dating back to the early 1800s, but the current voluntary lifeboats date from the early 1970s. In both cases, villagers reached into their own pockets to support the establishment of an independent rescue service to

protect locals and visitors along our coastline. Since then, they have served our communities loyally and saved countless lives.

It is not just coastal communities that benefit from the lifeboats: Mundesley lifeboat also supports floodwater rescues. It is a valuable service but, as with so much of the support for flooding, no additional funding is forthcoming to support that vital work. I hope the Minister will take that back to colleagues at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to think about further.

Independent lifeboats in Norfolk also keep us safe inshore. Just over the border, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Rupert Lowe), is the Hemsby independent lifeboat, which hosts the lifeboat Broads Marley, which serves inland rescues for those in distress on the Norfolk broads in my constituency and, no doubt, in that of the hon. Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew). It is a valued service that ensures that everyone who comes to our precious national park and enjoys its waterways can do so safely. I put on the record my gracious thanks to the crew at Hemsby for all that they do in my area and across Norfolk.

Lifeboat services are valued by my Lib Dem colleagues across the country, from the Hope Cove lifeboat in Devon to the Anstruther RNLI base in North East Fife. The issues that affect lifeboat services matter to a huge range of communities. Challenges at sea do not discriminate, and all coastal communities rely on their support. However, independent lifeboats face a range of challenges in carrying out their vital role. Their independent nature means that they can suffer from a range of funding struggles and do not have the same sure footing as many RNLI bases. In tandem with the rising cost of fuel, maintenance, training and equipment, this creates a difficult environment for these groups to survive in.

That is why we in the Liberal Democrats are encouraging the Government to increase their support for independent lifeboat organisations through targeted, practical assistance that strengthens the work of these volunteer teams. The Government could take many different steps to provide such support. They could introduce a specific grant scheme for independent lifeboat stations, similar to those available for mountain rescue or community fire services. That could help to cover essential operational costs, such as fuel, insurance, crew training and vessel maintenance. Furthermore, they could expand VAT relief for essential rescue equipment—which the RNLI receives for fuel and safety gear—to other independent lifeboat organisations.

Affordable access to training and skills is also vital for independent lifeboats. That is why we want the Government to offer all volunteer lifeboat crews free or subsidised access to training, accredited by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and to support volunteer crew members with access to maritime qualifications, which benefit both rescue operations and personal career growth. This upskilling would be hugely beneficial to the coastal communities where crew members live and work, and could create a wider economic boost, as well as keeping lifeboats staffed with the best possible experience and expertise. We are also keen for the Minister to see whether Government maritime agencies could share access to coastal radar data, weather tracking and communication systems, to enhance rescue co-ordination.

With the Budget coming up, I am sure the Chancellor will be pleased with any Minister who can provide her with a relatively cheap, impactful and universally popular policy, so here we go. I would like to share with her a reform that one of my local independent lifeboat services has encouraged: exempting charitable search and rescue vehicles from vehicle excise duty. Emergency vehicles are already exempt, but those that perform search and rescue for registered charities are not. Independent lifeboat groups may require large vehicles, such as Land Rovers or 4x4s, to pull their lifeboats in and out of the sea or transport them to other launch points. These vehicles attract a high tax, which adds hundreds or thousands to the groups' expenses.

Modelling suggests that providing the charities with this tax break could cost the Exchequer as little as £500,000 a year, which would effectively be a direct cash injection back into the independent lifeboat charities, supporting their sustained existence and allowing them to carry out their important work. Will the Minister make a case for this tax break to the Treasury ahead of the Budget next month? It would be a hugely positive step and an important recognition of the work of our independent lifeboats.

There is no distinction in the urgency of emergencies that lifeboats respond to. When someone is in distress off our coast, every second counts, just as it would in responding to a heart attack or a house fire. The teams need the best vehicles for the job, and they should not be punished by a punitive tax regime that discourages them from owning them. As it stands, the original Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and the A-Team van are exempt from vehicle tax, but independent lifeboat vehicles are not. I hope that the Government can recognise that our lifeboat crews are a real-life A-team, and support them as such.

I will finish by acknowledging the incredible work of the independent lifeboats that support us across the country, particularly in North Norfolk. If I had endless time, I would be delighted to read into the record the names of all the crew members in my area who work so hard, but as I do not, I want to note my thanks to the coxswain of Mundesley lifeboat, Dave Francis; the coxswain of Sea Palling lifeboat, Mick Clarke; all the members of their hard-working teams; and all those who support their work. I hope the Minister will not only join me in thanking them for all they do, but go further by providing them with the hope that the Government will give them the support they need to continue their vital work in decades to come.

3.39 pm

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): As ever, it is a pleasure to appear before you, Mrs Harris.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) on securing this debate. I know he is a long-standing supporter of independent lifeboats, and he hid his light under a bushel by understating his involvement in the creation of the National Independent Lifeboat Association. I will pause to remember the efforts of Anthony Mangnall, the former Member for Totnes, who was an excellent contributor—a very good orator—in the Chamber. He had his own style, stood with his hand in his pocket, right at the Front Bench where there is no protection at all. He was a very impressive Member of this House.

I should declare an interest. I do not think it is recorded in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, but since my early 20s I have been an offshore member of the RNLI, having been a sailor and boating enthusiast all my life. During the debate I played a game with myself to see whether I had sailed or been on a boat in every constituency mentioned. The answer is that I have. I was a bit nervous when the hon. Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) spoke, because that constituency is quite a challenge, but then he mentioned the Thames, and I have been there. I was also concerned when the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke; I have of course been on Strangford lough, but I was challenged by Lough Neagh. I have been there, and I think I have been on a boat there. The hon. Member could have mentioned Lough Erne—I have been all over that. So I know of what I speak, having followed every Member round their constituencies and their references to the lifeboats.

I can say I have been in those areas, but actually I was under the unseen protection of each and every independent lifeboat that was standing ready and willing to come to my aid had something bad happened. We need to remember that. Being out on the sea is a wonderful recreational experience. It is fun until it is not, when it becomes very dangerous very quickly. These men and women stand ready to put their own lives at risk to protect us, whether we are working on the sea or there for recreation. It is important that we remember that throughout this debate.

Independent lifeboat services offer important support for lifesaving, both on the sea and on inland waters, such as those in my constituency of Broadland and Fakenham. The National Independent Lifeboat Association says that more than 80 independent lifeboat organisations operate along the coastline and inland waterways, and it estimates that in 2024 there were getting on for 3,500 volunteers, of whom over 1,000 were operational. They attended almost 2,000 incidents, assisting more than 2,000 people in distress or need. As has been mentioned, that work has been valued at £2.6 million in savings to the Government. This selfless work, carried out by inspirational people, many of whom have been mentioned by name in the debate, not only saves lives but saves the taxpayer money.

I want to join in the local celebrations. I am a bit stretched, because I represent an inland constituency, although it includes a part of the Norfolk broads—the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) and I share them. At Great Yarmouth we have Caister lifeboat. I am told, although I stand to be corrected, that it is the oldest lifeboat in the country. It has existed since 1791—consider that: well over 200 years. It is at the heart of the Norfolk coastal community that raises the money to support it. That money goes towards lifesaving equipment and training.

This year, Caister came out not just to save lives but to save a historic vessel. As a keen sailor, I have watched the complete restoration of the former royal yacht Bloodhound—I read about the progress in the sailing press over the course of months—which sprung a devastating leak off the Norfolk coast. The Caister lifeboat went out, helped to pump out and secure the vessel, and escorted it safely to the shore. Bloodhound is the vessel in which Prince Philip taught Prince Charles how to sail. It was a royal yacht from 1936 until 1969.

[Jerome Mayhew]

On the other side of the Wash is the Humber Rescue lifeboat. On 23 May this year it was launched multiple times over a 10-hour period to deal with a series of serious incidents on the Humber, and it saved three lives in a single day. That is just one example of the incredible work that independent lifeboat has done.

An interesting point, which some Members have raised, is that a local lifeboat knows its waters, some of which have particular characteristics that mean that specificity of training pays dividends. Where we have local conditions, we need local lifeboats—independent lifeboats, in particular—to provide the coverage we are all looking for.

Last year, the Felixstowe coast patrol and rescue saved six lives and provided assistance to 58 people while taking part in 55 patrols covering thousands of miles. Closer to home, the hon. Member for North Norfolk will recall that, just last month, Hemsby Broads rescue was tasked by Humber coastguard to assist in the rescue of six people on the lower Bure on its approach to Great Yarmouth. We fight over the Bure; it is the barrier, or the demarcation point, between our two constituencies. I have not researched sufficiently to know whether it happened on my side of the river or the hon. Gentleman's, but the vessel that ran aground was listing heavily near Great Yarmouth. All the casualties were safely evacuated, but without that swift and co-ordinated approach, the situation could have ended very differently. We owe a debt of gratitude to independent lifeboats, whether they operate in inland waters or out at sea.

There is a wider point here. For all these institutions, their strength comes from their independence. Although state provision can provide funding and coverage, it comes at the very significant cost of disenfranchising local communities. It comes at the cost of undermining their sense of belonging and the network of social ties—the community resilience—that supporting, running and manning a local independent lifeboat brings about. The strength of independent lifeboats is their very independence.

More widely, this is a model for devolution—not the Government's version, devolution from above, where we destroy the lowest level of government and bring it up to county or bi-county level as a vehicle for undertaking the directions of the national state, but devolution down to communities that empowers them to take decisions on their own behalf. That is the kind of devolution towards which independent lifeboats lead the way.

Although these organisations are a celebration of independence, there is a difference between independence and funding, which remains a huge challenge. We have heard that between 2014 and 2020, the previous Government granted a total of £5.66 million to 104 different independent inshore and inland rescue boat charities through the rescue boat grant fund. Sadly, that was stopped in 2020. I hear the lament of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley, and I join him in it. It was a mistake that, to save £1 million pounds a year, the capital advantage given to these independent charities, which do so much for their local communities, was stopped. That leads me neatly into my request to the Minister to consider that as we approach the Budget on 26 November. What is she going to do about it?

We need to make sure that independent lifeboats are able to act to protect those in need. Are regulations in place to that ensure independent lifeboats can act effectively? Does the Minister agree with everyone in the Chamber about the importance of independent lifeboats? If so, will she update us on the Government's approach to funding—that is important—and on how she can encourage local lifeboat institutions to thrive?

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) made a very important point about the bureaucracy of volunteering. That is an increasingly significant constraint. There are lots of requirements, each of which is no doubt sensible on its own, but the accumulation of bureaucracy, when taken en masse, prevents people from volunteering. We need to do something about that. Will the Minister commit to a permanent position for NILA on the search and rescue framework?

This debate has been a celebration—of civic society, not the state. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley on drawing our attention to this very important part of our civic society and I look forward to hearing the Minister's speech.

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the Minister, may I ask her to wind up by 4.11 pm, so that we can allow Mr Holmes two minutes to sum up before I conclude the debate?

