

Thursday
25 June 2026

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Thursday 25 June 2026

The following abbreviations are used to show a Member's party affiliation:

Abbreviation	Affiliation
Alliance	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
Con	Conservative Party
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
Green	Green Party of England and Wales
Ind	Independent*
Lab	Labour Party
Lab/Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
PC	Plaid Cymru
Reform	Reform UK
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SNP	Scottish National Party
TUV	Traditional Unionist Voice
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

*The term “Independent” may denote—

Members who have been elected as Independent candidates without affiliation to a political party; or

Members who have been elected after standing for a political party but no longer have the party Whip in the House of Commons.

House of Commons

Thursday 25 June 2026

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

Civil Service Pension Scheme

1. **Gregory Stafford** (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Capita on the performance of civil service pension scheme administration. [900589]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Satvir Kaur): I met Capita's senior leadership last Wednesday, and told them directly that their operational failures, missed targets and escalating backlog are completely unacceptable. The Cabinet Office continues to monitor performance daily to hold Capita to account robustly. Capita has until the end of June to restore the service to contractual levels.

Gregory Stafford: As the Minister will know, behind every statistic and delayed case is a pensioner who is not receiving their pension after years of public service. I have constituents whose cases have been outstanding for months, including one from Farnham whose case took nine months to resolve. The end-of-June deadline is now effectively upon us. Does the Minister genuinely believe that Capita will make that deadline? If not, what sanctions or remedial action will she pursue to resolve the issue?

Satvir Kaur: The hon. Gentleman is completely right: those who have given a lifetime of service expect and deserve better. The Cabinet Office has held Capita to account robustly, using all commercial levers. Capita has a strict end-of-June deadline. If it fails to meet that deadline, we will consider all options. With your agreement, Mr Speaker, the Paymaster General intends to make a statement to the House about this issue at the end of the month.

Dame Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): My constituent's father, who worked all his life in public service, died tragically a year ago. Capita is withholding from his family the provision that he thought would make them secure. Another constituent was having his pension paid until Capita took over, and now he is receiving nothing. It is a tragic shambles, but

the problem is not rocket science; it is the IT system. If Capita cannot make this work in the time that it has already had, it should surely not be given the chance to do it any longer, and perhaps its other Government contracts should be reconsidered.

Satvir Kaur: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the situation is unacceptable. If she contacts me about her constituents' cases, I will be more than happy to take them up. As I have said, Capita has a strict deadline at the end of June. The Government have been robust in holding it to account. We will use all our commercial levers, and all options will be considered. After June, and with Mr Speaker's permission, my colleague the Paymaster General intends make a statement to the House. As with the Royal Mail contract, we will not hesitate to hold Capita to account and let it feel the consequences of its actions.

UK-EU Relations

3. **Martin Rhodes** (Glasgow North) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve relations with the EU. [900596]

11. **Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the future EU-UK relationship. [900608]

15. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester Withington) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve relations with the EU. [900613]

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): The Government held the first-ever UK-EU summit last year, where we announced a new common understanding that is good for bills, for borders and for jobs. We look forward to going further at the next UK-EU summit, which will be held at the earliest possible opportunity.

Martin Rhodes: Improving our relationship with the EU is about trade barriers, but it is also about standards. Many UK companies already follow the EU's corporate sustainability due diligence directive in order to trade with our biggest external market. Without alignment, we risk becoming a dumping ground for unethically sourced products while responsible UK companies are undercut by less responsible enterprises. What conversations has the Minister had with Cabinet colleagues about aligning our human rights and environmental due diligence regime with that of the EU, to protect UK companies that do the right thing?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The UK supports the EU's efforts to promote sustainable and responsible corporate behaviour within global value chains. We will continue to review the impact of measures taken by the EU and other countries, including, as my hon. Friend suggested, to see what lessons can be drawn from other jurisdictions to inform the UK's approach.

Rebecca Smith: I was recently in Washington DC. On several occasions, our American counterparts raised concerns about the future of the EU-UK relationship and realignment. What discussions has the Paymaster General had with his US counterparts, as well as with EU counterparts?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am very pleased with the economic deal with the United States that this Government have delivered and with the advantages that it brings, particularly for our automotive sector, including the jobs saved at Jaguar Land Rover. It is perfectly possible, as the Government are demonstrating, to sign free trade and economic deals around the world while having a close relationship with the EU.

Jeff Smith: Following the agreement at the May 2025 summit to establish a UK-EU youth experience scheme, can the Minister update the House on the progress of negotiations on the scheme and confirm that it remains a Government priority?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I certainly can. Negotiations have been proceeding very well. I look forward to making the case for those opportunities to work, travel and study for young people—I think it is very exciting.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): The negotiations for the new relationship with the EU have been the body of the Minister's work, so what pitch will he make to the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) about how important it is that he carries on doing this work, or will he give up so that he does not have to be involved in the right hon. Member's flip-flopping?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am very proud of the Government's work over the past two years. I do not think there is any doubt at all that the UK-EU relationship is in a significantly better place today than when we came into office. I look forward to making the case for a deal that will be good for jobs and for securing our borders.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Mike Wood (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): The Minister has submitted in answers to written questions that there will be no substantive vote in this House on UK association to Erasmus+, even though the Government plan to tie us into a multi-year programme without saying what it will cost after the first year. The Defence Secretary resigned because the Chancellor will not provide the funding we need for our defence, but apparently money is no object when it comes to this programme. Will the Minister finally tell us the Government's own central estimate for the programme, or must the public rely on press reports of an £8 billion bill?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We have re-accession to Erasmus+ from next year at a cost of £570 million, after I negotiated a 30% discount. After 10 months, there is a review clause so that we can balance participation versus cost. I have looked after every penny in this negotiation, and I have not signed up to things that do not deliver value for money. I am quite happy to explain it to the shadow Minister, rather than him just reading about it in the newspapers.

Mike Wood: I think everybody will have heard that the Minister has again refused to give any indication as to what he thinks would be an acceptable bill.

The Government used the cover of the Prime Minister's resignation on Monday to sneak out a written ministerial statement to say that the Turing scheme was being cancelled—a good day to bury bad news. Turing reached 43,000 UK students and provided opportunities in 153 countries for £105 million. Six of the 10 most popular destinations were outside Europe. Erasmus+ will send about half as many UK students abroad as it will bring in, and for more than five times the cost. Given all that, and the Minister's unwillingness to indicate what the long-term budget will be, how can he possibly be confident that this programme provides five times the value of the scheme that it apparently replaces?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Because it has a 10-month review clause to ensure that it is delivering value for money. Under Erasmus+, there are still opportunities to go around the world. I say quite candidly to the hon. Gentleman that he should look very carefully at all the different opportunities under Erasmus+. It is not just about traditional studies. People studying vocational qualifications go overseas as well, such as those studying sport coaching. There is a range of opportunities that are not available under Turing. If the Conservatives are seriously now setting their face against these opportunities for young people, best of luck to them.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): This week marked 10 years since the EU referendum vote, and the world has changed since then, with an unreliable Trump in the White House and Putin bombing schools in Ukraine. Labour's red lines are holding Britain back. They are hurting the British people and playing into the hands of those who seek to divide us. It was made clear to me in Brussels last month that the ball is in the UK's court and that there is real openness to Liberal Democrat plans for a sensible, pragmatic and deliverable plan for closer working. Will the Paymaster General commit to urging the new Prime Minister to drop Labour's red lines and back Lib Dem plans for a new UK-EU growth and defence partnership to make the UK safer, stronger and richer?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We have been building a growth and defence partnership, and we do not have to move the red lines to do it; it is what I have been doing every single week with the democratic mandate we have from 2024. The hon. Lady makes the argument for a customs union. This Government have managed to secure free trade deals with India and the Gulf Co-operation Council and an economic deal with the United States. Perhaps she might want to send her message to workers at Jaguar Land Rover, whose jobs have relied on the Government's trade negotiation.

Natural Disasters: Community Resilience

4. **Andrew George** (St Ives) (LD): What steps he is taking through national policy to help improve the resilience of communities affected by natural disasters.

[900598]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Dame Angela Eagle): Through our resilience action plan, we are driving a whole-of-society approach to resilience, which seeks to integrate the voluntary, community and faith sectors

into planning and strengthening the resilience of our critical national infrastructure. The Government are also committed to raising public awareness, with practical advice through gov.uk/prepare.

Andrew George: Nearly six months ago, my west Cornwall and Isles of Scilly constituency bore the brunt of Storm Goretti, which caused death and destruction across the area. Will Ministers work with local MPs in Cornwall and on the Isles of Scilly to review resilience plans to improve co-ordination on the resilience of nationally regulated utilities and telecom providers, including by reviewing the current timetable for the January 2027 digital switchover?

Dame Angela Eagle: I recognise that the hon. Gentleman's constituents have concerns, as do the constituents of other Cornish Members of Parliament who have talked to me. Hundreds were left without telecom services for days after Storm Goretti, which is clearly unacceptable. It is important that we work with telecoms operators and power suppliers to strengthen comms resilience across Cornwall. I will take a close look at that.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): There is awful news from Venezuela this morning after an earthquake there. Has the Minister had the opportunity to speak to her Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ministerial counterpart about support for that country at this difficult time?

Dame Angela Eagle: The overnight news of the earthquake in Venezuela, which has caused a lot of damage, is very concerning. I know that my colleagues in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office stand ready, as do we, to help with any recovery that the people of Venezuela may need, particularly in terms of rescue at this stage.

National Resilience

5. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to improve national resilience. [900602]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Dame Angela Eagle): We are delivering our resilience action plan to strengthen national resilience, and we are building a system in which Government, business and society work together to anticipate and mitigate the risks facing our country.

Kerry McCarthy: I am sure that I am not the only one who feels that they are not designed to withstand the current heat—and neither are many of our public buildings and infrastructure. May I urge the Minister to make sure, while also talking to colleagues in other Departments, that we factor in climate resilience when we plan future infrastructure and funding for housing, schools and hospitals?

Dame Angela Eagle: The national risk register includes the effects of climate change. Although the Government are working internationally on mitigation, it is also important that adaptation takes centre stage when the kinds of investment decisions my hon. Friend mentions are made. I assure her that the Government are across that.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Asbestos is widespread in public infrastructure. Asbestos-related diseases are the No. 1 cause of occupational death, with 5,000 a year—I lost my own father nearly 10 years ago. The right hon. Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms), now the Minister for Social Security and Disability, said just four years ago that the UK needed to move faster to align to standards in the EU that are now significantly higher. I raise this matter because I would like the UK to improve its asbestos resilience, which is critical if we are to save lives.

Dame Angela Eagle: I certainly empathise and sympathise with the right hon. Gentleman's loss. The loss of a parent in similar circumstances has been felt in many other households because of the toll taken by the legacy of asbestos on our public buildings and our buildings generally—not least this one. I take the point that he has made. We always need to be looking at how we can improve our response to mitigate the very real threat that the remaining asbestos in our buildings leaves people dealing with.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Having spoken to ambassadors from various nations, such as the Scandinavian and Baltic states, as well as to the high commissioner of Canada, I understand that so many of these countries are now planning for dual-use infrastructure, for instance by expanding the width of motorways so that they can be considered for use by military aircraft in future conflict. Will the Minister update the House on our thinking in that domain?

Dame Angela Eagle: Dual-use infrastructure is an important part of how we do planning, and my hon. Friend is right that we have to be much smarter and more forward thinking than perhaps has been the case, knowing that we face a very volatile and rapidly changing series of threats ahead.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): Water resilience is very much on people's minds this week. When a canal embankment collapsed in Whitchurch in my constituency just before Christmas, I found out that the canal network is used for drinking water, and that millions of gallons of drinking water will be being pumped over the breach every single day until it is repaired. Canal embankments are often 200 years old and largely made of sand, yet they are critical national infrastructure. Is the Minister satisfied that the Government are doing enough to retain the canal network in a safe state, not only to keep people safe but to protect our water resilience?

Dame Angela Eagle: When I was first in government in 1997, I discovered that I was the Minister for Canals, which was a particularly enjoyable part of the brief, so I understand what the hon. Lady is saying. My previous Department, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, does a lot on this issue, so I will contact the Water Minister. We can liaise, and I will be in touch with the hon. Lady.

Civil Service Pension Scheme: Insourcing

6. **Euan Stainbank** (Falkirk) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of insourcing the civil service pension scheme. [900603]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Satvir Kaur): I thank my hon. Friend for his engagement on this issue, which we have spoken about several times; he is a powerful advocate for his constituents. He will understand that we are currently prioritising and focusing on immediate service recovery. If Capita fails to restore core pension functions to contractual levels by the end of June, we will consider all available options to rectify the situation. We are preparing and planning for all eventualities.

Euan Stainbank: Capita has been fined millions for a multitude of past failures and has now failed to handle civil service pensions on a contract that the Tories signed off in November 2023, replacing MyCSP, which faced similar challenges. That has been to the significant detriment of many of my constituents, who are still waiting for payment—one is retired after receiving lifesaving surgery last year, and another is still waiting for payment 11 months on from being bereaved after the death of his wife. Will the Minister—I hope that the Government can answer this closer to the end of June—directly address Capita's failure, end the contract and insource the civil service pension scheme?

Satvir Kaur: My hon. Friend is right to highlight that outsourcing by default does not work, and I agree with his assessment of Capita's unacceptable failures. Our priority remains supporting those impacted and achieving full service recovery. As I mentioned, if Capita fails to deliver on that by the end of June, all options will be considered. Subject to your agreement, Mr Speaker, my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General intends to make a statement to the House on the Government's next steps.

Public Procurement: SMEs

7. **Harpreet Uppal** (Huddersfield) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help support small and medium-sized businesses through reforms to public procurement. [900604]

14. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon and Consett) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help support small and medium-sized businesses through reforms to public procurement. [900612]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Ward): This Government are determined to ensure that public procurement backs small and medium-sized businesses. That is why we have strengthened late payment rules, have set ambitious targets for all Departments to spend more with small and medium-sized enterprises—totalling £7 billion by 2028—and are simplifying the entire system to ensure that SMEs get a fairer crack. We are working with the Federation of Small Businesses on this, and there is much more to come.

Harpreet Uppal: This week I welcomed Antich & Sons to Parliament. It is a family-owned textiles company that, for the past decade, has been innovating by using traditional local skills and methods to develop 3D weaving techniques and provide cutting-edge advanced material solutions. Given how that aligns with the industrial strategy and the northern growth strategy, what are this Government doing to help companies like Antich & Sons access procurement processes?

Chris Ward: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight small businesses like the one in her constituency. As I announced in March, small businesses will now receive just over £7 billion a year from government procurement, as a result of reforms that we have put in place. That will support the industrial strategy that she mentioned. It will mean more money, jobs and opportunities in local communities—a lot done, and a lot more to do in this space.

Liz Twist: Dellner Glass Solutions, one of the SMEs in my constituency of Blaydon and Consett, has been manufacturing aluminium and glass fabrications for over 50 years. It supplies window and door systems to the UK's world-leading bus manufacturing market. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that reforms to public procurement support the growth of companies like Dellner Glass Solutions across the UK bus manufacturing supply chain?

Chris Ward: A number of colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk (Euan Stainbank), have raised this subject several times with me, and I am working with Department for Transport colleagues to see what more we can do to support British manufacturers, but we are already acting. We have announced a 10-year pipeline with over £70 million of funding for zero emission buses. We are also working on redefining social value to ensure that it does more to support local communities and local jobs. That should help companies like Dellner Glass Solutions stand out when it comes to public procurement.

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): Will the Minister confirm whether these reforms will apply to the provision of services to prisons? This year, the Ministry of Justice will commission 25% fewer hours of education and training in our prisons, not because of a cut in the budget, but because of an increase in the unit price. The Ministry of Justice requires providers to offer a very large minimum number of hours in order to bid for contracts. If he allowed small businesses to bid to provide education and training in just one prison, the Ministry would get a lot more value for money.

Chris Ward: I thank the hon. Member for that; it is a really good question. The reforms that we have introduced apply to all Departments, and the MOJ is obviously signed up to them. I have discussed this with the POA and a couple of other related organisations. If it is okay with him, I will ask colleagues in the Ministry of Justice about this and get back to him on the specifics.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): Public procurement must do more to support SMEs in Wokingham and across the UK who are doing their best to grow, despite what many see as a lack of help from the Government. In defence, only 5% of the procurement budget is allocated to SMEs. How will the Government change public procurement to benefit SMEs and the economy?

Chris Ward: The hon. Member is absolutely right that we need to do more to support SMEs, and that we need to use our procurement budget to do that. I have announced some of the steps that we have already taken. In fact, just last week, we announced new guidance, both to ensure that, in sectors such as steel and shipping,

more contracts go to British companies, and to help small and medium-sized businesses. That is just the start. We need to go much further—I am not challenging that at all—but we are taking big steps. In the last few years, we have come a long way, but hopefully we can go further.

Civil Service Jobs: Relocation

8. **Ms Julie Minns** (Carlisle) (Lab): What steps he has taken to support the relocation of civil service roles. [900605]

10. **Will Stone** (Swindon North) (Lab): What steps he has taken to support the relocation of civil service roles. [900607]

The Minister without Portfolio (Anna Turley): This Government are committed to delivering a truly national civil service, one that lives and breathes the communities that we represent across the UK. We have exceeded our target, having relocated 23,000 roles from London, and are now committed to over 50% of the senior civil service and our fast streamers being based outside London by 2030, so that our leadership is closer to the communities that we serve. We have also launched three new thematic campuses in Aberdeen, Manchester and the west midlands, building on the success of those in Sheffield, Leeds and Darlington. This work will drive a truly national civil service, and it will only continue.

Ms Minns: The Minister will know, because she represents a constituency not dissimilar from Carlisle, that our post-industrial towns and cities have ageing populations. In Carlisle, only 7% of the population is aged between 18 to 24, and the next smallest group is those aged 25 to 34. Will the Minister ensure that future civil service relocations give particular consideration to smaller cities and towns with ageing populations, so that we retain our young people, attract working-age populations, and support the long-term prosperity of those communities?

Anna Turley: I thank my hon. Friend for a really important question. I started my career as a civil servant, and I recommend that career to all young people; it is a truly brilliant career to start off in. We want those opportunities to be everywhere around the country, so we are working with all Departments to strengthen our presence in every English region, and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Smaller towns and cities will continue to support our talent pipelines and remain crucial to our overall national presence, which includes 2,000 civil servants based in Cumbria. Across the north-west, we are establishing greater opportunities and more career pathways. North-west bootcamps have supported over 200 local professionals into entry-level civil service roles, and over 4,000 roles have been relocated to the region since the beginning of our Places for Growth programme.

Will Stone: Following the fantastic opening of the indoor drone testing facility in Swindon, what backing is the Minister giving to the relocation of civil service and Government roles in order to support this centre?

Anna Turley: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in welcoming the opening of the Ministry of Defence indoor testing facility in Swindon; it is great news. He is

right that it is vital that the civil service opportunities that it provides are strategically located, partly through the relocation of roles, but it is also crucial to ensure that this fantastic facility harnesses the skills and talents of his constituents.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her answer. I am very supportive of the Government's tactic and policy. Back home in Northern Ireland, the relocation of civil service roles has been very important, but there is an issue that concerns me, and my constituents have asked me about it. Civil servants who are settled in, for example, Dundonald, outside Belfast, might then relocate to Londonderry or somewhere like Newry, many miles away, but they have a commitment to the communities they live in. Those who have permanent jobs and have been working somewhere for many years have children at school, a home and a mortgage, and a local social circle. Sometimes relocation is just not acceptable or even possible for them. Could the Minister indicate that there will be fair play for civil servants who have shown many years of commitment, that they will not have to move, and that there will be provision made for them?

Anna Turley: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point. We have to get the balance right. We have many fantastic civil servants embedded in their communities and delivering for them, which is great, but I am sure that he will agree with me on the importance of the opportunity that civil service roles offer to stimulate growth in regions across our nations. I am sure that he would support that. I look forward to continuing this discussion with him.

National Resilience Planning

9. **Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst** (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve cross-Government co-ordination on national resilience planning. [900606]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Dame Angela Eagle): We are driving a step change in national resilience through our resilience action plan. Central to that is our national security risk assessment, which embeds clear accountability for lead Government Departments across all risks. We are further enhancing this co-ordination by publishing updated guidance this year. That will ensure that every Department is fully equipped to deliver its responsibilities and works seamlessly across the resilience cycle to keep the country safe.

Dr Shastri-Hurst: Space has a crucial role to play in our national resilience. Responsibility for it cuts across Government Departments. With that in mind, and given the Cabinet Office's role in cross-Government co-ordination, can the Minister confirm when the National Space Council will next convene?

Mr Speaker: Oh my word!

Dame Angela Eagle: I will get back to the hon. Gentleman. I have to confess that I have not had my briefing on space yet.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I would just say to the Minister: live long and prosper. This heatwave may be considered as much man-made as naturally occurring. I am really concerned about the heat, not just in Westminster but in my constituency of Harlow. What are the Government doing to ensure that the country is resilient when it comes to heat? I know that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has had conversations about water safety, and what we can do to ensure the safety of young people, or others, who take risks in water because of the hot weather.

Dame Angela Eagle: I know that the extreme heat has extended even to Harlow, which has surprised some people; it indicates the nature of the threat. We have had a red alert. I will repeat the advice to drink plenty of fluids, and those who are travelling should take a lot of water with them, and be sensible and careful in these conditions. Clearly, water safety is an important issue. The National Fire Chiefs Council has issued good advice about water safety. If you are too hot, jumping into a very cold body of water is not a good idea, tempting though it may seem.

Lord Mandelson Humble Address: Government Response

12. **Rebecca Paul** (Reigate) (Con): What recent progress he has made on implementing the Humble Address agreed by this House on 4 February 2026. [900609]

Mr Speaker: I call Minister Jones.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Darren Jones): I see that the House has been waiting for me. I am starting to prepare myself for a quieter life, and it was nice to have the opportunity to start that this morning.

On 11 March and 1 June, the Government published two tranches of documents. Since the motion has passed, we have been in the House to discuss this matter on 11 occasions, including most recently on 3 June. The Government therefore consider themselves to have discharged their duties to this House in relation to the motion. The exception is the material withheld at the request of the Metropolitan police; we will publish that, once we have been informed that doing so is no longer prejudicial to the Met's criminal investigation.

Rebecca Paul: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that answer. Can he explain why his Department was apparently willing to appoint Mandelson as ambassador, and provide him with access to classified briefings, without conducting any security vetting, given that his close links with Russia and China were already public knowledge before his appointment?

Darren Jones: With permission, Mr Speaker, may I refer to my 11 previous statements that answered that question?

Mr Speaker: I call Alex Burghart, shadow Secretary of State.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I am sure that danger and excitement await the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister in whatever comes next. The Government have always maintained that they have withheld material from the Mandelson case only at the request of the Metropolitan police, but a fortnight ago, a *Daily Mail* journalist spoke to the Metropolitan police, who insist that they did not ask for a crucial series of messages to be withheld. Can the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister explain why the Metropolitan police and the Government are saying different things?

Darren Jones: It is not necessarily for me to give advice to the hon. Gentleman, but I would not always believe the reporting in the *Daily Mail*. On which documents the Metropolitan police have requested, as I have said repeatedly from the Dispatch Box, I have been advised not to detail or itemise those requests, but instead to refer to the categories of documentation requested, and I have spoken to that point on a number of occasions at the Dispatch Box. The House has asked questions previously about whether we could list the documents, and we have been advised that that would make the work of the Metropolitan police harder as they bring together their case, in terms of criminal consequences. As the hon. Gentleman knows—and he probably agrees with this—the Government do not want to do anything to jeopardise the Metropolitan police's criminal investigation, and we continue to hold that position.

Alex Burghart: Obviously the House does not want to do anything prejudicial to a case, but it appears that the Metropolitan police are saying that some documents could be released without that being prejudicial to the case. I know that things will soon move on, but the Humble Address will remain in force, even if there is a new Prime Minister. If there is a criminal trial—and even if there is not—it is likely that more information will be released. As this has been a particularly novel way of using and responding to a Humble Address, it is likely that there will be a Select Committee inquiry into how the process ran. Will the right hon. Gentleman give a commitment now, at the Dispatch Box, that there is no material that the Government have withheld that the Metropolitan police have not explicitly asked to be withheld?

Darren Jones: All the documentation that the Government hold has been published in the first two tranches, except for the documentation that the Metropolitan police have asked for, which we have given to them as part of their investigation. The only remaining documentation that will be published in future is therefore the documents that the Metropolitan police hold.

Public Procurement: UK Businesses

13. **Jayne Kirkham** (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to prioritise UK businesses in Government procurement. [900611]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Ward): This Labour Government believe that it matters where things are made, and who makes them. Last week, I published new guidance to ensure that the full weight of our £400 billion procurement budget

protects national security and backs British business. The guidance applies to four sectors initially—steel, shipbuilding, AI and energy infrastructure—and it will help secure our critical UK industries and boost growth across the country.

Jayne Kirkham: A&P Falmouth, now owned by Balaena, at Falmouth docks in my constituency, bid for a maintenance and repair contract for the Sir David Attenborough research vessel from UK Research and Innovation. Despite the company's experience—the vessel was built at its sister yard, up in Teesside—and a strong bid, it narrowly missed out. The contract went to a Danish shipyard, under post-Brexit Conservative procurement rules. Despite not employing people in the UK, the Danish shipyard was marked up on social value criteria. A&P Falmouth would have employed local apprentices to do the work on the ship. Will the Minister confirm that under the procurement rules that we are introducing, British shipyards will be prioritised for British work?

Chris Ward: My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. She has raised it with me previously, and she is a fantastic champion for her constituents. As she knows, I am working with the National Shipbuilding Office to bring forward the new rules. Shipbuilding is one of the areas that we are prioritising. Unfortunately, this procurement took place before the guidance came in, and it shows why the guidance is so necessary. It allows us to protect British national security and support shipyards, such as the one in her constituency. I reassure her constituents that the steps that the Government have taken will mean that more contracts, business and jobs come to constituencies like hers.

Topical Questions

T1. [900614] **Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Darren Jones): I begin by thanking my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for the dedicated work that he has undertaken since becoming leader of the Labour party. Following the crushing defeat that we experienced in 2019, he led our party to a landslide historic victory in 2024. Since coming into office, he has taken the right decisions to get our country back on track after 14 years of Conservative failure. NHS waiting lists have fallen by 400,000—the largest fall in 17 years. We have put an extra 3,000 neighbourhood police officers back on the beat, and we will lift 450,000 children out of poverty. I am proud to have served the Prime Minister as his Chief Secretary, and I know that my team and colleagues have been proud to serve him as well, and we wish his successor well.

Munira Wilson: I have heard from a number of constituents who worked for the civil service and have faced delays in getting their pension scheme payments, including a single mum who was forced to take early retirement due to a terminal cancer diagnosis. She told me that she just wanted to get her affairs in order for her children before she died. I have recently heard that her payments have started again, but that is not the case for

many other constituents. Will the Minister tell my constituents what he is doing to help them, especially those facing hardship?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Satvir Kaur): The hon. Lady is absolutely right that the situation is completely unacceptable. I offer my support to her and her constituents in any way that I can. When I met representatives from Capita last week, they said that they want to under-promise and over-deliver. Clearly Capita has failed badly at that, but it has until the end of June to ensure that its services are delivered at an acceptable level. If it fails at that, we will use all options available. We are holding it robustly to account. Capita initially promised that all death in service and ill health cases were resolved, but that is not the case, and I am happy to take up the cases the hon. Lady mentions.

T4. [900620] **Joe Powell** (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): I thank the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister for asking the Ethics and Integrity Commission to review lobbying, disclosure and access to Government. Does he agree that given that *The Guardian* has reported that the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) lobbied for changes in cryptocurrency policy that would massively benefit Reform's biggest donor and, in fact, his £5 million personal benefactor, any look at strengthening the rules should include a look at lobbying cases involving the Bank of England?

Mr Speaker: Mr Powell, have you informed the hon. Member that you intended to name him?