3.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) for bringing this debate to the House. It is extremely important to highlight the role of our dedicated lifeboat services, which seek to rescue any persons in distress or difficulty around our coast. It is important that we continue to celebrate these lifesaving services and recognise their contribution to search and rescue services across the United Kingdom search and rescue region. I welcome this opportunity to pay tribute to the brave volunteers who are a critical part of the UK's maritime search and rescue provision.

I am very happy to join all those hon. Members here today who have highlighted the volunteers on their own independent lifeboats and, indeed, RNLI lifeboats. The hon. Member for Havant (Alan Mak) highlighted Hayling Island lifeboat station; my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Helena Dollimore) highlighted the Pett Level independent rescue boat; the hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello) drew our attention to Lyme Regis and its independent rescue boat; my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Alison Hume) referred to the boat at Runswick Bay; my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith) referred to the Ferryside and Loughor boats; the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) referred to the Gosport and Fareham inshore rescue service; the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) highlighted independent lifeboats on Strangford lough, Lough Neagh and the Lagan; and my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Anna Gelderd) highlighted the RNLI in her area—I have witnessed its work myself while on holiday, and obviously the RNLI's headquarters are in Poole.

We heard from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Alison Griffiths) about the lifeboat service in her constituency; the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) talked about the lifeboats at Sea Palling and Mundesley; and we heard about the lifeboat at Caister from the hon. Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew). I apologise if I missed anyone and I know that there are many other independent lifeboats around the country that I have not mentioned. I feel somewhat guilty for not having done so, but I know that they will be doing incredible work too, and they similarly deserve our thanks.

I am sure that all hon. Members across the House will be aware of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution—a charity that provides lifeboat and lifeguard services across the UK, Ireland and the Crown dependencies—and the role that its brave volunteers undertake, but this debate is a welcome opportunity to call attention to our independent lifeboats, which are not part of the RNLI but provide vital lifeboat and lifesaving services in their local communities.

We are very lucky also to have volunteer life brigades, volunteer lifeguards and His Majesty's Coastguard volunteers, all of whom regularly risk their own lives to save others at sea and around our beautiful but sometimes treacherous coastline. Those volunteers undertake search operations and water, mud and cliff rescue 24 hours a day, sometimes in the most terrible circumstances and conditions. Indeed, the conditions in which they deploy to save and protect others are often challenging and potentially life-threatening. We recognise and greatly appreciate their service, and I know that all Members of the House will join me in thanking them.

Our volunteer lifeboat services in the UK have a long and proud history spanning more than 200 years. The saving of lives at sea and on the coast, and the volunteer ethos of these services, is a cornerstone of British society. While the RNLI is recognised as a world leader in lifeboat services and operations, the UK is also very proud to have approximately 40 independent lifeboats declared to His Majesty's Coastguard—and others besides, as we have heard. Those organisations provide lifesaving services around the clock in support of our maritime and coastal emergency service. His Majesty's Coastguard's own volunteer coastguard rescue officers are also proud to maintain the traditions of voluntary lifesaving and have worked alongside their colleagues in the lifeboat services for over 200 years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading Central (Matt Rodda) spoke about the issues in his constituency and the potential interest in establishing a rescue service on the River Thames. His Majesty's Coastguard is responsible for search and rescue on the lower River Thames to Teddington. Beyond that, inland water safety is the responsibility of the police. However, should small boat operators want to form a rescue service, His Majesty's Coastguard can provide advice and guidance, and the rescue boat code is a good benchmark for the formation of rescue boats. I am sure that the responsible Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Keir Mather)—would be happy to provide my hon. Friend with further information should he so wish.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading Central also asked about the safety of boaters, who take part in an increasingly popular activity. Inland search and rescue

is the responsibility of the police, but the fire services have water rescue capability and His Majesty's Coastguard search and rescue helicopters can also be asked to support those services.

The work undertaken by our independent lifeboats is often not fully recognised. Each is run by dedicated volunteers who provide a vital lifesaving capability to offer assistance to any person who may be in difficulty around our coasts and countryside. As we have heard, independent lifeboats operate in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, both on the coast and inland.

The hon. Member for Hamble Valley rightly highlighted the challenges our independent lifeboats face. In common with all search and rescue services, they are responding to an increasing number of call-outs. As so many hon. Members highlighted, they also face significant challenges to maintain their operations. We know that volunteers not only crew the lifeboats but undertake magnificent fundraising efforts to provide the resources they need. They of course require our recognition and support, and a number of bodies and initiatives work to support them.

In September 2022, the National Independent Lifeboat Association was formally launched, with support from Members of Parliament, the Department for Transport and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. NILA was founded with the intention of supporting our independent lifeboats and providing a cohesive voice for those smaller but vital organisations. His Majesty's Coastguard continues to help, support and guide the development of the association, which aims to provide ongoing support to the individual charities through the provision of a national voice, including by representing them in the United Kingdom Search and Rescue Operators Group.

UKSAR is the representative organisation for search and rescue in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is an amalgam of Government Departments, the emergency services and a number of search and rescue charities and voluntary organisations. Those authorities and organisations are committed to a cohesive and co-operative partnership in support of an effective, cost-efficient national SAR capability. UKSAR is chaired by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency on behalf of the Department for Transport and it has various workstreams that look to support all volunteer SAR groups, including independent lifeboats and many others, such as mountain rescue and lowland rescue, which I had the pleasure of meeting recently. The workstreams cover a broad spectrum, including interoperability, national operating guidance, medical response, volunteer support and recognition of SAR organisations.

As we heard, NILA is currently a probationary member of the UK Search and Rescue Operators Group, while it continues to establish and move to full membership. Importantly, probationary status does not limit NILA's access or influence, or the benefits it receives as part of UK Search and Rescue. NILA has done fantastic work representing independent lifeboats since its founding only a few years ago, and it must be commended for that work. HM Coastguard and UKSAR will continue to support NILA as it moves towards full membership. I understand that following discussions between NILA trustees and its sponsor, HM Coastguard, NILA concluded that remaining a probationary member at this stage was in its best interests, but it is clearly on a journey towards full membership.

[Lilian Greenwood]

UKSAR has worked with the DFT to ensure that all SAR responders, including independent lifeboats, will be recognised in ongoing work, including the revision of section 19 of the Road Safety Act 2006 to allow the appropriate use of emergency warning devices. It will also support wider workstreams, including, as the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Steff Aquarone) highlighted, allowing potential vehicle excise duty exemptions—I assure him that that work is in hand.

The hon. Member for Hamble Valley and a number of others raised the issue of the rescue boat grant fund. As we heard, the fund provided grants to inshore and inland rescue boat charities to support major capital purchases. The Department was able to subsequently extend the fund with a further £1 million for an additional round in 2019-20. But at the end of that period, the then Government closed the fund because its specific objective of enhancing capacity was considered to have been met.

While the Department does not currently have any plans to reintroduce the rescue boat grant fund, the Government regularly make new grants available to charities, and the process of identifying suitable opportunities, checking eligibility and making applications has been simplified through a single online portal. His Majesty's Coastguard provides guidance and support to all its declared independent lifeboats through its local management teams and declared facility officers. Since April 2015, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs has allowed search and rescue charities, including independent lifeboats, to recover VAT on the purchase of goods and services used for their non-business activities.

Earlier this year, the all-party parliamentary group for volunteer rescue services was established, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Torcuil Crichton)—a constituency that is quite challenging to say. My hon. Friend could not be in the debate today, but I know the APPG is supported by many MPs. The aim of the group is to advocate for legislation and policies that support and strengthen the volunteer rescue sector, ensuring that volunteers are equipped, protected and empowered to carry out their lifesaving work effectively across the UK in all emergency and disaster response situations. I am sure that we all look forward to a further opportunity to debate and discuss those issues in the House.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) rightly spoke about the reduction in charitable and corporate giving. As I am sure she will appreciate, this issue falls outside my portfolio, but I will ensure that the concerns she expressed today are heard by the Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley South (Stephanie Peacock). The hon. Member is right to raise the importance of addressing what we can do as a Government to support the growth of charitable giving and philanthropy.

I am very proud to be speaking on behalf of the Department responsible for maritime search and rescue, and I am very proud of the volunteers, and their supporting organisations, who form such an important part of that provision. I pay tribute to those organisations and the

individuals who work both in response and behind the scenes to provide lifesaving services in whatever circumstances, to whoever needs them. I hope I have managed to answer the questions and concerns of hon. Members, but if not, I know that the Minister for Maritime and Aviation will be reading our exchanges—I am afraid he is visiting another part of the UK today—and will reflect on them. I am sure that he would happy to respond to any questions in writing, if I have not covered them.

I finish by thanking the hon. Member for Hamble Valley for raising this important issue and providing the opportunity for us to debate and celebrate the contribution of our lifeboat services to search and rescue.

4.4 pm

Paul Holmes: I genuinely thank all hon. Members for their fabulous contributions extolling the virtues of their lifeboat services. I thank the Minister and shadow Minister for being here this afternoon. I am delighted that the shadow Minister has not had to use the services of the many independent lifeboats that he listed. It just shows what a good skipper he is—for now. He is, however, a much better skipper than I am on my little 23-foot motorboat. I am not a sailor; I get shouted at too much.

We have heard about so many services, but let us imagine what it would be like if those services were not there and we had no volunteers around our country. It would be a disaster for our coastal communities. The number of people who lose their lives on the water would go up, and we do not want that. The Minister's speech was very welcome, as was her willingness to thank all our volunteers and independent lifeboat services. That is something that I really wanted to achieve this afternoon, as this debate was intended on a non-party political basis; this is not a party-political issue.

Despite that, and although I am aware that a former Government Chief Whip is now sitting next to me, the Minister knows that I think it was deeply regrettable that the rescue boat grant fund was stopped under the last Government. I do not think that it is too much money. As the Minister said in regard to whether the grant should have been continued, there was an assessment that the mission was largely complete, but I think that that was the wrong assessment. There is certainly much more to do to make sure that our independent lifeboat stations get the finances that they need.

I will write to the Minister again about the interpretation of whether NILA wants to stay as a probationary or permanent member. That is certainly not the message that I got a few days ago from it, but it may be an issue of communication, so I will write to her again. Lastly, we will be holding another one of these debates next year, and I hope that someone else will feel able to pick up the mantle, but let us go out and celebrate the contribution that independent lifeboats make.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Government support for independent lifeboats.

Civil Justice Council Review of Litigation Funding

4.9 pm

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): I will call Sir Julian Smith to move the motion; I will then call the Minister to respond. I remind Members that they may make a speech only with prior permission from the Member in charge of the debate and the Minister. There will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up, as is the convention for 30-minute debates.

Sir Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con) [R]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Civil Justice Council's review of litigation funding.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Harris. I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—until the summer, I was voluntary chair of the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution. I pay tribute to Mr Justice Simon Picken and Dr John Sorabji, who co-chaired the review, along with each member of the working party and the Civil Justice Council secretariat.