Joe Powell indicated assent.

Darren Jones: I wonder where the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) is? [*Interruption.*] Not in Clacton, I am told, Mr Speaker. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell) for his question, and his continued support for the Government's efforts to improve ethics and integrity in public life. The House knows that trust in politics is important, and that we have more work to do. That is why we have important rules about conflicts of interest, and why we must declare those conflicts of interest on the record, and then not lobby on behalf of donors or others who have sought to put money into our campaigns or other personal interests. The leader of Reform UK has said, "it's literally none of your business"

in answer to questions about the £5 million crypto-donation. I am afraid that it is in the interests of the public, and he needs to answer questions about it. If he is acting on behalf of donors and asking questions in return for money, there should be consequences.

Mr Speaker: We are still on topical questions, folks.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): This may be the last time I come up against the right hon. Gentleman during parliamentary questions. When we first faced each other nine months ago, I said that he was one of the most able performers in Government, and I still believe that to be the case. I think there will come a time when his party regrets the fact that he did not stand in this leadership contest. I think he would have lost—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are on topical questions! I cannot say that to one Member and not another. I love a love-in, but not now.

Alex Burghart: I was just trying to be nice, Mr Speaker. We will do it privately.

Given that we may have a new Prime Minister on 16 July, does the right hon. Gentleman think that that new Prime Minister should take questions in the House before he goes off for the summer break?

Mr Speaker: Boris didn't!

Darren Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind comments. He says that this might be our last time together at the Dispatch Box; I do not know where he is planning on going, but I hope to be back here in due course. He asks a very pertinent question. I know that any Prime Minister takes their responsibilities to the House seriously, and I am sure that the next Prime Minister will be at the Dispatch Box at the earliest opportunity.

Alex Burghart: I am very glad to be the one to break the news that the right hon. Gentleman wants to keep his current job and not move to another role.

This is a serious question. Does the right hon. Gentleman think it would be appropriate for the new Prime Minister to answer questions before the summer break? If so, will he make representations to the next Prime Minister?

Darren Jones: I understand the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question, and I am sure the new Prime Minister will agree with the sentiment. We are waiting for confirmation of the timetable for the Labour party's election of a new leader. The sitting dates of this House have already been confirmed, but I know the new Prime Minister will want to come to the Dispatch Box at the earliest opportunity.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I know the Minister is committed to supporting civil servants during relocation. I also know she is aware that there are employment inequalities in the civil service, in particular around promotion and pay. Will she say what more she is doing about this issue, and will she agree to meet me?

Satvir Kaur: of course I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss that matter. We will be launching the national school of government, which will ensure that we have a civil service fit for purpose, not only for the current challenges but for the challenges of the future.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): We will soon have our seventh Prime Minister in 10 years. My commiserations go to the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister, who I see has bowed out of the race gracefully—I am sure he has many irons in the fire.

The right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) is known to be committed to proportional representation. What plans does the Cabinet Office have to enable any new Prime Minister to move quickly on making our voting system fit for purpose—if he does not change his mind? Has that come up in access talks?

Darren Jones: I thank the hon. Lady for taking the opportunity to pursue further Liberal Democrat policies; she is quite right to do so. She will know of the constitutional principles that mean we cannot bind our successors. I am sure that whoever is in the relevant ministerial role will happily answer that question in due course.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): The Barnett formula, introduced in 1978, is often misunderstood, but it has delivered hugely for the constituents of Paisley and Renfrewshire South. In fact, since this Government were elected, the Barnett formula has seen the highest uplift in funding for the Scottish Government in the history of devolution. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Barnett formula is a vital mechanism to ensure that my constituents receive their fair share of public sector funding? Will he reassure them that it is here to stay?

Darren Jones: My hon. Friend is right. The Barnett formula plays an important role in ensuring fairness in public spending across all the nations of the United Kingdom. She is right to point out that we have given a record-breaking level of money to the Scottish Government, but it is the responsibility of the Scottish Government to spend that money effectively. People in her constituency and across Scotland have seen that the SNP has failed to spend that money wisely, and we should continue to hold it to account.

Mr Speaker: I call Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst.

Lincoln Jopp (Spelthorne) (Con): Double dip!

T2. [900617] **Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst** (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): Indeed—I am back by popular demand.

Will the Minister set out what steps the Cabinet Office is taking to ensure that public appointments are made on merit alone and not based on political patronage or ideological principles?

Darren Jones: I could probably refer to quite a list of appointments under the previous Administration that did not meet that test. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that public appointments are made in line with independent panels, with proper evidence and citations. We continue to make reforms to the system to ensure that the brightest and best across the country help us to lead in the public sphere without being related to political conflicts, as he suggests.

Jessica Toale (Bournemouth West) (Lab): I know from my experience setting up Bournemouth town centre citizens' panel just how effective those forums are for deep dives into complex issues and for building consensus, so can the Minister tell me what recent progress has been made on the work of the people's panel for digital ID?

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (**Mr James Frith**): Thank you—a batsman needs runs, Mr Speaker.

Digital ID will ensure digital access to our public services. In recent weeks, citizens have been debating evidence from independent technical experts, privacy advocates and civil society groups. They have been discussing how we can join up our public services,

saving time and money and reducing faff and friction. It will be a free-to-use and a freedom-to-choose proposition from this Government, and the Government are now considering the recommendations I received in person on Sunday in Birmingham from the 120 citizens involved. By taking this independent, people-led approach, we will ensure that digital ID has genuine public consent.

Mr Speaker: I call Gareth Bacon—not here.

Helena Dollimore (Hastings and Rye) (Lab/Co-op): As we approach the upcoming EU-UK summit, can I urge the Minister to make sure that restoring international trains at Ashford International is firmly on the agenda for discussions with our European neighbours? It would bring over half a million extra visitors to Sussex and Kent every year and £2.5 billion of economic growth. Everything we need is sitting there in pristine condition, ready to go—it is a no-brainer. Will the Minister support it?

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): My hon. Friend is a powerful advocate for her constituency and for this particular cause. What she has said today has been heard very clearly.

T5. [900621] **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Yesterday, I asked the Prime Minister to launch an inquiry into the Peter Murrell scandal, because the SNP Government in Scotland refuse to do so. The High Court judge said that Murrell's crimes were “not particularly sophisticated”, demolishing any suggestion that he somehow deceived everyone in the SNP. The people of Scotland deserve to know what John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon knew and when they knew it, so will the Government set up an inquiry so that we can get to the truth of this matter?

Darren Jones: I thank the hon. Member for his question. Of course, the House notes the conclusion of the criminal investigation and the judgment that was laid down in this case of embezzlement by SNP officials. That should never happen in public life, and it definitely should not happen when people are making donations to what they think are good causes—it is clearly wrongdoing, and should never be allowed to take place. A number of tests need to be met to establish an inquiry of the nature that the hon. Member refers to, and I would be happy for us to look at those conditions and write to him with the answer.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): The threats we face from hostile states are unprecedented in my lifetime, and geography is deceptive; we do not share a border with Russia or Iran, but our critical infrastructure is well within their reach, from hospital networks to transport networks and our banking systems. What are Ministers doing to prepare for these threats and build our national resilience, including making sure that the public know what is at stake?

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Dame Angela Eagle): My hon. Friend is quite right to identify the threats from hostile foreign actors that we currently face, which evolve and rapidly change. I can assure her that we will continue not only to track those threats, but to give advice and information that helps businesses, communities and individuals to deal with them.

T7. [900623] **Lincoln Jopp** (Spelthorne) (Con): During Armed Forces Week, it is such a pleasure to see so many members of the armed forces around the Palace of Westminster, and in particular to see so many members of the senior service in the Public Gallery. When they came in, I thought it might be a coup d'état and that I just had not had the memo, but then I realised that in this place people do not wear uniforms for a coup.

On 1 June, I asked the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister whether officials and the security services were going to go through Lord Mandelson's time in office with a fine-toothed comb to make sure that he had not been subject to leverage. He reassured me:

“I can confirm...that officials are conducting that review of documentation.”—[*Official Report*, 1 June 2026; Vol. 786, c. 866.]

Could he give us an update on that review, and reassure the House that it will not be shuffled under the carpet?

Darren Jones: My experience of coups is that they do not come with a memo in advance, so the hon. Member should not feel sorry for not having had one. I can assure him that those investigations are under way; I cannot yet give him a time for when they will conclude, but I note that parallel investigations are happening in the European Parliament. When updates are available, my successor will come to the House with that information.

Pam Cox (Colchester) (Lab): It is encouraging to hear that SMEs will benefit from greater access to Government procurement routes. Can the Minister set out which kind of sectors in particular they think will benefit the most, because that will be of great interest to people in Colchester and the east of England?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Ward): There are four sectors where we are using national security guidance, but the support for SMEs is much broader, too. I will happily talk to my hon. Friend and come back to her on particular parts of her constituency, but this plan will be nationwide, supporting all parts of the country, with more than £7 billion of Government money going to SMEs.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): Food security is national security, and I am glad that the Government recognised that earlier this year. It is critical national infrastructure. As the Government pursue their building of 1.5 million homes, with which I absolutely agree, can we make sure that the Minister's Department talks to other Departments across Government so that we do not lose valuable agricultural land? We are already importing 55% of our food, and this house building could undermine the UK's already fragile food sector.

Dame Angela Eagle: I assure the House that, given the Department I was in previously, I am able to join up the “food security is national security” mantra in a stronger way than has perhaps happened. The Government's land use framework, which was published earlier in the year, demonstrates how we can ensure through multiple land use that we can build the homes we need and grow the food we need. The farming road map published yesterday demonstrates a plan for growth for UK primary production.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): Catherine on Tuckton Road, Claire on Naseby Road and Elise on Irving Road all agree that Britain should draw closer to the European Union. They are joined by Duncan on Hengistbury Road, Martin on Foxholes Road and Sarah on Water Lane. Can the European relations Minister please tell my constituents what this Labour Government are doing to bring Britain into the heart of the European Union again?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend knows the value of UK-EU ties from the language schools in his constituency. I am proud to have delivered the new security and defence partnership and the re-accession to Erasmus+. We are working on a summit that will be good for jobs, bear down on bills and secure our borders.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): If I may, I will build on the question from the hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Jessica Toale). Many of my constituents have contacted me about the problems they have been having with digital verification on gov.uk websites, and especially with facial recognition. What routes do people have if they are unable to use digital verification to access services?

Mr Frith: The Government's preparations for digital ID will ensure that all existing routes for accessing public services will remain in place. The preparation for digital ID, which will make digital access to public services easier, as I described earlier, will be built with the highest trusted status and will be road-tested by the public as we prepare it, design it and then build it. Verification is vital if we are to ensure that the guiding principles of digital ID—being trusted, inclusive and of use from day one—are seen and not just told.

Dame Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): The Trump Administration's decision to deny access to Anthropic's most powerful AI models to all foreigners—including the British state—has emphasised concerns over technology sovereignty. Will the Minister ensure that as part of the UK-EU summit, our leading technology sector works closely with European Union allies to ensure that we have greater competition and resilience in our technology stack?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: There are a number of areas where additional work with the European Union will be in our national interest. One of the great advantages of having annual UK-EU summits is that precisely those issues can be brought up.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Public inquiries undoubtedly provide a significant mechanism to bring redress to enduring wrongs in the British state, but the cost of them and the lack of governance over them can mean that sometimes they cost extraordinary amounts of money. What conclusions is the Paymaster General coming to on how the Government ensure that money is spent well and that these public inquiries report in a timely fashion?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The right hon. Gentleman is entirely right about that. I think we all know the value of public inquiries and the moment of public justice that they give. What we need to be very careful about is,

first, how much they cost and, secondly, the time they take, so that when recommendations do come, they are timely.

Martin Rhodes (Glasgow North) (Lab): What steps is the Cabinet Office taking to co-ordinate work across Government on national resilience, particularly in relation to supporting SMEs in extreme weather conditions, such as we have at the moment?

Dame Angela Eagle: SMEs, individuals and communities should look at the national advice that is published and check on gov.uk/prepare, so that they can take the advice. It is simple and it is up there.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In Northern Ireland, a 2024 study found that only around one fifth of direct public procurement spend across the wider public sector is awarded to small businesses. Given the reliance on smaller businesses in Northern Ireland, what steps will the Minister take with Cabinet colleagues to improve their access to public procurement?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Ward): We are taking a number of steps to improve SME access to Government procurement, and I outlined those earlier. If it is okay with the hon. Gentleman, I will write to him about the specific measures we are taking in Northern Ireland, but we are working across the United Kingdom to ensure that our procurement budget does everything possible to support SMEs.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): I, too, hope that digital ID will help improve the delivery of public services outcomes. Can the Minister please say what steps the Government are taking to work with the Welsh Government on this important policy development?

Mr Frith: We are working closely with the devolved Governments through bilateral meetings and regular official engagement, and we are thankful to them for their constructive and ongoing engagement. In recent weeks I have had the pleasure of attending our regions' devolved authorities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and we are sensitive to their expectations and demands on this Government to deliver effective digital access to public services across their Administrations, but I repeat: digital ID will be free to use, and there will be freedom to choose.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): Further to the Minister's answer, my constituents, who live along the English-Scottish border, already experience issues when it comes to accessing cross-border healthcare. I recently expressed concern that the single patient record will not go across the border. May I press the Minister to ensure that lessons are being learned, and that we have cross-border operability, when it comes to digital ID?

Mr Frith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is crucial that we learn how well some of the innovations in our health tech have lent themselves to the process of implementing digital access to services. I recommit to learning the lessons, and we are open-minded. In many cases, Scotland is ahead in its thinking and delivery in this area, and I am happy to have further conversations.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Following the attack on the Prime Minister's home and car, what measures are being taken to protect recently resigned or other senior leaders of Government?

Dame Angela Eagle: We always assess security risks on a case-by-case basis, and we do not discuss what they are in public.

Mr Speaker: Absolutely.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): As a previous chair of a local government pension scheme, I was really pleased to hear that the Government are going to bring catering, security, cleaning staff, porters and repair people back into Government Departments. Does the Minister agree that that is the right thing to do and is beneficial for those workers, particularly given the situation with their pensions and the other things that they should have had access to in the first place?

Chris Ward: I absolutely do. We announced last week that we will bring all Government Property Agency, catering and security services back in-house, or at least that it is our intention to do that. We were elected on a manifesto promise to deliver the biggest wave of insourcing in a generation, and we are going to start it at our own door—70 Whitehall, No. 10 and No. 11—but I would like to go further and roll this out across local government as and when we can.

Jeff Smith (Manchester Withington) (Lab): Brexit has created a number of serious barriers to the ability of UK artists to tour in Europe. Has the Minister had a chance to look at the recently published Culture, Media and Sport Committee report on this issue, which proposes a number of practical measures to remove those barriers, and will he work with CMS Ministers to act on its recommendations?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Yes, I have. I assure my hon. Friend that I will continue to work on it with our colleagues, and it remains a priority for the Government.

Will Stone (Swindon North) (Lab): Can the Minister update us on what recent actions he has taken to co-ordinate the Government's domestic policy on the war in the middle east?

Darren Jones: We have established a Cabinet Sub-Committee called the Middle East Response Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, which has met weekly. I, as Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister, have chaired senior ministerial groups underpinning that work to ensure we have a clear understanding of the impact of the conflict in the middle east on the UK domestic economy in relation to supply chains, the security of critical goods and the economic impact. That work is informing Government decisions to protect British citizens and the UK economy as best we can from that conflict.¹

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): Following the Government's welcome designation of four sectors as critical to national security, we have continued to see an exponential rise in under-investigation Chinese buses on our streets. In my constituency, 125 jobs were put at risk back in March following an SNP grant scheme that sent the lion's share of the public money to Chinese manufacturers. I will repeat the question I asked the Prime Minister a few weeks ago: will the Minister designate bus manufacturing as a sector critical to national security?

Chris Ward: As I said earlier, my hon. Friend has raised this with me a number of times, and he is absolutely right to do so. I have spoken with the Department for Transport and security teams about this, and we are looking at it. We have started with four sectors and we want to go further. We are also taking a lot of other steps to help the bus manufacturing industry, as I set out earlier.

1. *Official Report*, 9 July 2026; Vol. 789, c. 7WC. (Correction).

Sudan

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

10.37 am

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 intensification of fighting in Sudan and diplomatic efforts to press the warring parties into a ceasefire.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Chris Elmore): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. The war in Sudan has now entered its fourth devastating year. There is no military solution to the conflict, and this path promises only devastation for Sudan. We need an immediate and urgent ceasefire, we need those responsible for countless atrocities to be held to account and we need a pathway to peace.

This is a crucial moment for Sudan, and reports of a possible RSF offensive at El Obeid are deeply concerning. Last year, we saw unimaginable horrors unfold in El Fasher, and the world failed the people of El Fasher. We cannot allow that to happen again. Dozens of drone strikes have hit El Obeid over the past two weeks, killing civilians and leading to severe fuel shortages, sharp food price increases and increasing challenges to the water supply. The risk of atrocities and horrific humanitarian consequences for civilians is high.

The UK has been clear that the RSF must comply with international law, civilians must be able to leave freely and safely, and all parties must allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access. On 18 June, as reports emerged, the Foreign Secretary immediately called on the RSF to pull back, alongside a joint statement with partners in the coalition for atrocity prevention that urged de-escalation. The UK has also rallied support at the UN Security Council to drive international action to end the war. On 20 June, we worked with partners to raise the alarm over the worsening situation in El Obeid, pressing for an end to the fighting, the protection of civilians and unimpeded humanitarian access.

Just this week, we strengthened those calls in a joint statement with the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway. We are urgently engaging with our international partners and pressing those with influence to call on the RSF to pull back and bring all parties to the negotiating table. The Foreign Secretary personally raised this with counterparts in Egypt during her recent visit to Cairo, as well as with partners in the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia and the United States. The UK is the third largest humanitarian donor, and we are providing £146 million in aid, while doubling support for local responders to £15 million to ensure lifesaving supplies reach those on the frontline.

Now must be the moment for the international community to stand together to bring this devastating conflict to an end. There is no military solution. We need an immediate, urgent humanitarian truce. The UK is working closely with the UN envoy, Pekka Haavisto, the United States and Quad partners to drive a united global effort in pushing the parties into serious talks, demanding accountability for atrocities and clearing, without delay, every barrier to lifesaving aid.

Priti Patel: The world's worst humanitarian crisis is now threatening to sink into even more harrowing depths. The disregard for human life and the violence in El Obeid is shocking, and the major new offensive simply must not happen. The attacks and destruction of civilian infrastructure and supply lines that we have already seen are beyond all our comprehension.

Words alone, whether from the UK or the United Nations Security Council, will not stop the fighting. The Minister needs to explain how words are going to turn into action. Will it be made clear that, if there is destruction or obstruction of lifesaving British aid, there will be consequences for the perpetrators? What new measures will the Government bring to go after the leadership of these warring parties and the organisations that are fuelling and funding the violence? This is like no other war, and the brutal and dehumanising nature of this violence and conflict cannot be ignored, so what are the Government doing to end this cycle of endless killing?

What has the UK recently contributed to the US efforts to press the warring parties into a ceasefire? Has the UK been contributing to the Sudan Quintet's civilian dialogue process? What more can the UK do to support evidence collection of the atrocities, and then move the process on to widespread prosecutions? The UK will soon assume the presidency of the financial taskforce that has to look at the illicit funding that is driving this war. What can the Minister say about that process and what the United Kingdom will do?

I also expect the Minister to respond to the concerns outlined on Tuesday at the International Development Committee that the British Government allegedly failed to act on intelligence and policy proposals put forward by third parties regarding impending mass atrocities in El Fasher. How does the Minister reconcile that account with the way in which the conflict has been handled by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office since the Government took responsibility in July 2024?

For Britain's national security, we need action to end this war and support a transition to peaceful civilian rule. We do not want to see more destabilisation spanning all the way from the Sahel to the middle east. We cannot have more threats to our security and to regional security in the Red sea, or more Iranian or Russian influence, and we cannot see ungoverned spaces where terrorist groups plot to destabilise and undermine our security and that of our allies.

Chris Elmore: In relation to additional funding and support, and the ask of the shadow Foreign Secretary on turning words into action, that is what the Government are doing. We are protecting funding for humanitarian support for Sudan. We are additionally putting in money for emergency response rooms in El Obeid. We are actively working at every level to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

I anticipated that the Foreign Secretary would raise the claims made yesterday in the IDC; I am sure that other Members will as well. I have to tell the House that we completely reject those claims. The UK acted swiftly, including on 13 June 2024, when the previous Government were in office. We penned the UN Security Council resolution. We demanded that the RSF halt the siege in the city. As part of further work in November 2024, we attempted a follow-up UN resolution. We have also

issued further sanctions across the piece. Of course, there are lessons learned in any response to international conflict, but I have to tell the House that we do not accept the conditions in what was set out yesterday in the IDC.

On the wider response, the shadow Foreign Secretary will know that the Foreign Secretary has raised this matter at the highest levels, including when we chaired the Security Council in February. She has worked with partners across the Quad and the United States, and even this Tuesday was raising with the UN Secretary-General the need for further international intervention on a multilateral basis to bring about a peaceful resolution. On conflict resolution and a response to the people who are committing the atrocities, yesterday I was in calls with counterparts in Angola on working to build the international coalition on atrocity prevention and evidence gathering, to ensure that people can be held to account, and that prosecutions can take place for these horrendous crimes.

The shadow Foreign Secretary is right: what is happening in Sudan is one of the greatest travesties of our generation. The situation is horrendous, whether it is on sexual violence against women and girls or the sheer scale of civilian killings. The Government will continue to do all that we can to bring the perpetrators to account, to ensure aid enters Sudan, and to stop any conflict becoming more widespread.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is a good man, and I know that he cares deeply about this subject, but the time for calling on the belligerents and their backers to desist, for urging them to stop, or for raising matters with them, has ended. We did all of those things before El Fasher, and up to 60,000 people were slaughtered. We now have half a million people in El Obeid who are worried that if they do not die of thirst, they will die by drone, violent gang rape or summary execution. Will the Government start naming and shaming the belligerents and their backers, and slap more sanctions on them? Will they ensure that there is a UN Security Council resolution that explicitly calls on the belligerents and their backers, including the UAE, to halt the impending invasion of El Obeid?

Chris Elmore: My right hon. Friend is a passionate advocate on this issue, and a former Minister for Development and for Africa. As I said in my statement, the Foreign Secretary has raised the matter directly with the UAE and a number of other countries. My right hon. Friend will know that we have issued sanctions in relation to Sudan, but we do not discuss additional sanctions on the Floor of the House. We are putting money in to offer additional support to help the people at El Obeid. We are working at the UN: there have been conversations between the Foreign Secretary and Secretary-General António Guterres as recently as Tuesday, and we have led the work on the UN fact-finding mission on what the RSF is doing. We are leading the work, ensuring that there is joined-up working to bring about a peaceful resolution. However, my right hon. Friend is right that the situation is absolutely horrendous.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): The International Development Committee heard from a war crimes investigator that the UK Government failed

to act on repeated warnings of the looming genocidal massacre in El Fasher because their foreign policy had been captured by the United Arab Emirates. He claimed that the FCDO prioritised its economic security and diplomatic relationships with the UAE above preventing the intentional starvation, forced displacement and genocidal slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians.

The New York Times reported that Sheikh Mansour, Vice President of the UAE and owner of Man City, played a central role in arming the RSF. Given the UAE's manifold interests in the UK, the public would expect the Government to call that out and act. Will they do so now? Will the Government amend the Independent Football Regulator's remit to give it power to investigate and sanction football club owners suspected of involvement in human rights abuses? We are warned that El Obeid is facing a similar onslaught imminently, so will the Government finally, in their role as penholder at the UN Security Council, move to take consequential action against the UAE and any state arming belligerents in Sudan?

Chris Elmore: In relation to the IDC, I am happy to repeat the point: we reject the claims that have been set out. As the penholder, the last Government and this one were at the forefront of the UN resolutions. In fact, in November 2024 this Government pushed for a further resolution that was vetoed by Russia. The Government have been at the forefront of this work for the best part of four years—whether that is the last Government or this one. The Foreign Secretary and her two predecessors ensured that Sudan remained at the forefront of the multilateral UN agenda.

In relation to the wider processes around the UAE and other countries, as I have just told the House, the Foreign Secretary raised the matter during her visit to Cairo last week, including with the UAE. We continue to raise the matter in order to bring about a peaceful resolution. That position is not going to change. We will keep leading as penholder in the UN.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): The situation in Sudan is outrageous. The atrocities are unbearable to hear about. On the international Development Committee we have heard about the most vile attacks on women and girls, and sexual violence. It must stop; we must do as much as we can as a Government to end it. What steps is the UK taking with its international partners to protect women and girls from the current offensive?

Chris Elmore: My hon. Friend is right to raise the horrendous levels of sexual violence against women, girls, and indeed boys, across this devastating conflict. Just this week, the UN has published a report on the widespread sexual violence that is taking place, and we will respond to that in due course. In terms of the active work the Government are doing, my hon. Friend will know that the Foreign Secretary has announced an international coalition on tackling violence against women and girls. In Sudan specifically, we have announced a multi-year £20 million programme, starting this year, to support survivors of sexual violence to access psychological and medical support; we are doing work on the border, working with UNICEF, among others, to protect girls who are victims of sexual violence; and we are trying our best to work in-country and support refugees to ensure that they are given support. We are doing more

[Chris Elmore]

internationally to bring about this international coalition to tackle sexual violence. Sexual violence should not be used as a weapon of war, but it is. We are doing everything we can to stop it.

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): Trade with the UAE appears to have been the reason for the lack of robust action in the past to hold back the RSF, which murdered 60,000 in El Fasher last November. A softly, softly approach has clearly not worked, and now it is time for the UK, as UN penholder for Sudan, to find its moral compass and a backbone and stand up for what it believes. Will the Government empower their excellent civil servants with an atrocity prevention Act by which they can hold themselves, and indeed Ministers, accountable when their actions fall short of what we as a nation expect not only of ourselves, but of all those who would call themselves our allies?

Chris Elmore: We work internationally on atrocity prevention, on evidence gathering and working through international coalitions in Sudan, Ukraine and many other countries of conflict. That work has gone on for many, many years across various Governments, regardless of political party. We continue to call out these atrocities on the United Nations Security Council. As I have said, the Foreign Secretary has raised this matter with the UAE in the past week—we are not shying away from our responsibilities in this, and we will keep challenging. As the House knows, we do not discuss or debate sanctions on the Floor of the House, but we do keep them under review. That is the sensible, responsible approach of any Government.

Noah Law (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): We have heard very serious allegations this week that Foreign Office officials, and allegedly even senior members of this Government, may have been swayed by ties with international partners in determining how the UK acts to de-escalate this conflict and prevent atrocities in Sudan, against the backdrop of what we have seen in El Fasher, which has been found to bear the hallmarks of genocide, and in the light of the impending tragedy in El Obeid. I appreciate that the Minister has firmly rejected some of those allegations, and we must trust his word on that. Given all that, what steps is he taking with Cabinet colleagues to ensure that, whatever the truth of that matter, the UK is never in a situation where it is beholden to allies who are culpable for such atrocities?

Chris Elmore: We work constantly on Sudan. Almost every official in the FCDO, regardless of department, has a Sudan focus on the instruction of the Foreign Secretary, who could not be more clear in how she leads this work, including with the Prime Minister, on protecting aid support in-country and providing more support across the wider region.

I must repeat that we do reject the allegations that were made yesterday. Our actions on this speak very clearly: we have been at the forefront of trying to find a peaceful resolution for this conflict across the four years—across this Government and the previous Government—whether at a multilateral level or by engaging and working with partners, and we will continue to do so. As I said earlier, I was in conversation with the

Angolan Foreign Minister just yesterday, talking about evidence gathering in relation to the atrocities taking place in Sudan. This is an absolute focus of the Foreign Office and its Ministers, and Government Ministers more widely.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): It seems that whoever comes into government, the Foreign Office's weak policy on the UAE persists. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the UAE has incarcerated a British citizen for more than 19 years—illegally, according to the UN. The UAE provides the rebels with significant amounts of arms and weaponry, without which they would never be able to continue this brutal war, with so many dead and wounded as a consequence. Surely it is time for a British Government to stand up and say that enough is enough, and that we are going to sanction all those individuals responsible for decision making in the UAE and in other countries providing arms to the rebels. If we do not do that, all the talk is worthless.