Third-party litigation funding plays an important role, enabling citizens in the UK and businesses to bring claims against larger and often better-resourced firms and organisations. Litigation funding involves an investment company that is not involved in a particular legal case providing all or a portion of the legal costs of a claim, in return for any damages awarded. The typical area in which litigation funding operates is in high-value commercial, arbitration or group litigation claims, particularly in the Competition Appeal Tribunal—a key route for competition-based group claimants to attempt to seek redress and, alongside the Competition and Markets Authority, one of two pillars of the UK's globally recognised competition regime.

Litigation funding provided financial resource for cases to be taken in the initial stages of the Post Office Horizon scandal, *Bates v. Post Office*, as well as providing resources in cases taken up against car manufacturers, such as one over false diesel emissions, cases focused on data breaches, those involving car financing and, most recently, a high-profile case last week involving Apple and charges for app use on the App Store.

Luke Akehurst (North Durham) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way at such an early stage in his speech. I want to highlight another positive example of the use of litigation funding. It was essential in helping 52 former franchisees of Vodafone—essentially, small business owners, including one in Chester-le-Street in my constituency—to bring a claim against the company, which they would have struggled to bring without funding. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that this example demonstrates that litigation funding can play a crucial role in enabling access to justice for those who would otherwise be denied it?

Sir Julian Smith: I agree with the hon. Member; the Vodafone case, which involved franchisees across the UK, is another example of how litigation funding can help.

The Supreme Court's judgment in the PACCAR case in July 2023, which involved a claim against truck manufacturers for anti-competitive behaviour, rendered many third-party funding agreements unenforceable by bringing them in scope of another type of legal funding agreement, damage-based agreements. The impact of the judgment on the litigation funding market has been two years of instability and a lack of clarity about its contractual operating terms. The last Government sought to remedy the issue by introducing the Litigation Funding Agreements (Enforceability) Bill, which had reached Second Reading in the House of Lords immediately prior to the election.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Gentleman for securing the debate; he was right to do so. Although no win, no fee seems like the only reasonable option for those seeking compensation in the civil courts to fund their cases, they can be easily taken advantage of, so does he agree that we need a framework that allows for a reasonable exchange of risk and benefit to consumers, rather than putting the ability to fight for justice just beyond their reach?

Sir Julian Smith: I agree with the hon. Member; I will come to some protections that I think he might be attracted by.

The last election stopped the Litigation Funding Agreements (Enforceability) Bill, which was going to overturn the PACCAR judgment, but on 1 August 2024, Lord Ponsonby said in a written answer to a parliamentary question that the new Labour Government

"recognises the critical role third-party litigation funding plays in ensuring access to justice.

Following the PACCAR judgment, concerns have been raised about the need for greater regulation of Litigation Funding Agreements... The Government is keen to ensure access to justice in large-scale and expensive cases, whilst also setting up adequate safeguards to protect claimants from unfair terms.

The Civil Justice Council is considering these questions and others in its review of third-party litigation funding, and hopes to report in summer 2025. The Government will take a more comprehensive view of any legislation to address issues in the round once that review is concluded."

The Civil Justice Council review concluded in June this year. The litigation funding industry, businesses and the legal sector await the Government's response. The current lack of response to the report is causing significant uncertainty to the sector and additional costs for those fighting for businesses and consumers. Although the Government are inevitably busy on many fronts, action on this is needed now and will be positive for the UK economy.

I will return to the recommendations of the CJC report shortly, but I just want to emphasise two broader points. First, the legal sector in the UK was worth about £52 billion in 2024, up by about 10% on the previous year. Litigation funding is estimated to have quadrupled since 2013, with more than £1 billion capital estimated as currently available to litigation. In 2023, PwC UK predicted growth at a compound annual growth rate of more than 8% over five years.

On a global basis, the global litigation funding market was approximately \$20 billion in 2025 and is expected to be closer to \$49 billion in 2035. Legal services with litigation funding are an important component and a vital export opportunity as the UK continues to be the

[Sir Julian Smith]

leading centre for global disputes of all kinds and can stand to win significant revenues from deals such as the ones the Government have done with India, the US and, this week, Turkey. Services of all shapes and sizes, but particularly legal services, are a key UK economic sector and we should bear that in mind during this debate.

The second broader point is that litigation finance significantly assists with access to justice, as we have heard, discouraging large companies from anti-competitive or anti-consumer behaviour. Litigation finance funds cases of all shapes and sizes, but particularly class actions where there is a potential case against large and often global firms who unknowingly—or often knowingly—have breached the UK's competition law.

UK competition law was crafted over many years to ensure an efficient market protecting consumers and fostering fair competition between companies, encouraging better and more effective growth. Both issues matter to UK citizens as they directly impact incomes and financial costs for families across the United Kingdom. We need one of our most successful service sectors to operate with a full focus on expansion and growth. That means more jobs, which mean more tax revenue. We need UK consumers to have routes to take on the huge might of the global companies from which they buy products and services, but that have such large market share and resources that they can more or less do what they want.

The Competition Appeal Tribunal was extended in 2015 by the coalition Government to include opt-out collective actions to enhance competition, ensure prices stay fair and that businesses do not abuse their position and keep innovating. As Ministers said at the time:

“Competition is one of the great drivers of growth”,

For many consumers, who are often on low incomes, cases in the CAT, funded by third-party litigation funding, is the only route to challenge and hold large companies to account.

Neither point is intended to imply that everything is perfect, but the PACCAR judgment and the need for legislation to remediate the situation, the CJC report that is the topic of this debate and a recent call for evidence on the opt-out regime at the Competition Appeal Tribunal, run by the Department for Business and Trade, all risk slowing down an important growth market for the UK if Government responses are not executed quickly, proportionately and with vision. Improvements can clearly be made to the oversight of the litigation funding sector, and also in the operation of the Competition Appeal Tribunal. Having said that, despite heavy lobbying for change, there is no evidence that the UK's ranking as a destination for foreign direct investment has been affected by our vibrant competition regime. Moreover, private enforcement of the regime through the CAT seems to be good value for money, with just over £5 million in costs for the Competition Appeal Tribunal and £118 million for the Competition and Markets Authority.

The first recommendation of the CJC report is:

“Legislation should be introduced to make clear that litigation funding is...a distinct form of funding”.

It also recommends that the effect of the PACCAR Supreme Court judgment should be overturned. Although the market has, to an extent, adapted to that judgment

in June 2023, the bulk of submissions to the review and elsewhere highlighted the impact on the provision of funding. Less money has been delivered to claimants, and there has been a reduction in the number of CAT cases. The report's main ask is to get legislation in place and to overturn PACCAR. I would be interested to hear the Minister's response on when that will happen, and a clear timeline. It would be good to get it done in this Session of Parliament. I would also be interested in the Minister's comments on the change being retrospective, which seems fraught with complications. On the previous Bill's Second Reading debate in the House of Lords, Members raised concerns.

Other flagship recommendations in the CJC review relate to the move from self-regulation by the Association of Litigation Funders not to the Financial Conduct Authority, which some proposed, but to light-touch regulation put in place by the Lord Chancellor. The proposals are for differential regulations for the type of claimant: very little for commercial disputes, and lighter touch for consumer, representative or class actions.

The review proposes a minimum baseline set of regulatory requirements, focusing on case-specific capital adequacy, codification that litigation funders should not control the litigation process, conflicts of interest and money laundering. Additional light-touch regulation is proposed for groups and consumer claimants, to include a consumer duty, early court approval of the funding agreement and a court assessment of whether the lender's return is reasonable. Further measures include the provision of independent legal advice for consumers before entering into funding agreements, and a prohibition on litigation funders controlling proceedings or settlement proceedings.

In reflecting on the proposals, the Government must be alive to the risk of fettering an innovative and successful industry that enables consumers to mount challenges against Goliath-sized firms. I encourage them to take a pragmatic view, driven by the market. There may be merit in applying some elements of the CJC report through regulations, but it is worth considering strengthening the current self-regulation regime, including by getting all players operating in the UK market to join the Association of Litigation Funders—it is a self-regulation body has a code of practice, but not all litigation funders are in it. I call on the industry to get everybody operating in litigation funding in the UK on board in the association.

There are proposals to use redress schemes and other forms of non-court-based resolution more regularly. I believe strongly in alternative routes to settlement, so I agree strongly with those proposals. Much more can be done to offer settlement options, including encouraging settlement rather than litigation, offering mandatory mediation in parts of the CAT process, and making mediation a clause within the process for litigation funding agreements. Avoiding costly disputes is generally a good thing. Focusing on settlement, not litigation, in the Government response would help in that regard. Mandatory mediation would also help to ensure that disputes between litigation funders and law firms are handled more clearly.

Although I acknowledge that improvements need to be made, I hope that the Minister and the Government will reflect on the potential motivations of some of those who look to impose heavy changes on opt-out.

Opt-out, and its reliance on litigation finance, offers consumers a powerful opportunity for redress. The Government opt-out review, introduced earlier this year, references perceived burdens of the current regime on business, but there seems to be little evidence of our competition law putting off inward investment. The UK is seen to be a great place to invest and the same arguments that helped to build the UK competition rules stand today. If there is no fear of being brought to book, some companies will continue to rip off and abuse consumers. If they are abiding by UK competition law, they have nothing to fear.

While acknowledging that improvements can be made, we should be sceptical of those who seek to fetter consumer rights and should instead make the case for an expansion of those rights in the interests of our citizens and UK economic growth. A strong defence of consumer rights is the best way for the UK to continue to thrive, for the UK economy to grow, and for inward investors and domestic businesses to stay lean and competitive.

Whatever the Minister's response today, I hope that the Government will soon introduce a Bill to address PACCAR, the primary recommendation of the CJC report, and will seek to look at practical ways to implement elements of that report while avoiding adding burdens, cost and micromanagement on to an innovative and important sector.

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): I will bring this debate to a close at 4.42 pm. Hon. Members should bear that in mind so that there is time for the Minister. I call Oliver Ryan.

4.26 pm

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Harris. I thank the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Sir Julian Smith) for securing the debate and allowing me briefly to contribute.

When people go to court, they deserve justice, not a financial system that puts investors before victims, yet that is what litigation has too often become. We all remember the Post Office case, which the right hon. Gentleman eloquently discussed. It was one of the darkest chapters in recent legal memory. The postmasters fought for years to clear their names, yet when the settlement came in, around 80% of the damages—£46 million—went not to them, but to funders and lawyers. That is not right.

This is not some distant issue that affects courts in London. In my constituency of Burnley, Padiham and Brierfield, many households were drawn into cavity wall insulation claims by legal vultures only to be left thousands of pounds in debt when the funder and law firm behind them, SSB, collapsed. Ordinary families were left exposed, with no resource and no protection. That failure should shame us all. We can do better by having effective regulation of the market. The Solicitors Regulation Authority and others still have questions to answer about SSB.