Chris Elmore: The right hon. Gentleman knows that the diplomatic engagement of the Foreign Office with all foreign partners goes on day in, day out and year in, year out. I do not agree with him that nothing happens; there are plenty of examples across the board in various conflicts taking place where British involvement makes a meaningful difference. He is an experienced former Cabinet member, so he will know, as I have said, that no Government will debate sanctions on the Floor of this House, and nor should they. We will continue to keep them under review and keep challenging and working with colleagues internationally to bring about a peaceful resolution.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): This is a most bloody conflict, and the Foreign Secretary was right to say that rape is being used as a weapon of war. What steps is the Minister taking with international partners to ensure that the belligerents and those culpable are brought to justice?

Chris Elmore: My hon. Friend is right to raise that. It is why we are working internationally on evidence gathering. We must ensure that evidence is not suddenly vanished from the system. I hope that this conflict will end with some form of peaceful resolution. We are working with the coalition to ensure that there is a central system for gathering evidence so that prosecutions can take place through the courts. It is extremely important that the perpetrators are held to account. I thank him for highlighting this matter.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): In his statement, the Minister urged the parties to comply with international law, but he will know that many are coming to the view that the UK's compliance with international law is very often a cosmetic or paper-based exercise. The Srebrenica judgment established that a state breaches its obligations under the genocide convention not by failing to prevent a genocide but by not even trying to do so. The International Development Committee heard the other day that the UK was told but failed to act; the Minister is disputing that account. Can we please have an independent inquiry into whether it is true, so that the House can judge whether this country has complied with its obligations under the genocide convention?

Chris Elmore: I have a great amount of time for the right hon. Gentleman—we have known each other for a very long time—but I do not accept the suggestion that the Government do not respect international law or human rights conventions. British Governments have taken the long-standing position, over many decades, that it is for the courts to decide whether genocide has taken place. However, that does not mean that we do not act or intervene to undertake our international obligations, as we have always done. We do that in a meaningful way through funding, direct support and international humanitarian aid, and by ensuring that, as penholder in this particular case, we lead in the multilateral system. I do not accept that this Government have not provided support, and as the Minister with responsibility for human rights and the United Nations, I can assure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that we are at the forefront of those conversations. I will never accept that we do not hold up the rules of the international order.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement on this terrible conflict. Will he tell us more about the impact of this tragedy on countries that neighbour Sudan? How can we help them?

Chris Elmore: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are significant pressures on near neighbours, particularly Chad. We have offered funding over the past year to bring about more support for refugees travelling into Chad. We continue that dialogue; the Foreign Secretary has visited the region—as have many colleagues—fairly recently and seen at first hand the scale of migration. We keep support for other countries under regular review.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Reform): There is a consensus across the House that the horrific occurrences in Sudan are worthy of global attention and action well beyond what has been done so far. We spend a lot of time talking about Gaza in this Chamber, but very little time talking about Sudan, which is a far greater humanitarian crisis. Will the Minister consider the implications for the Christian community in Sudan? It is a small community, but they have been particularly harmed by the conflict, with many churches being demolished and many vulnerable Christians persecuted. Will he take that matter up with the international authorities?

Chris Elmore: The hon. Member is right to raise that issue. We have an excellent envoy for freedom of religion or belief in my hon. Friend the Member for North Northumberland (David Smith), who leads a lot of this work. I will continue to challenge what is happening to Christians and people of other faith in Sudan and internationally. He is right to highlight that Christians are often targeted specifically because of their faith. That cannot be allowed to continue, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will continue to raise it.

John Grady (Glasgow East) (Lab): The RSF have slaughtered children and used rape as a weapon of war. As we return to our constituencies, we should reflect on how we would act if this were happening in them—to our mothers, our sisters, our partners and our children. The UN Security Council says that there will be no impunity for those committing war crimes. But forgive

my scepticism, because people are committing war crimes in Sudan, Gaza and elsewhere with impunity. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister, who is a serious man, what steps the UK Government are taking to make the argument to our allies forcefully and with conviction that we must seriously strengthen the scope and enforcement of international law, so that we can truly say that there is no impunity?

Chris Elmore: My hon. Friend makes a point that I cannot disagree with. We work internationally every week and every day, I would argue, to lead on this front, both in terms of our humanitarian response and in relation to international law. We have led this work as penholder on the UN Security Council and will continue to challenge all partners in this space to hopefully bring about a peaceful resolution as well as prosecution through the international courts system to ensure that those who have committed those evil crimes will be brought to justice. We will keep doing that work internationally and multilaterally.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): Many Members will be aware of just how reluctant the FCDO always is to take action against any country. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran is a very good example—just look at how long that took. I know the Minister personally. I know his character; I know he is a good man. He has heard from parties across the House that something has to change. With the change in leadership coming in the Government, may I ask that he takes a step back from what the mandarins in the FCDO are saying to him and makes representations on behalf of this House to whoever is put into whichever position in the new Government? Will he reflect the comments he has heard, as a Minister listening to this House, about the UAE and the flow of money and arms, and override what often is a theoretical intellectual argument made by the mandarins in the FCDO?

Chris Elmore: The right hon. Gentleman knows how much I care about this place and the Members who serve in it. I always listen to and take seriously what Members say, regardless of politics or party. The current Prime Minister has led from the front with the Foreign Secretary and the previous Foreign Secretary—the now Deputy Prime Minister—in making sure that Sudan stays on the international agenda. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that as the transition takes place to the new Prime Minister, I will make sure that the views of the House are fed in as part of foreign policy work and more broadly. As Ministers, we should listen to what all Members tell us and ensure that we update the House and are accountable to it—and I hope he knows that I am always happy to do that.

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): A teacher of Sudanese heritage in my constituency came to see me to tell me about the experience of her family. She said, “They had just enough time to grab their flip-flops and run for their lives. Having left all their property, they are now scattered in multiple countries across the region.” Her concern was that Sudan has never received the publicity or attention that it has deserved, and that that has been at the expense of the civilian population. Can I ask the Minister and the Government to put a proper spotlight on this conflict, and to use our weight and influence to prioritise the protection of the civilian population and the provision of humanitarian relief?

Chris Elmore: My hon. Friend is right to raise the matter of media scrutiny around this conflict. One of the challenges of this is being able to show that there are more conflicts in the world now than at any point since the second world war, which I find a very harrowing statistic. That is why in February at the UN Security Council the Foreign Secretary chaired a special session on Sudan. It is why she raises it in international speeches and with international partners at summits. It is why we keep Sudan on the agenda wherever the UK is leading.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the challenge of media scrutiny. I am not sure how much coverage debates in Parliament on Sudan that take place on a Thursday morning will get in the national media. The subject does need more media coverage, and we will continue to keep highlighting it internationally, but it does need scrutiny and challenge. As the Minister with responsibility for media freedom, I am very keen for journalists to do more investigative work in relation to Sudan, and we will keep doing all we can to highlight the atrocities and the scale of devastation taking place of civilians in Sudan.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I respect the Minister, but I regret the gap between his words and the actions of this Government. He said that the world has failed Sudan, but the UK has also failed Sudan. He said that the Government believe that we need those responsible to be held to account, but the Government are not doing that. It is widely known that the United Arab Emirates is arming the RSF. Will the Minister tell the House which UAE leader the Foreign Secretary spoke with and what was said? Will he agree today to suspend arms exports to the UAE? Finally, will he summon the ambassador to insist that the UAE takes every step to arrest the RSF's approach to El Obeid?

Chris Elmore: I too have a great deal of respect for the Liberal Democrat spokesperson on Foreign Affairs. We have not known each other very long, but I believe we have a good relationship. I do not accept that the UK has failed the people of Sudan. Successive Foreign Secretaries have led the charge internationally on the coalition to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. We continue to raise it at the highest levels and we continue to challenge.

On the UAE, I can tell him that the Foreign Secretary spoke to the Foreign Minister. We continue to raise these points internationally, no matter what they may be. As I have said repeatedly, we do not debate sanctions on the Floor of the House—no responsible Government would do that—and we will keep to that.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): We have seen three years of unimaginable suffering in Sudan, with 19 million people extremely hungry, millions of children out of school, and thousands of women and girls who have been raped. The world should have been focused on stopping that, but major powers, like the US, have been largely absent and others, from the UAE to Iran and Turkey, have actively supported the conflict by supplying guns and drones. We in the UK must be on the side of peace. Will the Minister say what more he will do to stop that supply of arms and throw our weight behind a ceasefire before we see a repeat of the El Fasher massacre in El Obeid?

Chris Elmore: My hon. Friend is right to challenge me in this space. We are putting in additional funding to support El Obeid and to make sure that we have early intervention. We have also led the work internationally to call for no additional progress on any conflict in El Obeid. As for the crimes of sexual violence that are taking place and the use of sexual violence in conflict, we are leading part of the international work, including working with US colleagues, to create a system through which evidence can be gathered that can bring about prosecution.

On the peace deal and bringing about a ceasefire, the Foreign Secretary is personally leading the charge. She does not shy away from any of those challenges and she continually puts pressure to bring about a peaceful resolution. This is why she has issued the statement, why she is challenging foreign Governments and why the UK is at the forefront of the development funding that has not been cut for the people of Sudan: to try to play our part in bringing about a peaceful resolution.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): This brutal conflict has resulted in more than 14 million people being displaced. Around 5 million of those have been displaced over the border, but 9 million are displaced in Sudan itself. Will the Minister set out what practical steps the Government are taking to support those who are displaced internally?

Chris Elmore: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that point. We often use UN agencies internally in Sudan, because they are some of the most trusted support mechanisms for supporting peoples displaced inside Sudan. As I mentioned earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney (Nick Smith), on neighbouring countries where refugees are moving to—Chad is a particular point of movement for people—we are offering additional support. We keep the situation under constant review so we can support people who are refugees in-country and those who are moving outside Sudan. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we keep that under constant review to provide more support where we need to.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement and the level of reassurance he has given us. I also thank the hon. Member for Leicester South (Shockat Adam), who yesterday introduced me to three men with a connection to Sudan. They were all absolutely distraught by what is happening, and I really felt for them. They asked why we were not discussing the situation more; all of us, not just the Minister, have to ask why that is.

The men had two questions. First, can the Minister confirm that we are not exporting weapons to the United Arab Emirates for use in Sudan? Secondly, the Minister has told us that the cut to aid has not affected the women and girls who are fleeing the region into Chad, but are those women and girls getting all the support they need?

Chris Elmore: The point that my hon. Friend makes, as many Members have, about the international spotlight on Sudan is a correct one, and also applies to our domestic media. We have ringfenced funding for support for women and girls. We are offering more support and

working with the international coalition to end violence against women and girls. I can assure him that one of the Foreign Secretary's six priorities is around women and girls, and Sudan forms a crucial part of that.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his answers. Two weeks ago to the day, I held a debate on Sudan in Westminster Hall, as the Minister will know. We highlighted all these issues, and today we are back again. Does the Minister agree that the terrifying escalation of drone strikes and the ethnically targeted violence in El Obeid demand an unyielding response, rather than the global reticence we have seen too often? Will the Minister commit to using the UK position on the UN Security Council to enforce immediate humanitarian corridors, and in particular to ensure that missionaries—there are many out there—and other British foreign nationals in the area are safe and have the support that they need?

Chris Elmore: The hon. Gentleman has championed the issues of the Sudanese people for a number of years, and I thank him for doing so; I have responded to debates in Westminster Hall in which he has raised, in particular, the persecution of Christians in Sudan. He is quite right to raise the wider point about the UN Security Council. Just this Tuesday, as I mentioned earlier, the Foreign Secretary spoke to the UN Secretary-General. As penholder, we have issued the clarifying statement with Norway, Germany and others, as I mentioned. He is right that we will continue to lead this work in the UN to bring about a peaceful resolution and do all we can to get crucial humanitarian aid to the people of Sudan.

Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): The single most effective action to protect El Obeid civilians and avoid a repeat of El Fasher would be for the UAE to withdraw its clearly evidenced backing for the RSF and demand that civilians are protected. What more can the Minister do to persuade the UAE? If that fails, what can we do on the gold trade and illicit finance, in addition to sanctions, to ensure that anyone involved in arming the conflict does not materially benefit?

Chris Elmore: As I said, the Foreign Secretary raised this issue with the UAE just this week as well as during her visit to Cairo at the end of last week. My hon. Friend makes a good point about illicit gold flows. We are a leader in tackling the gold flows problem, and have hosted a joint conference between the FCDO and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs to launch a public-private partnership with industry to clamp down on illicit flows. We are very much trying to control the problem, and leading this work is extremely important.

Points of Order

11.13 am

Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that the Home Office is due tonight to announce 12 new asylum seeker centres across the country, with no statement to the House or notification to Members here. This is a very, very important issue for our constituents. I seek your guidance on how we might encourage the Government to release this sort of information here first, so that we can scrutinise it on behalf of the people we represent.

Mr Speaker: If that is the case, it is once again totally unacceptable. This Government do not seem to understand that MPs on both sides of the House should hear any news first, as it is their constituents who are affected. If it is true that it is to be announced through a written ministerial statement on Monday, that is doubly unacceptable. I say to the Minister who is going to release this information that we have between now and the end of the sitting, and I am more than willing to allow them to come to this House and inform Members whose constituents will be affected. This is unfair. It is unacceptable. When will the Government get the message? There is going to be a change of Government; well, I hope the people who take over will have learned.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I do not want to continue the debate, but I will hear it.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke: I merely confirm that I have been made aware of the same information that my hon. Friend the Member for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam) has just put forward to you.

Mr Speaker: This is not good enough.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I presume your point of order is the same, that you have heard the same message.

Mark Pritchard: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. It is a variant of it. I thank you for speaking up on behalf of all Members from across the House. At Deputy Prime Minister's questions last week, I raised the point that an asylum centre had been put in my constituency with just hours' notice, and yet Shropshire council, the unitary authority, had been given at least five days' notice, or even weeks.

Mr Speaker: Well, at least you will not be asking a question in Business questions now you have asked that. I want to put it on the record that this situation is not acceptable. We need to ensure that MPs on all sides hear things first because I do not know whose constituencies will be affected. Do it correctly, learn, and speak to the Leader of the House—I am sure that he can make arrangements.

Business of the House

11.15 am

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business, perhaps including the business relating to the item just raised under the point of order?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Alan Campbell): The business for the week commencing 29 June will include:

MONDAY 29 June—Estimates day, first allotted day. There will be debates on estimates relating to the Cabinet Office, in so far as it relates to security and resilience; the Northern Ireland Office; and the Home Office and Ministry of Justice, in so far as it relates to criminal justice.

TUESDAY 30 June—Estimates day, second allotted day. There will be debates on estimates relating to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, in so far as it relates to sport and youth services; the Department of Health and Social Care, in so far as it relates to pharmaceutical procurement; and the Department for Work and Pensions, in so far as it relates to spending priorities and performance. At 7 pm the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

WEDNESDAY 1 July—Proceedings on the Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Bill, followed by consideration of a Business of the House motion and all stages of the Taxation (Energy and Vehicles) Bill.

THURSDAY 2 July—Debate on a motion relating to the National Audit Office, followed by a debate on a motion on commonhold and leasehold reform and the regulation of property managing agents. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee, followed by a general debate on access to further education. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 3 July—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 6 July includes:

MONDAY 6 July—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by a motion to approve the draft Environmental Permitting (Waste Controlling or Transporting) and Relevant Functions of Primary Authorities (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2026, followed by a motion to approve the draft Infected Blood Compensation Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 2026, followed by a motion to approve the draft Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Industry Training Board) Order 2026.

Jesse Norman: I thank the Leader of the House for the business. I know the whole House will join me in thinking of the victims of the earthquakes in Venezuela, of which we have just had news, and of course the victims of the train crash in Bedford and the victims of what now have been deemed aggravated terrorism-related attacks in Edinburgh. It has been a difficult week, Mr Speaker, but on a brighter note, I am sure that all will want to join me in celebrating Armed Forces Week and thanking all the men and women across this country and abroad who serve His Majesty in the armed forces—a matter of particular interest, I remind the House, in Herefordshire.

We weep for the Scotland football team, but perhaps less so for Peter Murrell, who began a five-year sentence this week for theft and embezzlement. The Scottish police asked him in 2024, “What does the SNP need over £19,000 of luxury pens for?” It is quite a good question. One might ask the same about a Jaguar I-PACE, a state-of-the-art motorhome, a men’s slouch pouch onesie, whatever that is—I am not looking for guidance from the Chair on this matter, Mr Speaker. The real question is not just whether Nicola Sturgeon knew or should have known of these thefts, including the sudden appearance of a £2,500 Lalique salt and pepper set on the kitchen table; it is about the culture and probity of a Scottish Government who still refuse to appoint a KC to lead an independent inquiry.

While we are on the topic of vehicles, the leader of Reform UK, the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage), has publicly reserved the right to spend the £5 million donation definitely not related to politics from his Thailand-based crypto billionaire on Ferraris if he wishes. It appears that none of that money has been spent on personal security, from what he said, and he has now been referred to the Financial Conduct Authority, alongside the current investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

And so to the Government. I know the House will share my sadness at the tragic decision by the Leader of the House not to stand in the Labour leadership election, resulting in a coronation, alas, of the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham), and, I am sad to say, the rather tawdry sight of Cabinet Ministers trailing their coats. Once again, we can only regret the decision of the Leader of the House not to throw his hat into the ring, but I simply ask, what is the Government’s policy on the defence investment plan? The Prime Minister wants to publish it now. His successor wants a delay, but a defence investment plan that may be reopened within weeks is not a plan; it is a hanging IOU with a NATO deadline attached.

I turn now to a matter of the greatest sensitivity: the case of Lucy Letby, members of whose family are my constituents. It is essential to respect the independence of the judiciary in this matter. Nor, crucially, must we ever lose sight of the suffering of the families whose babies died or were gravely injured, but I believe there is also a proper public concern here as to the security of the verdict.

Since the convictions, a number of serious and reputable people have raised concerns about the expert scientific and statistical evidence in this case—both the evidence presented to the jury and the evidence that the jury never saw. Those concerns come from neonatologists, pathologists, statisticians and, most recently, from Dame Sue Black, one of the country’s most distinguished forensic scientists. Like me, Dame Sue makes no claim as to whether Lucy Letby is innocent or guilty, but she has said in measured terms that she is “troubled” by the conviction and by the apparent lack of forensic evidence. When someone of her public scientific standing speaks in those terms, I do not think the issue she raises can be properly avoided. Her and other expert concerns raise profound questions as to the fairness of the trial and, indeed, the status of the evidential test used by the Criminal Cases Review Commission in considering whether to reopen it.

I remind the House that there were no witnesses, no CCTV footage, no forensic evidence and no confession in this case. Everything therefore depended on the testimony of experts, but when it came to the defence, in the words of Dame Sue Black,

“there were no medical or statistical experts put forward at all”.

I would also highlight that Lucy Letby had had a prior complaint against the consultants in the hospital upheld after a detailed investigation and report, which found that there was absolutely nothing to prevent her from returning to work and that doctors had bullied and harassed her. That evidence, too, was never heard by the jury.

The Thirlwall inquiry into the Countess of Chester hospital has yet to publish its final report, despite many delays, but yesterday's Nottingham University hospitals report is a powerful reminder that in neonatal and maternity settings, grave harm can arise from not only individual malfeasance but systematic clinical failure. *[Interruption.]* If I may conclude, the Criminal Cases Review Commission is now considering the Letby case. May I ask—

Mr Speaker: Order. I have allowed the time. You are a minute over. Please can you conclude now?

Jesse Norman: I think it is unfortunate that I was not allowed to conclude in the terms that—

Mr Speaker: We will leave it at that. Sorry, but I am not going to be challenged like that. I think that is totally unfair. I gave a full minute and allowed you to continue. I was going to allow you to come back. I would have expected better from the shadow Leader of the House than to challenge the Chair in that way—I have never had that before. I call the Leader of the House.

Sir Alan Campbell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I welcome the right hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) back to his place, and I wish him a happy birthday for earlier this week.

I join him in sending our condolences to the people of Venezuela and those caught in the earthquake. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, our thoughts are also with those injured in the rail collision last Friday, and the friends and family of the driver who lost his life, and I send my deepest sympathies at this dreadful time. As the shadow Leader of the House said, our thoughts are also with those injured in the horrific anti-Muslim attack in Edinburgh, and we send our thanks and appreciation to all the emergency services who responded to both incidents with bravery and professionalism in very difficult circumstances.

I echo the right hon. Gentleman's words about the importance of Armed Forces Week—we will mark Armed Forces Day this weekend. Events are taking place across the country to celebrate the work of our armed forces, and show our support for the men and women who make up the armed forces community. I also thank you, Mr Speaker, for the events that you put on in Parliament this week.

Members across the House will be pleased to know that the Great British summer of saving has started. Families across the UK can take advantage of lower

prices on children's days out, meals and travel. We are cutting VAT to reduce the cost of children's restaurant meals, children's tickets for theatres and cinema, and all tickets for attractions such as soft play, amusement parks and museums. In August, children aged between five and 15 will be able to travel on local bus services in England for free, keeping the cost down further.

Before I turn to the right hon. Gentleman's specific remarks, let me say that I very much welcome the three new Members to the House this week. I wish them all well, irrespective of whichever party they serve. It has in many ways been a momentous week following the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday. He will leave office with a record of stabilising the economy, driving down waiting lists in the NHS, lifting half a million children out of poverty, as well as a proud record on the international stage and defending our national interest.

Standing for election and representing our community and country is the essence of politics. We would do well to remember that, regardless of party affiliation, at the heart of this are human beings for whom toxic political discourse only makes the job harder, and it can take a toll on them and their families. I hope we all bear that in mind, and recognise that the onus is on all of us to moderate political discourse, and ensure that it does not cross the line into abuse or intimidation. Reflecting on that, and on Prime Minister's questions yesterday, made me even more grateful for the tone of the shadow Leader of the House. During these sessions, despite our party political differences, we share good-natured exchanges, for which I thank him. It is a habit of an old Chief Whip, or an old habit of a Chief Whip, that while exchanges are taking place in Prime Minister's questions, I tend to watch the faces of Conservative Members, including the right hon. Gentleman. I think I am safe in saying that staring at the ground, or looking at a phone, is one way of demonstrating that he is not very happy with the tone that has been set by the leader of that party.

On Peter Murrell, as the Prime Minister made clear, the SNP should step up to the mark and address the matter, as should the necessary appropriate authorities where that work needs to be done. Similarly, I expect that the leader of Reform will be held to account, and that his account of what the £5 million was all about will be tested, as I suspect that it does not really hold water.

As the Prime Minister said, the defence investment plan will be published before the NATO summit, and I would expect that a statement will be made to the House once it is published. I reassure the House that the Prime Minister, and any future Labour Prime Minister, will be absolutely committed to the defence of our country, and to finding the money to pay for it.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the serious matter of the Lucy Letby case, which I know is a concern for both Government and Opposition Members. It is important that the decision was sound and safe, so I will raise it with ministerial colleagues. Should he wish to express his concern directly to ministerial colleagues, I will arrange that for him too.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): I welcome what the Leader of the House said about the defence investment plan. Militec Ltd is a small but mighty company in Mountain Ash, in my constituency, that has served our armed forces and police forces for almost

[Alex Davies-Jones]

30 years, yet it is on the verge of collapse because of the much-delayed defence investment plan. Hopefully we will have the plan soon, but can we have a debate in Government time on the impact of the delayed defence investment plan on our small and medium-sized businesses, which are the backbone of the economy and the defence sector in the UK?

Sir Alan Campbell: I reassure my hon. Friend that this Government have increased the amount spent on defence by a record amount since the end of cold war, and we are determined to ensure that we have proper funding for defence. I hear what she says about the role played by companies across our constituencies. Since we came into office, 1,400 major contracts have been agreed, 86% of which are with British businesses, so colleagues across the House, including my hon. Friend, should be reassured that this Government's intention is to ensure that British businesses benefit from that spending and, crucially, that our armed forces have the means that they need to defend our country in these very difficult times.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson—welcome back.

Bobby Dean (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I join the Leader of the House in his comments about Venezuela, Edinburgh, Bedford and our armed forces. I acknowledge his comments about the summer of saving, but ask him: a summer of saving who?

Paternity leave has been a joy. I know it will not make me popular with new parents, but mercifully my daughter has been sleeping pretty well, so far—[*Interruption.*] Mum is doing well too. As hon. Members may know, our journey to this point has not been straightforward. I shared our story of miscarriage in the baby loss debate last year. Telling that story was the start of hearing from thousands of women across the country about their experiences, which was truly humbling. It connected me with organisations such as Tommy's, which is proposing a new model for graded levels of care for miscarriage. Shockingly, at the moment, those who go through a miscarriage experience are not offered support—they have to wait until their third miscarriage to get support. Tommy's is campaigning for access to graduated support from day one. I note that the hon. Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) has written a cross-party letter to the Government about this, which I support.

We received information about maternity services in Nottingham yesterday, but we still await the final report on the national maternity and neonatal investigation, led by Baroness Amos. She gave interim findings earlier this year, from which we discovered that lots of women feel as if they are not listened to, that there is a postcode lottery for services and that many women are being treated in inadequate buildings. Will the Leader of the House confirm when that report will be published? We were told last August that there would a rapid investigation, so I hope it will be published this side of the summer recess.

Sir Alan Campbell: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to his place. I hope that all has been well following the addition of baby Lyla to his family. I wish them all well.

The hon. Gentleman raises an important point: every woman deserves safe, compassionate care, and it is devastating when that is not the case. The work of Donna Ockenden and Baroness Amos made clear the systematic, sustained and recurring failures in maternity and neonatal care, which are entirely unacceptable. The national maternity and neonatal taskforce, chaired by the Health Secretary, will take the recommendations from the Ockenden report, as well as those from Baroness Amos's national review, and ensure that it produces a comprehensive action plan by the end of this year. I cannot give him a specific date, but we are proceeding at pace.

In relation to the public inquiry, the Health Secretary made clear yesterday that no options are off the table. We are making progress on maternity care, and there are over 2,000 more midwives, but we accept that much more needs to be done. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood Forest (Michelle Welsh) has been the Government's first maternity adviser.

Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): Yesterday, during Women and Equalities questions, the Minister referred to the protection of the rights of trans people provided by the Supreme Court judgment, but I have constituents contacting me about their fear of using public toilet facilities when no gender-neutral toilets are available. They include one constituent who expressed the guilt they felt, because, as a transgender woman, she felt compelled to use the disabled toilet while at a museum because she could not use the women's toilets. She now feels unable to leave her house. Does the Leader of the House recognise the vulnerability of trans people? Will he agree to meet me with a relevant Minister to address this issue so that trans people can feel the respect and dignity that they deserve?

Sir Alan Campbell: My hon. Friend is a champion for the rights of his constituents, and I pay tribute to him. I recognise the concern that he has raised. Everyone, including trans people, should have the right to access the services and facilities that they need in a respectful way that protects dignity and privacy. Trans people continue to be protected under the Equality Act 2010, which we on the Labour Benches are particularly proud of. I will write to Ministers on his behalf and see whether we can arrange the meeting that he seeks.

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

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business that we have scheduled. In addition to the business he has announced, on Thursday 9 July there will be a debate on a ban on trade with illegal Israeli settlements, followed by a further debate on which we await confirmation from the sponsor. On Thursday 16 July, assuming that we are given that date, there will be the annual Sir David Amess pre-recess Adjournment debate, which is very popular with all colleagues.

As we await the implementation of the new Government, it seems that Government business is reasonably light. Early notice of any extra dates that we might get before the recess would be appreciated, as we have only just cleared requests for debates in the Chamber dating back to December. We have a large queue.