More than 70 litigation funders are active in the UK, managing billions of pounds but operating with very little formal oversight. That gap leaves consumers exposed and confidence in our legal system weakened. The right

hon. Gentleman has ably explained some of the practical recommendations in the Civil Justice Council report—in which Seema Kennedy, previously of this parish, although on the Conservative Benches, was also involved—so I will not go into them now. However, I hope that this Government take on board recommendations for greater transparency and oversight, clearer limits on funding controls, the strengthening of the ombudsman and alternative dispute resolutions, as has been mentioned, and court scrutiny of the profits and sources of funding of those taking these legal cases through. Those steps would restore fairness and integrity to collective actions and make sure that outcomes serve the people involved in these cases and not the profit motive.

I know that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister has ambitions to address concerns in this area, perhaps in legislation. I look forward to hearing her response and I thank the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to contribute.

4.28 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Sarah Sackman): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I thank the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Sir Julian Smith) for securing a debate on this very important subject. It gives me an opportunity to cover three of my favourite themes: consumer protection, access to justice and growth, especially as it is delivered by the very successful legal services sector in this country.

We are here to discuss the Civil Justice Council's review of litigation funding, which was published in June. As others have said, litigation funding refers to the mechanism by which litigation is privately funded in England and Wales. Third-party funding is where a party unconnected to a dispute, most often a financial institution, funds the cost of the legal action in return for a share of any damages awarded. As others have observed, this performs two functions: a social function and an economic function. Third-party funding is an essential tool in ensuring access to justice for many. It enables those who would not otherwise be able to afford to litigate—ordinary people, the small businesses referred to—to assert their rights before a court of law, against often far better resourced opponents, often large corporations and institutions.

Without third-party funding, as others have noted, the sub-postmasters would not have been able to bring their landmark civil claim against the Post Office. Those individuals without the financial means or legal clout to bring a claim themselves, were able to secure compensation for their losses as a result of third-party litigation funding. Such funding has also been used to support equal pay cases, environmental challenges, consumer claims against multinational companies regarding data breaches, and the other sorts of cases mentioned today.

As the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Sir Julian Smith) notes, this also makes a huge economic contribution. Along with the quality and calibre of our judiciary and legal services, third-party funding is an important factor in attracting international business to England and Wales as a jurisdiction of choice. That is because third-party funding is also used in high-value commercial cases, where there is a significant financial imbalance or where parties do not wish to use limited capital resources on legal proceedings.

[Sarah Sackman]

It is important for the House to recognise that third-party funding plays a critical role in supporting the attractiveness of our jurisdiction as a global hub for commercial litigation and arbitration. Legal services contributed £42 billion to the economy last year. I am happy to be their greatest champion, but it is fair to say that the UK Supreme Court's judgment in the PACCAR case has created a degree of uncertainty for funders and litigants alike.

As we have heard, the case concerned litigation funding agreements—LFAs. The Supreme Court held that third-party litigation funding agreements were damages-based agreements. The ruling rendered many such LFAs unenforceable, by bringing them into the scope of the regulatory regime for damages-based agreements. As others have noted, that has created a degree of uncertainty. There is a concern and very real risk that funders are beginning to pivot away from London, England and Wales to look at other jurisdictions, such as New York, Paris and Singapore, more favourably. In short, that is not good for UK plc.

The PACCAR judgment and the report of the Civil Justice Council that followed present an opportunity for the sort of debate we are having. What would it look like to reverse PACCAR? Do we want to go back to exactly what the regime looked like before? Can we evolve an even better regime, which provides the right regulatory balance, ensuring access to justice, and that damages-based agreements work for client and funder alike? How do we develop that? For that reason, the Government have taken time to ask the CJC to conclude its work, and we are considering carefully how to achieve that balance.

Third-party funding is currently subject only to self-regulation via the Association of Litigation Funders' code of conduct. I welcome and echo the invitation by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon to those who are not currently subject to the code's ethical and operational standards to seize the opportunity to bring themselves within what is currently a voluntary regime.

Despite litigation funding's importance to effective access to justice, not all feel that current third-party funding arrangements always work in the client's best

interest, as my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Oliver Ryan) pointed out. Some have questioned funders' role and level of control in legal proceedings. Those weaknesses in the pre-PACCAR regime are ones we recognise and want to take time to consider, so that we can ensure that third-party funding works for all.

In the light of the judgments and those concerns, the Civil Justice Council, an advisory body chaired by the Master of the Rolls, has conducted a thorough and learned review. It looks at this issue and the wider ecosystem for third-party litigation funding and its regulation. The scope of the review was to set out the current position of litigation funding and third-party litigation funding, and to consider access to justice, effectiveness and a host of regulatory options. Specifically, the review considered whether the current arrangements for third-party funding deliver the effective access to justice that we all want to see. We are incredibly grateful for the report.

We are now taking the time, as I said, to consider the report and its recommendations very carefully. I am sure that hon. Members here today will appreciate that it is essential to take this detailed and considered approach to what is a technical area but one that is fundamental to the human aspects of access to justice. We must ensure that the right balance is struck to ensure fair and effective access to justice, while enabling economic growth, which is, as so many others have said, the primary mission of this Government. We are aware that many are eagerly awaiting the Government's response, and I look forward to announcing our way forward in due course. The stakes are high: access to justice, consumer protection and economic growth. We have to get this right.

I will say one more thing in response to the question asked by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon on retrospectivity. I think it is highly unlikely, given the general rule-of-law principle against retrospectivity, that we would look to have that, but as I said, we must get this right; we have to get the balance right. We want an improved regime that works for the funders and for their clients and consumers.

Question put and agreed to.

Vehicle Headlight Glare Standards

4.38 pm

Peter Lamb (Crawley) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the potential merits of a new standard for vehicle headlight glare.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I am grateful for the opportunity to present this motion today; it is the first time that I have been successful in an application for a Westminster Hall debate, and I feel that I have been incredibly lucky with the coverage that it has received so far in the news. But I suppose that I should not be surprised. This issue has been raised with me by many constituents, and polling indicates that 80% of all drivers are concerned about headlight glare. I am sure that most Members have at one time or another struggled to see the road because of the glare of oncoming headlights—I certainly have.

No one should deny the valuable role that headlights play in enabling people to drive safely. They enable drivers to see potential hazards, and other people to notice vehicles in motion. It is for that reason that we encourage cyclists to ensure that their bikes are properly illuminated at night—the conversation about their lighting, and particularly the flashing lightbulbs that they often have, can wait for another day. However, in recent years the glare from headlights has begun to tip over from enhancing road safety to compromising it. On average each year, police are called to 280 collisions and six fatal collisions where headlight glare is cited as having played a role in causing the accident.

Several factors have a role to play in driving the increase in headlight glare. Poor alignment of headlights means that often car headlights are angled too high up in the road, and consequently the light enters into cabins. There is increased adoption of SUV-style cars, which sit higher in the road, so again the light is more likely to enter a car's cabin and impact drivers.

However, the most significant change has been the replacement of traditional halogen lightbulbs with light-emitting diodes. LEDs are a significant improvement on halogen bulbs; they are far more energy-efficient, last far longer and have the ability to be brighter and better directed than traditional lightbulbs. Unfortunately, although car companies feel the advantages of the increased brightness of LEDs—which, due to emitting large volumes of blue light, unlike halogen lightbulbs, take far longer for the eye to recover from—they do not appear to have considered the impacts on other road users. It is hard to say whether that is by accident or design. Brighter headlights may well be attractive to those purchasing a car; they can be more aesthetically pleasing, and drivers benefit from increased visibility, but that all comes at the cost of other road users.

The tension between the conflicting interests of those living in this country sits at the heart of our politics. It is our job as representatives to decide where that appropriate balance sits—curtailing the freedoms of some to protect the freedoms of others—and there will always be winners and losers. Fortunately for the Government, on this issue the balance seems clear. When four out of five drivers are telling us they are concerned about headlight glare, we know that the balance of freedoms in this country rests clearly on one side. We cannot have a road network

where one in 20 people have stopped driving completely and a further 22% would rather not drive at night at all if they have a choice.

Lauren Edwards (Rochester and Strood) (Lab): From my hon. Friend's research, how concerned is he about the role that increasing glare from headlights could be playing in increasing social isolation? A lot of my older constituents say they are quite frightened about going out at night, particularly in winter as the nights are drawing in, which leaves them feeling more isolated.

Peter Lamb: Although the researcher involved did not look into particular age groups, I think we all know that on balance, it is often older citizens who are far more inclined to feel the issue of headlights and problems with driving in general. When looking at the numbers, which show the scale of people who are simply staying at home because they no longer feel safe in the road, we realise that something clearly has to be done. The overwhelming majority of those who say that they are no longer driving at night, or would not drive if they had the choice, cite headlight glare as the primary reason.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing his first Westminster Hall debate. I thought this was an issue of personal annoyance until I met Alan, an old colleague from Heriot-Watt University, who said he found it difficult to go out in the evening and was not looking forward to winter. He is a young man—even younger than me—so does my hon. Friend agree that we need more research to fully understand the negative impacts of these lights?

Peter Lamb: Certainly, there is probably work to be done in general around how transport impacts social isolation, and particularly at different times of day. We know the impact that losing bus routes has had on rural communities, and the age brackets for which that causes huge problems. Transport for many people is an essential part of daily life; they do not have the options that those of us lucky enough—I say lucky—to live in an urban area have available to us. We have to think of the enormous impact that this issue has not only on convenience, but on someone's ability to get through life.

There are options available to drivers to reduce headlight glare. They can try keeping their windscreen and glasses clean; they can adjust mirrors to reduce glare; and they can ensure that their own headlights are properly aligned and avoid buying SUV-type vehicles. *[Interruption.]* Well, they could. Although all those things would see an improvement in our roads, driving-related law in the UK should not be reliant on voluntary measures by drivers. The law relating to driving begins from the starting point that every vehicle is a lethal object and rigid rules are required to manage that risk.

The track record of accidents stemming from headlight glare is now sufficiently clear, but it is time for that to be recognised in law with a new standard to ensure that headlights in the United Kingdom do not exceed safe levels of brightness. I am glad that the Department for Transport appears to have recognised that, with the Transport Research Laboratory having been commissioned last year to study the impacts of headlight glare. I understand that research was supposed to have been completed in the spring, but it has not yet been published. Despite that, there have been positive noises, certainly

[*Peter Lamb*]

in recent days, about headlight glare being addressed, in part through the new road safety strategy. I hope that hon. Members will receive assurances about that from the Minister, and I hope that this debate will help to maintain pressure for the action that our constituents deserve at the earliest opportunity.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that if they wish to speak they should bob so that we can work out the timings. Hon. Members should also please bear in mind that we are expecting votes.