Let me turn to the debates in Westminster Hall next week. On Tuesday 30 June, there will be a debate on Government support for removing unlawful storefronts and regenerating local high streets. On Thursday 2 July, there will be a debate on reducing premature deaths from heart disease and stroke, followed by a debate on Government plans to tackle air pollution. On Tuesday 7 July, there will be a debate on UK aid policy in the context of global funding trends.

On Thursday 9 July, there will be a debate on Government support for the lobular moonshot project, and a further debate to be confirmed. I can announce in advance that on Thursday 16 July in Westminster Hall there will be a debate on the impact of national planning policy framework changes, followed by a debate on capital funding for Changing Places toilets.

Given the recent hot weather, I have been inundated with reports of individuals trapped in their flats in high-rise buildings, lifts going out of action and people being trapped in stairwells and collapsing because of the heat. That is particularly prominent in social housing. Given that this is about the design and upkeep of properties, can we have an urgent statement from one of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Ministers on what action the Government will take to protect these very vulnerable people? I have to say that they are often from visible ethnic minorities and often have no recourse to the support that they need. This is an urgent matter. Given that the hot weather is likely to continue for some time to come over the summer, we must take urgent action.

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his work and the work of his Committee. I will endeavour to give the Committee as much advance notice as possible. I expect the Committee to be given Thursday 9 July to schedule business. I know how much the House welcomes the Sir David Amess debate, and I hope that I will be able to announce that in due course. However, he can expect it to take place at the time when people would expect it to take place.

The hon. Gentleman raises the important matter of heat and social housing. We are working very hard across Government and with devolved and local partners to respond to the severe heatwave. On Tuesday, the Cabinet Office held an official-level Cobra meeting to support co-ordination. As he rightly says, we do not know how long this weather will continue, but if it continues into the future, it is right that we look at resilience across the board and particularly where there are vulnerable people, including in social housing. I know that councils will want to do everything they can to mobilise support for those people. I will draw his question to the attention of Ministers and see whether an update to the House is due.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): “Can we have one, Dad?” That was the iconic slogan of Yorkshire Caravans back in the 1980s. I am sure the Leader of the House will not quite remember then, but will he join me in congratulating Yorkshire Caravans on achieving its 100th birthday, which is a huge milestone for a local business in Bawtry in my constituency?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this matter to the House, and of course I congratulate Yorkshire Caravans on 100 years in business. Businesses

such as those are the cornerstones of the local economy, and its longevity only proves its worth and contribution. As my hon. Friend says, the product it manufactures produces lifetime memories for lots of people.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): A wheelchair-using constituent has contacted me after a major manufacturer and dealership refused to apply the VAT relief available to eligible disabled people purchasing adapted vehicles. There seems to be a perception in parts of the industry that the rules are complex and that dealerships bear a risk if that relief is applied incorrectly, which may be discouraging legitimately disabled people from getting the vehicles they deserve. Could we have a statement on this issue from the relevant Minister to clarify how the rules should work, so that my disabled constituents can acquire the vehicles they need?

Sir Alan Campbell: VAT relief on adapted vehicles is an important matter, and as ever, the right hon. Gentleman raises it in the proper way. However complex these matters are, it is important that businesses do the right thing, so getting that understanding between business and Government is very important. I will raise this matter with the relevant Minister and make sure that the right hon. Gentleman gets an update on it.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): As chair of the all-party parliamentary beer group, I was in a lot of pain this time last week—I was pedalling to pubs in Norfolk, and was probably just outside of Norwich, or maybe somewhere nearby. This week, Pedalling to Pubs came to Parliament. It has raised over £130,000 for two brilliant charities that support the beer and pub industry, Only A Pavement Away and the Licensed Trade Charity. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the riders, the support team, and the Members of this House who supported me financially to do that silly act? Will he also congratulate Ben McCarthy—an inspirational Down’s syndrome young man—and his mum, who absolutely smashed it and really showed me what it means to be committed and to support our pub industry?

Sir Alan Campbell: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in thanking Pedalling to Pubs and offering it our congratulations; that is an incredible amount of money, and I congratulate every individual who has been involved in raising it. Local pubs are very important indeed, which is why the Government are trying to do everything we can to support them, but I certainly think Pedalling to Pubs deserves our congratulations.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Hundreds of my constituents have been left bitterly disappointed by the Government’s recent announcement cancelling the later stages of Project Gigabit. Chichester did not receive a single completed upgrade from that project—all the households and businesses that were due to benefit were included in the later stages of the scheme, and as a result, they have now missed out entirely. Will the Leader of the House arrange an urgent meeting between me and the relevant Minister in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, so that I can discuss what will be done for these residents?

Sir Alan Campbell: I understand the concern of the hon. Lady and her constituents about this matter, and I will seek to arrange the meeting she asks for.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): I welcome the Government's ongoing commitment to supporting our veterans and delivering fairness for them. Can we please have a statement from the Veterans Minister on reducing processing times for war pension scheme claims? My constituent Denzil Hancock, an 88-year-old nuclear test veteran, continues to await a decision.

Sir Alan Campbell: It is appropriate that my hon. Friend should raise this matter in Armed Forces Week, but we should look to support veterans every week of the year, not just this week. I will raise his concerns with the relevant Defence Minister to see what further action can be taken to get rid of these delays.

Peter Fortune (Bromley and Biggin Hill) (Con): I have been contacted by a constituent in Biggin Hill who is deeply concerned that schools are not made aware when individuals who have been charged with child sexual offences are living in close proximity to the school. I appreciate that we have to balance safeguarding with legal and privacy issues, but surely making the schools aware makes sense. Can we have a debate in this place on community safeguarding?

Sir Alan Campbell: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. As he rightly acknowledges, it is a question of balance, but in that balance, the safety of children is paramount. He may wish to seek an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate on this, so that he can make his case, because I am sure his concerns will be shared by a number of colleagues from across the House.

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): In Brent, the support staff at Woodfield school face a cut in hours that equates to a cut of about £4,000 in their wages. The school is suggesting that it will fire and rehire them. The staff are on strike. The National Education Union is trying to negotiate, in order to save services, terms and conditions and jobs. Will the Leader of the House support me in ensuring that issues to do with special educational needs and disabilities funding do not jeopardise the care of children, or the terms and conditions of support staff?

Sir Alan Campbell: I am sure that this matter is of real concern to my hon. Friend's constituents, and she knows the Government's position on fire and rehire. She will know that we are committed to funding SEND properly, but if there are instances where that is having a real detrimental effect on an area, I can arrange for a meeting with the relevant Minister for her.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Reform): Tax-free individual savings accounts are tax-free; it is a very simple principle. ISAs have existed for 30 years, and 22 million people in our country invest their savings in them; that is 40% of the adult population. As the Chancellor's final act, she has decided to slap a 22% tax on cash in stocks-and-shares ISAs. Is there nothing that she does not want to tax? Does the Chancellor intend to come to Parliament and

account for her actions? Can we have a debate on this decision, in the name of the 22 million savers in this country who are being let down?

Sir Alan Campbell: The reality of the situation is simple, and I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman does not understand it. The new cash ISA limit, introduced by the Chancellor at the Budget in 2025, will encourage retail investment and drive better returns for savers. We are confident that we have struck the right balance between supporting normal investor behaviour and preventing routes that replicate a higher cash ISA allowance in stocks-and-shares ISAs and innovative finance ISAs. The new charge is aimed at deterring the long-term holding of cash in ISAs that should be used for investment. We have designed the rules to be as simple as possible, in order to maintain maximum flexibility for savers and ensure that an investment portfolio works for them. Normal investor behaviour, such as holding cash in a non-cash ISA prior to investment, will not be prevented by the introduction of the tax changes.

Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in commending the fantastic parliamentary staff in Westminster and in constituencies across the UK who keep MPs' offices running? They are employed by 650 separate offices, rather than by Parliament itself. That leaves them without consistent terms and, in some cases, proper support. The GMB, the largest union in Parliament—for the record, it is my union—is working to fix that through its “One Parliament, One Employer” campaign. Will he join me in encouraging Members to back its proposal?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this issue to the attention of the House. He is right to recognise the incredible work done by our staff in Westminster and across the UK, and I know that there are a range of views on this topic. I also note that your conference did a great deal of work on this in the last Parliament, Mr Speaker. Should my hon. Friend wish to have a meeting with the relevant House officials to discuss how this matter might be taken forward, and whether there is a consensus, I will help him to arrange it.

Rebecca Smith (South West Devon) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for his recent reply to my letter offering my support for the “regulating for growth” Bill, which was announced in the King's Speech. However, while he was effusive in his gratitude for my interest in the Bill, he definitely ignored my question about its timetabling in the House. The Bill is vital for the marine autonomy sector, based in my constituency. The sector is very keen to hear when the Bill will come forward. Given the comments of the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), about how light Government business is at the moment, may I urge the Leader of the House to think about starting the process before the summer, so that scrutiny can be carried out by businesses, and by people like me, ready for the September sitting?

Sir Alan Campbell: I will certainly give some thought to what the hon. Lady says, but let me knock on the head the idea that the business is light going forward. Next week, we have two days of estimates, which are the

lifeblood of this place, because they allow Members to hold the Government to account for how they intend to spend taxpayers' money. That is not light business, and there are the other measures that we are bringing forward next week. She will need to be careful in explaining to heavy goods vehicle drivers why she thinks that our improvements to their situation, and the help and support that we are giving them, is a matter of light business. However, I understand the need for decisions about investment. We will bring forward a timetable for the legislation in the usual way, but I will give some thought to what she has said.

Sally Jameson (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op): Doncaster Rovers are a league one football club, but the Club Doncaster Foundation is truly premier league in its outreach work. Last year, it delivered nearly £23 million of social value in Doncaster, and for every £1 invested, there was an £11.50 return through education and community impact. Does the Leader of the House agree that football clubs and their charity foundations should be celebrated for their work, and that other clubs should look to Doncaster Rovers and the Club Doncaster Foundation for best practice, on and off the pitch?

Sir Alan Campbell: I certainly pay tribute to Doncaster Rovers for everything that they do, and to other clubs that play an important role in their community. If clubs need to step up a little, I encourage them to look at what Doncaster Rovers are doing. It is not just about what happens on the pitch; it is about the work that they do in the wider community.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): Some of my youngest constituents have been in touch with me to say that they are really worried about being split up from their friends in their class. They go to Woodley primary school, which faces stretched budgets and a lowering birth rate, so the school is moving to mixed-age classes. Could we have a statement from the Department for Education about Government support for schools moving to mixed-age classes, so that I can raise the concerns of my youngest constituents, who are really worried about what is coming for them in September?

Sir Alan Campbell: Many schools, not just those in the hon. Lady's constituency, are having to come to terms with the falling birth rate and how best to organise services, and it is not an easy thing to do. Should she seek a Westminster Hall debate or an Adjournment debate on the subject, she might hear directly from the relevant Minister about how best the Government can help.

Tim Roca (Macclesfield) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in welcoming the GMB union's campaign to protect the 130 low-paid Churchill Cleaning staff in this place from redundancy? Does he agree that Parliament must remain clean for all, and that the Government's policy of ending the outsourcing of cleaning jobs should also be adopted by the parliamentary authorities?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this matter to the House. I hope we all agree that cleanliness and the upkeep of the parliamentary estate are absolutely vital, because they allow us to continue to do our jobs. The policy that he mentions is in the

purview of the House authorities, and if my hon. Friend should wish to make his case to the appropriate House official, I will help him in that process.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): The Leader of the House has many skills, as we all know, but many Members will not know that footballing skills are among them. In this world cup season, I suggest to him that playing fields have an important role in the football narrative of many boys and girls, and others playing football now, including for England. Is he aware of the campaign by the Shropshire Football Association, which has supported football since 1877, to protect where we play in Shropshire? We should ensure that our playing fields are protected, not built on. We understand that we have to build more houses, but that needs to be done on the right scale, and in the right place. Does he share my concern about the Government's plan to remove Sport England as a statutory consultee?

Sir Alan Campbell: I regret to say that I think the right hon. Gentleman is mixing me up with someone else if he thinks I have footballing skills, but I will plough on regardless. Let me be very clear: it is important that we protect our playing fields. We do need houses—homes—so that people can live fulfilling lives, but we also need to protect playing fields wherever we possibly can, and the Government are committed to that. If he wants reassurance on this matter, I can arrange a meeting with the relevant Minister, or he could seek an Adjournment debate in which to make his case.

Baggy Shanker (Derby South) (Lab/Co-op): My constituents are fed up with getting fleeced by private parking operators, and this is an issue not just in Derby. The RAC expects a record 17 million fines from just the last year alone, costing drivers well over £100 million. This Government are right to stand up for drivers in Derby and across the country by introducing a new private parking code of practice, but does the Leader of the House agree that it is time to crack down on unfair private parking fines, and will he ensure that this House is promptly updated when the new code of practice is released?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this matter. He is right that our new private parking code of practice will raise standards across the private parking industry to ensure that drivers are treated fairly. Stricter regulation of private parking companies will curb aggressive fines and debt recovery tactics. I am sure that the House will be updated when the code of practice is published, and I hope that will be at the earliest opportunity.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): As the Leader of the House and Members from across the House will be aware, when charities and voluntary groups arrange drop-in sessions in Parliament, we Members receive emails from constituents urging us to attend and support them. Yesterday, I attended the Leukaemia UK event in the House, and as is often the case, the main request of those attending was for early diagnosis. Could the Leader of the House arrange for a Health Minister to come to the House and give those people some reassurance about earlier diagnosis of this terrible disease?

Sir Alan Campbell: The hon. Gentleman is an assiduous constituency MP and campaigner on these matters, and I pay tribute to him for that. This is important, and the Government recognise that all cancer patients should get diagnosed in the shortest time possible, which is why we have published our national cancer plan. We have backed that up with £2.3 billion of investment, which will deliver 9.5 million additional tests by 2029. Charities such as Leukaemia UK do vital work, and I know that they will want reassurance on the issue that the hon. Gentleman mentions, so, to satisfy him, I will see whether we can get either a statement or an update from the relevant Minister.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will be aware that, in response to violence and disorder last year in Broadstairs, I have worked with Kent police, Southeastern railways, local councils and the British Transport police to establish better ways of tackling the problem of antisocial behaviour, yet still it returns—this time in Margate, as well as in Broadstairs, this week. I welcomed the extra resources allocated by this Government to seaside towns last year, which definitely helped. Will my right hon. Friend convey to the Home Secretary my constituents' concerns that we need to continue to resource our coastal communities—in particular, mine in East Thanet, but also his in Tynemouth—to meet needs that arise as a result of the influx of visitors, and to tackle the wilful misbehaviour of a determined few?