4.45 pm

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I thank the hon. Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) for securing this important debate. The statistics are stark—as stark as bright light coming around the corner at night on a dark country road. The RAC tells us that four in five drivers complain of bright vehicle lights on the road, that 95% of drivers think that at least some headlights are too bright, that 53% have been temporarily blinded while driving, that 79% find it hard to tell when vehicles were indicating because of the bright lights, that 77% find it difficult to judge the position of an oncoming vehicle in the road, that 25% avoid driving at night due to headlights, and that 22% would like to drive less at night.

There is an issue that drivers with automatic headlight dipping, and indeed the manufacturers of the systems, may not be aware of: the sensors that dip the lights automatically do not seem to do so until they directly sense an oncoming light, so for those of us who can see a light in the distance and consequently dip our headlights manually, that courtesy is not returned until the first flash of the lights as they round a corner. That makes for more bad temper on our roads, occasional retaliation and of course the danger of being blinded.

Some may have seen advertisements for night driving glasses, which have yellow lenses that take out the blinding, blue part of the light. I have found them effective, but it would be useful if the Government's Transport and Road Research Laboratory, the TRL, could undertake research into the effectiveness of these driving glasses. It could perhaps, along with the British Standards Institution, issue a kitemark for approved night driving glasses and make the case for them more obvious.

Other problems, such as the fitting of LED bulbs to standard car light housings are already illegal. Making that point of law more widely known and publishing statistics on the issuance of penalty points for that offence would be widely welcomed, and be a public benefit.

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): I am imposing an informal time limit of four minutes.

4.48 pm

David Taylor (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) for securing this important debate, for bringing this

issue to national attention and indeed—forgive the pun—for shining a light on it. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ooh.”] I know, I could not resist; I apologise.

Many of my constituents have raised this issue with me, not just in the town of Hemel Hempstead and areas such as Adeyfield and Bennetts End, but in our rural communities—in Bovingdon, Chipperfield and Flaunden. The growing problem of the glare from modern vehicle headlights is now a real concern for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians alike. Hon. Members have shared their personal irritation at this issue. I, too, cannot now drive at night without adjusting the rear-view mirror to reduce the glare. I also recognise the occasional issue of flashing an oncoming driver because it appears that they have inadvertently left their full beams on, only to find that they have not—those are just their natural headlights.

According to the RAC, nine out of 10 drivers say that they are affected by this issue, and seven in 10 believe that it has got worse in recent years. The BBC, among others, has reported how serious this problem has become across the country. In my constituency, the impact is clear. On dark, unlit rural lanes in Bovingdon and Chipperfield, the glare from oncoming cars can cause a driver to go blind for several seconds. On busier roads in urban areas, such as St Albans Road in Hemel Hempstead, drivers face a constant dazzle from modern LED lights.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Rochester and Strood (Lauren Edwards) and for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) have said, the issue also affects older residents. We do not want to inadvertently create a situation where they are isolating themselves because they are avoiding driving at night altogether. I welcome the Labour Government indicating that they will review headlight glare as part of the wider road safety strategy. It shows that this Labour Government are listening to people's real experiences and acting on them.

I associate myself with what my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley said about his wish to see safe levels of brightness imposed on vehicles going forward, be that from stronger regulations that force manufacturers to adjust the vehicles they are producing, better MOT alignment checks or enforcement against illegal modifications. If we can force these headlights to be dipped downwards, that would address some of the major issues, particularly with the increasing number of mini-SUV vehicles on our roads. Everyone in Hemel Hempstead, whether in our towns or villages, deserves to travel safely at night without being dazzled by oncoming lights. I once again thank my hon. Friend for bringing this important issue to our attention.

4.51 pm

Shokat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I thank the hon. Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) for bringing this debate to Westminster Hall. I declare that I have personal experience with this issue as a practising NHS optometrist, so I can say with some clarity that it is of great importance and concern, with potentially significant consequences. Many of my patients have told me of their utter despair when they want to drive at night. Some only take the keys out if it is a real emergency, while others have abandoned it altogether, which feeds into the narrative that elderly people in particular will not go shopping or go to the pharmacist to pick up medication. That can result in loneliness and other problems.

There are also those who continue to drive despite knowing that night driving is really difficult for them. That becomes a matter of life and death, as some of the statistics bear out. As an optometrist, I have only anecdotal evidence, but although excellent research has been done by the College of Optometrists, the Association Of Optometrists and the RAC, among others, it does not take an expert to know the link between eyesight and safety for everyone who uses the road.

I want to focus on two intertwined challenges: the impact of modern car lighting, and the lack of research and subsequent legislation around it, and the failure of our system to ensure that drivers meet basic vision standards.

Modern vehicles are brighter than ever. LED and xenon technologies have replaced many older halogen bulbs. They are much brighter and more efficient, and provide better clarity on the road for the driver, but unfortunately the increased brightness comes at a cost, which is a rise in glare and dazzle for other road users. The RAC, drawing on Government collision statistics, reported that since 2013, an average of 280 crashes a year in Britain have involved dazzling headlights as a contributing factor. Six of those crashes a year involve a loss of life. Campaigners believe that the real figures could be a lot higher.

The shift from halogen to LED, combined with higher headlight positioning because of SUV cars, is part of the problem. Experts at the light and health research centre at Mount Sinai hospital in New York have identified three factors driving the problems: the rise of taller vehicles, incorrect alignment of lights and the blue light of modern LED bulbs. Due to their shorter wavelength, they can potentially scatter more light in the eyes, and are more uncomfortable than other light forms. No research, as far as I am aware—there have been some anecdotal studies and very small-scale studies, but nothing conclusive—confirms that they help night driving.

The RAC also found that it takes 68% of drivers—this is really worrying—up to five seconds to recover after they have been dazzled, and more than 11% say that it takes six seconds or more. That is the time it takes to travel 160 metres at 60 miles per hour, without any clear vision. That is worse for anyone who has other eye health conditions, such as corneal opacity at the front of the eyes, cataracts or macular degeneration problems, but also a dirty windscreen or glasses lenses.

The greater, and quieter, threat is the number of drivers who already have poor or unsafe vision and continue to drive anyway. According to statistics by Mortar in October 2024, one in seven people knows of a relative, friend or co-worker who they believe is breaking the law by driving despite poor eyesight. Almost 30% of motorists admitted they would continue to drive even if they knew their vision was below the legal standards. More than a quarter said they are worried about someone they know who drives despite having poor vision.

These figures are deeply concerning, and reveal that our current, self-referral system is failing and many people either do not know their vision has declined or choose to ignore it. Earlier this year, a coroner in Lancashire issued a prevention of future death report following a fatal crash caused by undiagnosed sight loss. We need to change the legislation and have more research done on lighting.

4.55 pm

Martin Wrigley (Newton Abbot) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I congratulate the hon. Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) on securing this important debate. I have worked on this issue for some time, and I am really pleased that the Government are picking it up. I thank the Minister for engaging with it following my written questions in March and my early-day motion in April. I also thank Rod Dennis from the RAC and Denise Voon from the College of Optometrists for meeting with me around six months ago to discuss this in detail.

Constituents have contacted me about the dazzling effect of modern car headlights and the disorientation and loss of confidence that causes when driving at night. That is particularly concerning in rural communities, such as those in Newton Abbot, where driving is essential for work, appointments and, as we have heard, social contact. Losing confidence behind the wheel can quickly lead to social isolation, especially among older residents—it is delightful to see such continuity and consistency on this across the House.

LED headlights can be up to 10 times brighter than traditional halogen bulbs and that the glare they produce can lead to photostress with recovery times of up to 30 to 60 seconds. That is a long time to be effectively driving blind. Glare will always exist to some extent, but we can manage it by regulating brightness, colour, temperature and headlight height and angle. By working with drivers, manufacturers and medical experts, we can make real improvements.

From my own experience as a former non-executive director at the Department for Transport's Vehicle Certification Agency, I know how crucial type approvals and manufacturing standards are. Let us use that system to ensure new vehicles meet safe and consistent lighting standards. Of course, we must also use the MOT test to ensure that headlights are correctly aligned and comply with the regulations.

Finally, the UK has the opportunity to show international leadership on this issue, contributing to the UN taskforce and helping to set a global example in road safety and driver wellbeing. Let us get this sorted, so that headlights help us see the road ahead, and not blind us to it.

4.57 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I commend the hon. Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) for setting the scene so very well. This is an important issue as road safety is important to us all. Keeping ourselves, as well as other motorists safe, is part of that. There have been reports of concerns from across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland about the impact of vehicle headlight glare. Indeed, just this week BBC Breakfast had a story on this very issue.

I recently read a news article back home about how the Fermanagh and Omagh district council on the west of the Province wrote to the Committee for Infrastructure at the Northern Ireland Assembly raising concerns that vehicle headlights are becoming an increasingly distressing and potentially dangerous aspect of driving at night. It has also been noted that the intensity and resulting

[*Jim Shannon*]

glare from headlights are not currently tested. The hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Martin Wrigley), who spoke before me, referred to the MOT test. We really need to include this as part of that.

I know, from my experience living in rural areas, that there are safety concerns regarding vehicle glare. For example, on the roads leading down to my house, there are minor and major dips and hills. I live in the Ards Peninsula in a very rural part of Strangford. I know that some, on these country roads at night flash their main beam on, but perhaps do not turn it off when other cars approach. There is no doubt that that has a significant impact on public safety, and that is not to mention the fact that streetlight provision is next to nothing on these types of roads, so the spotlight glare of a headlight does not in any way increase safety. Indeed, it has the very opposite effect.

A more general UK survey found that 61% of drivers who suffer headlight glare say the problem has worsened in the past year, and I believe it has as well—certainly based on the evidence I have seen. Some 26% say that they try to reduce night-time driving because of bright headlights. If someone is not sure of being safe on the road, that would be the right thing to do. I would argue that the actual number is much higher; that figure is based purely on personal reports and anecdotes, and not on the many motorists who experience this issue daily.

It is evident that the issue affects many constituencies, but the narrow and unlit roads in rural areas, such as my constituency of Strangford, mean that beams and headlight glare stand out even more. As the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shockat Adam) asked, are people safe on the road during the 30 seconds or 50 seconds afterwards, as their eyes try to adjust again? That is a question I ask as well. There is space for human consideration, too: we certainly can be more mindful of where we are driving and the impact we will have on others.

I understand that the Department for Transport's research into glare for 2024-25 is studying how to incorporate practical glare tests into annual inspections. Perhaps the Minister can tell us what the Government are intending to bring about. Future MOT guidance may include brightness and levelling checks.

I happen to have a four-wheel drive—it does not make me better than anybody else, but we are high up off the road. If someone lives in the countryside, they probably have one, but they have it because they use it, not because it is a status symbol. I look forward to seeing what more the Government can do to improve road safety collectively throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the near future. I very much look forward to the Minister's response. He is doing his business this week, yesterday and today—two days running. Well done.

5.1 pm

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): It is an honour to serve with you in the Chair, Mrs Harris.

As the clocks go back and evenings grow darker, drivers in Devon are finding that dazzling headlights are no longer just a nuisance, but a real danger on our roads. This week, for the first time since summer, many of the people I represent are trying to get around in the dark along the dark lanes and long roads that surround

Sidmouth, Honiton and Seaton. A burst of a full beam before it is dipped can leave drivers disoriented. Add in a wet road, a scattering of potholes and maybe a cyclist, and it is a recipe for a near miss. Those do not always make it into the statistics, but anybody who drives knows them, because they have been there.

Many people in Devon are saying the same thing to me: headlights feel brighter than they used to. They are right. I remember when halogen bulbs were first introduced. They cast a much longer beam than we had known before, but now those have been surpassed by LED. The RAC's recent polling backs this up: almost every driver thinks that some headlights are too bright, and more than half have been temporarily blinded. A quarter now do not drive for fear of such temporary blinding.

Dr Arthur: That is an interesting point. If most drivers think there is an issue, that means their cars are probably part of the problem. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that they should look at their own vehicles first before they start criticising other drivers?

Richard Foord: I honestly do not think that we can make this the responsibility of every individual driver; it is our job to come here and legislate on collective problems such as this one.

The problem is especially serious in rural areas such as the one I represent, where the population tends to be older than across the country as a whole. Age changes how the eye copes with bright light at night. A report by road safety consultants released yesterday highlighted that an older person's eye can take around nine seconds to recover from glare, compared with about one second for a 16-year-old. That could mean not being able to see anything properly—potholes, pedestrians or cyclists—for the length of an entire football pitch.

In 2024, more than 600 people were injured on Devon and Cornwall's roads, and sadly 56 lost their lives in road traffic collisions. Plainly, the sort of glare we are talking about will not have been responsible for all of those incidents, but I know from a constituent who came to see me in a surgery that at least one of those fatalities related to glare from sunlight. If adapting headlights to reduce glare helps to prevent even one of those tragedies, it is worth looking into it.

LED headlights give the driver a clearer, crisper view but, when they are not properly fitted or aligned, their tight, blueish beam can cause real discomfort for others on the road. Penalties for sellers peddling unsafe kits would make a difference. When the Government's report is released in the coming weeks, it is vital that its recommendations are acted on quickly. Following the evidence could help us to save lives on the roads.

People in Seaton, Sidmouth and Honiton want to get home without feeling that they are gambling every time with a bright set of lights coming around the bend. Let us make sure that our vehicles light the way home safely, rather than blinding those who share our roads. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) for bringing this issue to the fore.

5.5 pm

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I join other hon. Members in commending the hon.

Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) for bringing this very important topic to Westminster Hall and, indeed, for his impressive efforts in getting media coverage before the debate had even occurred—I might ask him later for his tips on that, if he might be so generous, because hitherto I have not had quite such success, but it is very good to see. He is quite right to talk about the fear of driving at night that this issue instils and offers some good tips for mitigating the effects.

My hon. Friend the Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew) talked about the economic impact of reduced night driving and the problem of automated light dimming—I shall return to that subject, because I have some very strong views about it. The hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (David Taylor) joined other hon. Members in talking about the rural context and how important night-time driving is for people who live in rural areas and for the rural economy. It was once again great to hear the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shokat Adam) bring his professional optometrist's experience to the debate and quite rightly highlight the impact of the issue on elderly people's mobility, as well as the safety aspects of those who continue driving even though their eyesight may be compromised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Martin Wrigley) gave us an excellent summary of his very strong and robust campaigning on this issue, which this debate will hopefully accelerate. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) was very articulate about the need to strengthen MOT requirements and the fact that the data under-represents the problem at hand, a point also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord).

Following a petition with more than 14,000 signatures, the previous Government committed to commissioning research into headlight glare, a project that was taken up by the current Labour Government, with the results eagerly expected. While LED headlights improve driver visibility and energy efficiency, they can cause discomfort or temporary blindness to oncoming drivers. An RAC survey in December 2024 found that 95% of drivers believe some headlights are too bright, with 53% reporting being temporarily blinded and 25% avoiding night driving altogether because of glare.

Research shows that glare particularly affects people with cataracts or other vision issues. Headlight alignment and condition are checked during the MOT test, yet overly bright lights can still pass if technically compliant. There are concerns about poorly aligned or aftermarket LED conversions sold online; police reports list dazzling headlights as a factor in around 200 to 300 collisions annually in Great Britain. However, as hon. Members have suggested, that is almost certainly an underestimate.

The UK raised the issue at the UN Economic Commission for Europe, which agreed to tighten rules on headlamp alignment and to make automatic levelling systems mandatory by 2027. Ongoing Government-funded research by the Transport Research Laboratory will include real-world glare assessments across different road types.

This issue is close to my heart, because my Oxfordshire constituency of Didcot and Wantage has many rural components, and my main method of transport around the constituency is a bicycle. I assure the hon. Member for Crawley that I certainly do not use a flashing light outside street-lit areas, nor am I one of those covered in

dark clothing who is invisible. However, despite wearing high-vis clothing with retroreflective strips and having panniers with retroreflective elements, a front light, a rear light and loads of reflectors, I encounter a growing problem of car drivers taking too long to dip their headlights. Often it is so bad, particularly on roads that do not have a white line, that I just have to stop until the offending vehicle has gone—perhaps after some creative hand gestures in front of my light, as a last-minute attempt to make sure that they see me.

Some people dip their headlights and others do not, so it seems unlikely that it is to do with my visibility. I therefore wonder whether the automation that some hon. Members have mentioned is the factor; possibly some drivers rely on that, whereas others are observant, keeping a close eye and dipping as soon as they can. I can say from my experience as a cyclist that this is a real safety issue: if somebody is behind me when I have to stop suddenly, they will not be expecting to have to stop too.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the Department for Transport's decision to commission an independent review into headlight glare and we urge the Government to develop an updated road strategy including vehicle design, including lighting, within its scope. I know that that is something they are working on. We are deeply concerned about increasing reports of overly bright or poorly aligned LED headlights causing discomfort, temporary blindness and heightened safety risks for other road users, including drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. For all those reasons, this debate is very welcome and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to it.

5.10 pm

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) for securing this debate.

We have all heard from constituents who say that they now avoid driving at night altogether because of dazzling headlights. The BBC recently reported on this issue, highlighting the frustration of drivers who say that modern lights, while being brighter and more energy-efficient, are simply too intense for oncoming road-users. Drivers have spoken of being momentarily blinded by glare or of feeling unable to judge distances, and consequently of losing confidence behind the wheel. For many, that means avoiding night-time journeys altogether.

However, this issue is not just about comfort; it is also about access and safety. When people tell us that they no longer drive at night because the glare from other vehicles hurts their eyes or makes them anxious, that represents lost freedom and independence, particularly for older drivers or drivers in rural areas, such as my constituency of Mid Buckinghamshire.

The data supports those stories. According to the RAC's headlight glare study, which was published in February, a quarter of drivers who have been dazzled by the headlights of oncoming vehicles now stay off the roads more at night; 61% of drivers said the problem is worse than it was a year ago; and three quarters of those who are driving less say that it is because others cars' headlights make the experience uncomfortable or more difficult.

[Greg Smith]

The issue matters because glare does not just cause discomfort; as I have already said, it interferes with people's ability to process visual information quickly. Older drivers are particularly affected. The evidence shows that a 70-year-old's eyes can take nine seconds to recover from glare, compared with about one second for a teenager. Nine seconds is a very long time to be effectively blinded while driving at any speed, let alone at national speed limits on a country lane.

However, we should also be guided by the data on collisions. The Department for Transport's records show that the number of road traffic accidents in which dazzling headlights were recorded as a contributory factor has not risen sharply in recent years; the figures fluctuate from year to year, but they do not indicate a dramatic upward trend. However, although the statistical picture does not suggest that glare is causing more crashes, it does confirm what drivers have been telling all of us: that glare is making people feel less safe, which in itself is a serious issue.

We know that several factors contribute to glare. Misalignment of headlights is one of the most common. Of the 32.4 million MOT tests carried out in 2022 on cars and light vehicles, 1.6 million vehicles—1.6 million!—failed because their headlights were misaligned. Even a small upward tilt can make a big difference to the intensity of glare experienced by other road users.

Newer lighting technologies also play a role. LED headlamps, which are now fitted to most modern vehicles, produce a whiter and more focused beam than traditional halogen bulbs. The human eye reacts differently to such light and although LEDs improve visibility for the driver using them, they can cause real discomfort for oncoming traffic.

I also want to raise a related concern about the glare from powerful bicycle and personal lights. Many drivers and pedestrians now report being dazzled by high-intensity LED lights that are poorly aligned or excessively bright. Some of these lights are designed for off-road use, yet they are now being used on busy streets and in shared spaces, creating unnecessary discomfort and danger for everyone else on the road. Some cyclists and runners even wear head-mounted lamps, which can shine directly into the eyes of other road-users.

The issue is not about stopping people being seen; clearly, visibility is vital. However, it is about balance and consideration. It might be time for the Government and the British Standards Institute to consider introducing clear standards for all lights used on the public highway, whether on a car, a bike or a person, to ensure that they are properly focused, safe and considerate to others.

Of course, we also have the problem of illegal retrofitting—drivers replacing their halogen bulbs with cheap LED kits that are not compatible with their vehicle's design. These conversions are not road-legal; they fail the MOT test and make glare far worse. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency has increased surveillance to tackle this, but more needs to be done to stop the sale of unsafe aftermarket products online. The Government have said that research into that is under way, but it was first announced by the previous Conservative Administration in May 2024.

The research, commissioned by the Department for Transport and undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory, was meant to include real-world testing to examine how different lighting technologies, vehicle designs and driver characteristics affect glare. However, here we are more than a year later and the findings have still not been published. I ask the Minister directly: when will the research be released and will the full findings be made public? Until that happens, drivers will rightly question whether the issue is being taken seriously enough.

It is also worth recognising the international progress made under the previous Government. They raised the issue of dazzling headlights with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which oversees global vehicle standards. In April 2023, that body agreed to tighten rules on headlamps, aiming to make automatic headlight levelling mandatory for new vehicles. That technology ensures that when a car is heavily loaded with passengers or luggage, the headlights automatically adjust downwards to avoid dazzling oncoming drivers.

Those rules with tighter tolerances come into force in September 2027, which is welcome progress. But it only applies to new vehicles; millions of older cars will remain on our roads for years and decades to come. We should be asking what more can be done to mitigate glare in the existing fleet of vehicles—whether that is tougher and better MOT checks, awareness campaigns, proper headlight alignment or encouraging wider adoption of adaptive headlight systems that dip automatically when other vehicles approach.

A lot of evidence has been put out and it has been a good debate. The issue is about balance: making sure that headlights are bright enough to see, but not so bright that they blind. It is also about fairness—ensuring that drivers of all ages in all types of vehicles can travel confidently and safely, whether it is noon or night.

5.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Simon Lightwood): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mrs Harris. I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) on securing this debate about the potential merits of a new standard for headlight glare. I am sure that it will have not gone unnoticed that the UK has some of the safest roads in the world. But the effect of every death or injury on our roads is devastating for the individuals and families involved.

I make it clear that this Government treat road safety seriously and are committed to reducing the number of those killed and injured on our roads. The Department is working to develop its road safety strategy, which will include a broad range of policies, and will set out more detail in due course. More widely, the Department recognises the importance of the road network to many people's lives and to the economy. But we know that not everyone shares the same positive experience. Glare from headlamps is a perennial issue, as there is a compromise between providing illumination with sufficient intensity and distance to enable drivers to see and anticipate potential hazards, and the propensity to cause glare for other road users.

To strike the right balance, all vehicle headlamps are designed and tested to follow international standards developed under the United Nations to ensure that they are bright enough to illuminate the road but do not

unduly affect the vision of other road users. Those standards define the beam pattern and include maximum and minimum light intensities. None the less, we know that lots of people raise concerns about headlamp glare, and we are told that some drivers, as has been mentioned, choose not to drive at night because of its effects. While police collision statistics do not indicate an increase in collisions caused by headlamp glare, the issue can lead to social isolation, which impacts on people's wellbeing and their ability to undertake everyday tasks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley highlighted the impact on older residents in particular. Obviously, we have an ageing population with increasing numbers of older drivers. As people age, their eyes become more susceptible to glare due to changes in the photobiology of their eye. Better vehicle technology such as power-assisted steering, automatic transmission and improved braking and parking aids have made the driver's task easier, and people tend to drive for longer before surrendering their licence. The number of adults more than 70 years old in England holding a full car licence has actually increased by more than 50% over the last 10 years.

Shockat Adam: I agree wholeheartedly that better cars mean that we are driving for longer, but does the Minister share my concern that the UK is the only country in Europe that allows people to hold a driving licence until the age of 70 without ever being required to take a sight test? Perhaps we need a sight test at initial licence application, at every 10-year renewal and at every three years from the age of 70 because we are driving for much longer.

Simon Lightwood: We will always keep all these considerations under review, but, as with anything, we will be evidence-led on the measures that we put in place, working with our international partners.

Road users will have experienced discomfort from headlamp glare when driving. From personal experience, I know that that is not pleasant. A few Members raised headlight aim, which is checked in an MOT once a year. During normal wear and tear, headlights can become out of alignment. The manual controls that many of us have to adjust our headlight focusing need to be changed if we have passengers in the back seats or luggage in the boot. Many Members I spoke to in advance of the debate did not know that, if they have luggage in their boot or people in the back seats, they should adjust their headlights. There is more education to be done there.

Over the years, the Department for Transport has raised the issue at the United Nations international expert group on vehicle lighting, and it was asked about the UK playing an international role. Following lengthy and significant negotiations, proposals to amend headlight aiming rules were agreed in April 2023, together with requirements for mandatory automatic headlamp levelling—a system that automatically recorrecs the aim of the headlights based on the loading of the vehicle, to go back to the issue of when passengers are in the back seats or there is luggage in the boot. Those new requirements are expected to take effect in September 2027, to permit sufficient time for vehicle manufacturers to redesign their products and adapt the manufacturing process. Once implemented, those tougher requirements will help alleviate the number of cases where road users feel dazzled by vehicle headlamps.

There is, however, still much to do and much that we do not know about the underlying causes. To address the lack of clear evidence into which factors are impacting on drivers, the Department for Transport commissioned independent research in 2024 to understand better the root causes of the glare. Over several months, researchers gathered real-world glare data when driving at night, using an instrumented vehicle and machine learning analysis tools to determine the main factors that influence glare. That work was recently completed, and the final report is due to be published in the next week.

As might be expected, the results indicated that road geometry, in combination with brightness, is a key factor in glare events. The second most important factor, however, was identified to be vehicle type, suggesting that certain vehicle characteristics may be contributing to problems of glare. Given the findings of this innovative and groundbreaking research, the Department plans further research examining a range of vehicle makes and models, aimed at identifying what vehicle design factors may be responsible for increased glare. That can then be used to generate proposals for amendments to the international vehicle lighting regulations at the United Nations.

Lauren Edwards: Given that SUVs, which are generally larger, higher cars and have LED lights, now make up more than half of new cars sold in the UK and demand is growing, does the Minister agree that it is critical that the Government address this issue urgently?

Simon Lightwood: I heed the comments of my hon. Friend. Again, it is important that we are evidence-led, hence the commissioning of further research to drill down on the cause and effect.

In parallel, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, which leads for the Department on market surveillance of vehicles and automotive components, has stepped up its activities to intercept the sale of illegal retrofit headlamp bulbs for on-road use, which we believe is one of the contributing factors. Anyone caught could face a fine of £1,000. The Department is also an active member of the Euro NCAP consumer information programme, which assesses a range of vehicle characteristics to determine a vehicle's safety rating. Work is under way to develop a new vision protocol for 2029, which is planned to include an assessment of vehicle lighting systems to ensure that they provide forward vision while minimising the risk of dazzle for some road users.

Much has already been achieved, but we have listened and we understand that more can and must be done. We will continue to develop the evidence and work domestically and with our international partners to help ensure that people feel able to drive at night without experiencing glare or dazzle.

5.25 pm

Peter Lamb: I am very grateful for the time that we have been given for this debate, and I am grateful to all the Members who have taken the time to come along and participate. I thank the Minister for his response. We look forward to the publication of the existing research into the issue and for the research due to begin shortly. I very much hope that it can be completed promptly.

[Peter Lamb]

It is recognised across the House that there is a need for action. There is support among Members, the public and the press to act. Politically, this is something of an open goal, readily available to the Government. We know from the figures that headlight glare poses a risk to life. It is putting real limits on people's freedom to go out and exercise or to go places at night. It is beyond time that we finally put an end to it by introducing a new standard, which I hope will be forthcoming on the basis of the research.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the potential merits of a new standard for vehicle headlight glare.

5.27 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 29 October 2025

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Post Office Capture Redress Scheme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Blair McDougall): Today I have launched the Capture redress scheme, which is now open for applications.

This represents a significant milestone in our commitment to provide redress for postmasters who suffered financial shortfalls due to the Capture software.

Following the independent investigation on Capture, the Government announced that we would be providing redress for affected postmasters. In June we set out our approach to redress, and I am pleased that today we are delivering on that commitment.

The experiences shared by affected postmasters have been invaluable in shaping the scheme that we launch today.

Who is eligible?

Postmasters who used the Capture software in their branch between 1992 and 2000 and suffered a financial shortfall as a result of the Capture software can apply. Applications are also open to those with legal authority to act on behalf of deceased postmasters or those who lack capacity to apply themselves.

This scheme is specifically for those without a criminal conviction related to Capture. If any convictions related to Capture are identified as unsafe and overturned by the courts, we remain committed to ensuring that appropriate redress is given.

Payments

As a demonstration of our commitment to swift action and to provide immediate support before the cases are assessed by an independent panel, eligible claimants will receive a preliminary payment of £10,000 upon confirmation of eligibility.

Once eligibility is confirmed, an independent panel will assess all the evidence provided, taking a holistic view, and decide upon an appropriate award. The award will be based on a banding model ranging from £10,000 to £300,000, reflecting both financial and personal impacts. The preliminary payment will reflect the lowest band and where, following assessment, a postmaster has been awarded a higher band, this amount will be topped up.

In exceptional cases, where circumstances are particularly severe and supported by detailed evidence, the panel may consider an award exceeding the £300,000 upper band limit.

All awards will be exempt from income tax, capital gains tax and inheritance tax. They will also be exempt from national insurance contributions and, where applicable, corporation tax, and will be disregarded for the purposes of means-tested benefits, including universal credit and housing benefit.

How to apply

As previously set out, we are launching the scheme starting with a phased roll-out for an initial group of 150 claimants. This approach will allow us to test and

refine the process. Applications for phase 1 can be made via an online form. Full guidance and application details are published on gov.uk.

Any lessons from the first phase will inform any refinements needed ahead of wider roll-out in phase 2, which will launch swiftly after completion of phase 1. Ipsos, an independent research agency, will be delivering an evaluation to inform this. Should we enhance any payment aspects of the scheme following phase 1, these improvements will be applied retrospectively to early participants.

Appeals and legal support

Claimants who, following assessment of their applications, are found ineligible can request an independent review of this decision.

Additionally, claimants have the right to appeal the award offered in certain circumstances where there is new evidence, procedural error or material error. If appeal grounds are met, the award may be amended following a review by the scheme's independent panel chair.

We encourage all claimants to seek legal representation. The Government have published a legal cost framework that law firms can sign up to. The framework will ensure that postmasters can seek legal representation from the firms listed in the framework without having to pay legal fees. The Government will pay these legal fees directly as part of the scheme.

We strongly advise that postmasters check that a legal representative is content to operate within the terms of the cost framework to avoid being charged.

Today we deliver on our commitment to provide redress for those negatively affected by the Capture software.

[HCWS1000]

UK Export Finance Contingent Liability: Jaguar Land Rover

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Chris McDonald): A departmental minute is being laid before Parliament today setting out the particulars of a new contingent liability associated with Jaguar Land Rover.

It is normal practice, when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is no specific statutory authority, for the Minister concerned to present a departmental minute to Parliament giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

Given the particular urgency of the Jaguar Land Rover financing requirement, particularly in order to provide urgent support to members of its supply chain, it is regrettable that we were unable to provide the House with the normal period for consideration prior to the guarantee being entered into. Due to an administrative error, it is also regrettable that we were not able to provide the House with a departmental minute with the previous WMS on this matter. We are rectifying that today.

JLR requested that UKEF provides its export development guarantee product to a commercial loan for working capital of £1.5 billion, repayable over five years, to help it manage the impact of the recent cyberattack on its export business and wider operations. UKEF had

existing exposure to JLR and providing this additional support fell outside UKEF's normal underwriting criteria. If this liability is called, provision for any payment will be sought through the normal supply procedure.

[HCWS1003]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Clean Energy and Climate Action Plans

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): Today, I am making a statement on the Government's approach to meeting our carbon budgets, and the benefits this brings to the British public and industry—delivering growth, increasing energy security and lowering bills. I am proud of the progress the UK has made to date, but further action is needed to build on that success and fully embrace the opportunities clean energy and climate action present for our country.

We are publishing the carbon budget and growth delivery plan, which sets out how we will meet our targets while driving economic opportunity and delivering for those across the UK.

We are also publishing the government response to the Climate Change Committee's 2025 progress report in reducing emissions. This responds to the points that the CCC raised and sets out key Government achievements in the past year.

Alongside this, we are publishing an investor prospectus, which signposts the opportunities for companies and investors that will drive clean economic growth.

Finally, we are also publishing the methane action plan. This is forward looking and action-focused, detailing the key methane abating policies we have developed as part of our carbon budgets, alongside highlighting progress the UK has made so far.

Together, these publications demonstrate the rapid progress we are making towards our mission to become a clean energy superpower, showcasing the breadth of action across Government. We will grow our economy and create good jobs, while improving our nature and biodiversity. These plans will deliver a wide range of economic and societal benefits, protecting our country for the long term and delivering immediate benefits for households:

Energy security

This government is taking back control by investing in homegrown clean power to protect the British people. Great British Energy, our publicly owned clean energy company, has kicked off its first projects—putting solar panels on around 250 schools, around 260 NHS sites and 15 military sites to cut their bills and save money that can be reinvested in frontline services. We are also ushering in a new golden age of nuclear. In July, a final investment decision was taken to build Sizewell C in Suffolk with £14.2 billion funding allocated for this Parliament, as well as investment in nuclear fusion and over £2.5 billion for small modular reactors.

Jobs and growth

Clean energy and climate action will create new businesses, attract huge levels of investment into the UK, and create highly skilled, well paid job opportunities across the country. Our recently published clean energy jobs plan sets out how Government, industry and trade unions will work together to recruit the workers needed for our mission and ensure people across Britain can benefit from the good jobs with high wages that clean energy brings. For too long the competitiveness of British industry has been held back by the high cost of electricity. In the industrial strategy, we announced additional support for 7,000 energy intensive

firms through the British industrial competitiveness scheme, which will reduce electricity costs by up to £40 per megawatt hour. These reforms complement the Government clean power 2030 target, which is the only way to bring down bills for good by ending the UK's dependency on volatile fossil fuel markets.

Improved quality of life

From warmer homes to cleaner air to more affordable travel, clean energy and climate action will improve the lives of people across the UK. We will shortly publish our warm homes plan, kicking off Britain's biggest programme of home upgrades in generations. This will be backed by £13.2 billion of public investment to upgrade up to 5 million homes over this Parliament to lower bills and tackle fuel poverty. Meanwhile, the electric car grant, launched in July, is making EVs cheaper by offering discounts of up to £3,750 on eligible models. This complements wider efforts to make electric vehicle charging easier, fairer and more accessible for all.

Protecting our natural world

We must address the climate and nature crisis together. That is why we are supporting farmers with up to £2.7 billion per year of funding for farming and nature recovery which includes funding for nature schemes such as tree planting and peatland restoration. In addition, the Government are investing £816 million in our tree planting programme through to 2030. By 2030, we will also invest £85 million to bring back our wild peatland.

We have moved at speed on our mission over the last 16 months, but we have much further to go to address the long-term challenges we face as a country and bring the benefits to families and businesses as quickly as we can.

This Government will keep fighting to seize the opportunities that clean energy and climate action offer, acting to protect the British people now and for generations to come.

[HCWS1004]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Extending the Right to Work Scheme: Consultation

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (Alex Norris): The Government focus is on restoring order, control and fairness to the UK immigration and asylum system, bringing down net migration and promoting economic growth. The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill creates a range of new measures to strengthen UK border security. The immigration White Paper, "Restoring control over the immigration system", presented to Parliament in May, sets out the planned reforms to legal migration. A core principle behind our approach is that the rules must be respected and enforced.

I am launching a consultation on extending the employers and businesses within scope of the legal requirement to carry out checks on workers and prevent illegal working. A copy of the consultation will be placed in the Library of each House, and it will also be available on gov.uk.

It remains a criminal offence for migrants to work illegally in the UK. However, modern labour market models are becoming more attractive to illegal workers due to the perceived lack of consequences for working without permission. Illegal working acts as a pull factor to the UK for irregular migration and is inextricably linked to low or no pay, as well as indicators of modern slavery such as inhumane working hours or conditions.

Legislation setting out employer responsibilities to prevent illegal working has been in place since 1997. Since 2008, employers have been required to carry out prescribed right to work checks on all employees regardless of a person's nationality prior to the start of employment: the right to work scheme. However, this scheme only applies to individuals classified as an "employee".

The risks associated with this long-standing, narrow scope have been brought into sharp focus by developments in the modern labour market. There are whole sectors where businesses can engage workers without the legal responsibility to complete a right to work check, for example agency workers and casual contract arrangements in the gig economy.

Therefore, through changes being made by the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, the Government are extending the scope of employers and businesses required to carry out checks on their workers and prevent illegal working. This will ensure that those who engage individuals as casual or temporary workers under a worker's contract, individual subcontractors and online matching services who provide details of service providers to customers will all be required to carry out right to work checks. This safeguard will ensure that businesses acting lawfully will not be undercut on labour costs by those who exploit the system.

The Government are committed to supporting employers in preparing for this change and adapting their processes to ensure compliance.

The consultation seeks views on how the measure will be enforced, shaping the guidance and statutory codes of practice that will be published when the regulatory changes are commenced. The consultation provides an opportunity to further develop understanding of the recruitment and employment practices in the labour market.

The consultation will run for six weeks, closing at 11.59 pm on 10 December 2025. The Government will publish its response thereafter, and will finalise the guidance and amend the statutory codes of practice through secondary legislation.

[HCWS1001]

JUSTICE

Whiplash Reform Programme: Post-Implementation Review and Call for Evidence

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Sarah Sackman): I would like to inform the House that today we are launching a post-implementation review of the whiplash reform programme.

The review will assess the measures introduced in part 1 of the Civil Liability Act 2018. This includes the statutory definition of a whiplash injury, the fixed tariff of damages for whiplash injuries where the duration of the injury, or injuries, does not exceed two years, and the ban on seeking or offering to settle a whiplash claim without medical evidence.

The review will also consider the supporting secondary legislative change to increase the small claims track limit from £1,000 to £5,000 for road traffic accident-related personal injury claims. The impact and effectiveness of the industry owned and operated official injury claim service, introduced to help claimants affected by the reforms, will also be assessed.

To inform the review, we are launching a stakeholder call for evidence today to gather expert opinion, data and evidence on the impact and effectiveness of the whiplash reforms. This call for evidence will run for eight weeks and will close on 22 December 2025.

The responses to the call for evidence will provide vital insight into the effectiveness of the measures in achieving their intended aims. They will be considered alongside data provided by operational partners and other Government Departments to inform the final assessment of the reforms.

We plan to publish the post-implementation review of the WRP in spring 2026.

[HCWS1002]

Petitions

Wednesday 29 October 2025

OBSERVATIONS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Protection of primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders

The petition of residents of Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk,

Declares that wild goats have been roaming Langholm Moor and Newcastleton Hill for hundreds of years and play an important part in the biodiversity and natural history of the Scottish Borders; further declares that, despite this, Oxygen Conservation who own the land that they roam have started to cull this ancient animal without any consideration to the historical and emotional significance they carry for the local community; and notes that over 4,300 people have signed a similar petition to the Scottish Parliament on this issue.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make representations to the Scottish Government on their behalf, to encourage them to stop the cull of wild goats on Langholm Moor and Newcastleton Hill and ensure the survival of this ancient animal in the Scottish Borders by granting them national protected status.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by John Lamont, *Official Report*, 29 April 2025; Vol. 766, c. 299.]

[P003064]

Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh):

The protection of primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders is a devolved matter. As such, it is for the Scottish Government and their agencies to set their own priorities for the management of wild goat species in the Scottish Borders.

TRANSPORT

Ilkeston Market Place

The petition of Loraine Wilson, the family and friends of Samuel Wilson and residents of Ilkeston,

Declares that Ilkeston market place is insufficiently pedestrianised and that new anti-vehicle measures should be put in place to enhance public safety.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to call on relevant authorities and key partners to strengthen pedestrianisation measures on Ilkeston market place, and that the petitioners remain informed as to actions taken to achieve this goal.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Adam Thompson, *Official Report*, 13 October 2025; Vol. 773, c. 173.]

[P003116]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Simon Lightwood):

The Government are grateful for your petition regarding pedestrianisation and public safety at Ilkeston marketplace, recognise the strength of feeling within the local community, and understand their concerns about ensuring that public spaces are safe and accessible for all following the tragic incident involving Samuel Wilson.

The Department for Transport is committed to supporting local authorities in their efforts to improve road safety, including for pedestrians.

Responsibility for traffic management and the implementation of pedestrianisation measures on local roads rests with the relevant local authority—in this case, Derbyshire county council.

The Government view is that these authorities are best placed to assess local needs and determine appropriate interventions.

The Department for Transport provides good practice guidance through documents such as the traffic signs manual and the manual for streets, which prioritises consideration of pedestrian needs.

The Government commend the Member for Erewash (Adam Thompson) for bringing this important issue to the attention of the House of Commons and the Government. We hope that Derbyshire county council will engage constructively with the Member and local residents to discuss their concerns and explore appropriate solutions.

Safety of the A500 Audley slip road

The petition of residents of the constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme,

Declares that the A500 Audley slip road, where it crosses Alsagers Road, is not currently fit for purpose and is not safe for local residents, drivers or pedestrians; further, recognises that if action was taken by Staffordshire county council and National Highways to make it safe, there would be fewer accidents and near-misses and less confusion; declares that there are many ways through which safety could be improved, such as by improving signage, such as including a stop sign, implementing more pedestrian safety measures, introducing traffic lights, reducing speed limits, improving the road layout design, introducing restrictions on re-joining the A500, reducing surrounding vegetation to allow for greater visibility, placing rumble strips on the slip road, improving visibility by redesigning the crash barriers, introducing cameras or other deterrents for dangerous driving, improving road markings, introducing changes to Junction 16 so lorries are not led onto that section of the A500, and introducing yellow lines as a warning for drivers to slow down as they approach the slip road; and further notes that a corresponding online petition on this issue has received a separate 260 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to encourage Staffordshire county council and National Highways to take immediate action to ensure that the A500 Audley slip road is made safer for local residents, drivers and pedestrians.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Adam Jogee, *Official Report*, 14 October 2025; Vol. 773, c. 344.]

[P003118]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood):

The Government treat road safety seriously and are committed to reducing the numbers of those killed and injured on our roads.

After being made aware by the local parish council and the police of the recent increase in collisions on the A500 Audley slip road, National Highways has been seeking to determine the underlying causes. This includes carrying out a site visit and engaging with the police to better understand the nature of the recent incidents.

No clear causation factor has been identified. However, National Highways has progressed the design and installation of upgraded signage to reinforce the need

for drivers to give way at the top of the slip road. National Highways is also looking to install temporary signage in the interim to increase road user awareness. National Highways will continue to engage with local residents and parliamentarians regarding this matter, to ensure that they are kept up to date about the planned improvements.

The Government commend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jogee) for bringing this important issue to the attention of the House of Commons and the Government. We hope that Staffordshire county council will engage constructively with the Member, local residents and National Highways to discuss the concerns and explore appropriate solutions.

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