Sir Alan Campbell: As my hon. Friend says, I am very keen for this issue to be tackled. I hope to return to my constituency this weekend, and if the weather is fine, I am sure that the police—I am meeting them tomorrow—will, through Operation Coastwatch, rise to the challenges posed by young people, predominantly, coming to the coast. I welcome them, but I do hope they will behave when they get there.

We have passed the Crime and Policing Act 2026, which will tackle some of these behaviours. We will introduce respect orders, with named local antisocial behaviour leads, and we are also providing the police with the powers that they need to address these incidents. We must have the powers, but we must also have investment in more police officers. We should also encourage chief constables to recognise, as many of them do, that at times of great demand, they need to deploy officers in a certain way, and coastal towns have a particular claim.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): Pubs are the lifeblood of our local communities. In Wokingham, we are very lucky to have so many great pubs. To try to help them, I ran my “Wokingham's Best Pub” competition, recognising the value of pubs and their staff. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating The Two Poplars, which won the best pub competition last Friday, and, as I know he likes to support local pubs, will he consider joining me for a pint in The Two Poplars, where he will find good beer and good food?

Sir Alan Campbell: Again, the hon. Gentleman is an assiduous campaigner for his constituency. I congratulate him on setting up that scheme to recognise the importance of pubs in his local community, and I congratulate The Two Poplars on its achievement. I am tempted, I have to say, so I will have a look at my diary and see what we can do.

David Williams (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): There are plenty of great pubs across Stoke-on-Trent North and Kidsgrove that I could invite the Leader of the House to, but today I want to talk about Wendy, Val and residents at Bradeley village in my constituency. Time and again, they fundraise and hold community events to raise money for good causes; most recently, they raised £1,000 for a local sight loss charity. Will the Leader of the House please join me in saying thank you to Wendy, Val and everyone in Bradeley village, and can we make time for a debate on the role of community champions so that we can recognise all they do for our local communities?

Sir Alan Campbell: The work and dedication to their community of individuals like Wendy, Val and the residents of Bradeley village are an inspiration to us all, and I am pleased that my hon. Friend brought that story to us. I join him in thanking them for everything they do; indeed, I thank community volunteers right across our country because, as I have described them before, they are the golden thread that tie our communities together.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): My constituent Dean Collier chairs Priddy folk festival, a local volunteer-run community event that for 34 years has brought really good music to the village and raised money for the village facilities. For 20 years, campers and festival-goers used metered water in a tap on the village green. Bristol Water remove that meter last year so the organisers can no longer use the tap. The mains pipe to the village has a standpipe point in a perfect location, but Bristol Water has outsourced its supply standpipes to a company called Aquam, which refuses to fit a standpipe if people are going to drink the water.

We have a mains pipe full of potable water, a water company happy for it to be used, a subcontractor that will not allow a metered standpipe, and 5,000 thirsty folk music fans coming in a fortnight's time. Can the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs urgently to knock some heads together so that we can get a supply of drinking water at community events, and ask her what steps she can take to ensure that where there is a potable mains supply and an approved standpipe connection—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I call the Leader of the House.

Sir Alan Campbell: I hope that the water suppliers and all their contractors have listened to what the hon. Lady has said and that they act on it. I know there are considerations about the safety and quality of water, but I am sure it is not beyond the wit of them, if they put their heads together, to make this happen. If she lets me know how the matter progresses, then should the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs need to get involved—I am not sure what its powers are in this regard—we will see what further action can be taken. I encourage the water companies to sign up to sorting this out.

Andy MacNae (Rossendale and Darwen) (Lab): One key to creating opportunities in places like Rossendale and Darwen is reindustrialisation—making more things in more places, and creating good jobs close to home. To make this real, we need economic policy that truly understands the particular constraints facing our small

towns and rural communities. We need to be connected, and to have a policy that works for all parts of the country, not just places with a mayor. That will require a truly ambitious industrial strategy that gets behind every business, and a Government fully committed to buying British. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate in Government time on how we can make that happen?

Sir Alan Campbell: My hon. Friend is right to point to the importance of towns and communities, such as Rossendale and Darwen. They have a vital role to play in Britain's economic future, as do our rural and urban areas. The Government's industrial strategy is focused on driving investment and creating well-paid jobs in every part of the country. Our efforts have helped to secure £360 billion in private investment to date, which will support over 120,000 jobs. I encourage my hon. Friend to apply for a Westminster Hall debate or an Adjournment debate, so that he can put his concerns about the importance of towns directly to a Minister.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Reform): I feel sure that the Leader of the House will want to join me in celebrating with the people of Romford. We have a double celebration this week: Armed Forces Day, when there is a magnificent parade through the town centre with the Royal British Legion Band & Corps of Drums, ex-servicemen, cadets, and many others joining to salute our brave servicemen and women; and the 10-year anniversary of 70% of my constituents voting to leave the European Union and take back control of their country.

I want to make one serious point about the closure of schools across the country. Will the relevant Minister come to the House today to say, "No. We have learnt the lessons from covid. Closing schools because of a heatwave is the wrong decision to make"? Taking children out of the classroom is absolutely wrong, so will the Minister make a statement condemning it?

Sir Alan Campbell: I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in praise of Armed Forces Day and give the events in Romford our best wishes. It is important that the community can celebrate our armed forces. I imagine that the hon. Gentleman's area, like mine, has been a recruiting area in the past. I am not going to join him, however, in celebrating the 10th anniversary of leaving the EU. I am tempted to ask the hon. Gentleman: how is that going, then?

I am not going to condemn schools for making decisions. They must do what is right in the circumstances. I understand the concerns, because I remember the impact the covid years had on education, but the safety of children, staff and other workers is important. As I said earlier, there was a Cobra meeting earlier this week, and the Government are looking to see what further advice or action is needed. If anything further needs to happen, the Government will take that action.

Pam Cox (Colchester) (Lab): Young people in Colchester will benefit from their new youth hub, which is one of 14 set up across Essex. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on the early impact of those youth hubs, and the youth guarantee that so brilliantly underpins them?

Sir Alan Campbell: My hon. Friend is a champion for the youth guarantee, and I pay tribute to her for all the work she does to support young people. Over the next

three years, we are expanding the youth hub network to over 360 locations across Great Britain, ensuring that every young person can access opportunities and comprehensive support in their local area. To celebrate that, I encourage my hon. Friend to look for a debate in Westminster Hall or an Adjournment debate to see what more we can do to support our young people.

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): Protected land and villages, such as Stoke Row and Park Corner in my constituency, are being sold off in small lots. Auctioneers subtly encourage buyers into paying over the odds for land that has no prospect of planning consent. The result is disappointed and ripped-off buyers. Plot holders, left with failed investments, try to monetise them in ways that go against planning rules. We have also seen some members of the Gypsy and Traveller community move ahead with unauthorised development, using their ownership of the land to their advantage in the planning system. My residents are sick and tired of that, and expect the Government to act through the national planning policy framework and planning rules. Will the Leader of the House support my efforts to secure a Westminster Hall debate on the topic so we can discuss it further?

Sir Alan Campbell: I encourage the hon. Member to apply for a Westminster Hall debate. I am not the person that allocates those, but the hon. Member raises important matters. Given what he has said, it is important that he hears from Ministers with responsibility for planning whether further legislation is necessary, or, if the legislation exists, whether those who have the authority to use it actually do so.

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): I welcome the Government's announcement of a review into the zero emission vehicle mandate, with the objective of slowing the phase-in of ZEV targets. However, I do not believe that this changes the direction of travel for bus manufacturing, which supports 50,000 jobs across the United Kingdom, and is similarly struggling with the rise in imported Chinese electric buses. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement from Department for Business and Trade and/or Department for Transport Ministers to update the House on the scope of this reported review?

Sir Alan Campbell: Nobody in this House campaigns harder on behalf of the industry than my hon. Friend, and I thank him for that. The Government have allocated more than £73 million in additional funding to deliver almost 500 zero emission buses across England. The mandate is a devolved matter, but we are working with the devolved Governments to ensure that meaningful engagement takes place ahead of the review. I will raise his concerns with the relevant Minister to see whether there is any further update that we can share with him.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Princess Alice hospice in my constituency on celebrating its 40th anniversary this year? Over the past 40 years, it has cared for tens of thousands of people and has been a staple for local families at their most vulnerable. Only 20% of its funding comes from statutory NHS funding, with the rest mainly coming from selling woolly jumpers; as a result, it is able to meet only one third of the local need. Access to palliative care will come under scrutiny

[Monica Harding]

once again in the autumn. Will the Leader of the House make time to address sustainable funding for palliative care to ensure that provision for all is available?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank Princess Alice hospice for everything it does. Hospices in all our areas are so very important. I do understand its concern about having sustained funding going forward, but the Government have committed £125 million to support the hospice sector, with a further £26 million to support children and young people's hospices. I suspect that the hon. Lady is right that this issue will come more into focus as private Member's Bills come forward; I think she will get her opportunity then to make that case. In the meantime, if there is anything the Government can do to update the House about that, I am sure they will think about doing it.

Josh Newbury (Cannock Chase) (Lab): Last month, my constituent Kyle Pusey was recognised with Cannock Chase district council's youth endeavour award for his years of outstanding volunteering at Norton Canes library. Kyle is known for being polite, hard-working and always willing to go the extra mile. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Kyle on this well-deserved achievement, and could we have a debate on the positive difference he and many other young people make to communities up and down our country?

Sir Alan Campbell: I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating Kyle on his youth endeavour award—he sounds like a credit to his local community and to his family and friends. I want to thank everyone who volunteers in service of their local communities, ultimately making them a better place to live. If my hon. Friend sought a Westminster Hall debate or an Adjournment debate on this subject—not just to talk about the work and success of Kyle—I am sure that others would wish to raise issues from their own constituencies.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): On 20 May at Prime Minister's questions, I raised the fears of my constituents, like Leigh, about the exceptionally high levels of forever chemicals in watercourses near the former RAF Upper Heyford airbase. Without hesitation, the Prime Minister agreed to ask the Environment and Health Secretaries to meet my constituents and me. Five weeks later, the two Secretaries of State have repeatedly refused a meeting; instead, the Minister for Water's office has offered 15 minutes for an "initial discussion" before recess. My constituents are deeply worried and desperate for the Government to take a grip. I ask the Leader of the House to help me to secure the meeting that the Prime Minister promised without delay.

Sir Alan Campbell: I will endeavour to find a way through this so that what the Prime Minister committed to can happen.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): I am delighted that Cumberland council is to partner with Carlisle College and the Story construction group to renovate the old keeper's lodge in Bitts Park in my constituency. The college's construction students will gain invaluable experience of working on a live construction site, there

will be no cost to the council, and a much-loved building will be brought back into public use. Does the Leader of the House agree that this partnership model could be adopted elsewhere to bring back other much-loved buildings, and will he join me in thanking council officer Stephen Dunn, whose brainchild this project was?

Sir Alan Campbell: My hon. Friend is right to champion the scheme that she refers to, which sounds like an excellent partnership that benefits all sides. I join her in congratulating Stephen Dunn on instigating this project, as well as the many other council officers across our country who do a fantastic job. I will ensure that the Secretary of State hears about it, because it sounds like an arrangement that has a lot of potential going forward.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Freeholders on private estates currently face unregulated service charges and have no meaningful recourse if managing agents are incompetent. In January, the Minister of State for Housing committed to tackling these so-called fleecehold schemes by the end of this Parliament. However, with a new Prime Minister likely to reset the legislative agenda, affected constituents will be worried that that promise will be quietly dropped. Will the Leader of the House request a written statement on delivery from the Minister?

Sir Alan Campbell: I announced in the business statement that there will be a debate on these issues next week, when I hope the hon. Lady will be able to make her case. Let me reassure her that the Government are absolutely committed to taking action on this matter, and I am sure that, whoever is Prime Minister, that commitment will be maintained.

Danny Beales (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Lab): The Met police play a vital role in keeping those who work in, live in and visit London safe, including us here in this Chamber. The Labour Government and our Mayor have stepped up and increased funding, but at the same time, the unique challenges that the Met faces—policing protests, complex crimes and terrorism—have all increased, meaning that, despite the uplift, there remains a gap in funding. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on future funding for the Met, and in particular the opportunity to bridge the funding gap by enabling the force to retain a proportion of the value of the cryptocurrency it recently seized as part of Op Manor—estimated to be worth between £3 billion and £9 billion—so that we can invest in the equipment, police stations and police officers that we desperately need?

Sir Alan Campbell: The Government are absolutely committed to ensuring that the Met police have the resources they need, and have increased funding by £446 million since coming to office. Court proceedings relating to Operation Manor are ongoing, and critical elements are still to be considered before any asset is realised. Ministers will consider how any residual funds are distributed, including reflecting on the role of the Metropolitan police service.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Leader of the House for all his answers. Will he ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement on the protection of recognised and unrecognised religious minority communities in the Gulf region? Following reports from Human Rights Watch that Qatari authorities have ordered members

of key Baha'i institutions to leave the country without due process or an effective legal avenue to challenge these decisions, what steps are the Government able to take through their close bilateral relationships in the region to encourage stronger protections for freedom of religion or belief, legal recognition and due process for minority faith communities?

Sir Alan Campbell: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, raises an important matter. We strongly condemn the persecution of Baha'i communities in many countries around the world. Our special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, my hon. Friend the Member for North Northumberland (David Smith), has met with the Baha'i international community UN representative to discuss the persecution that the Baha'i face, and regularly engages with the community. I will raise the hon. Gentleman's specific concerns with the Foreign Office and ensure that he gets a reply on what further action the Government can take.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): For years, my constituent Donna Louise Armstrong has worked tirelessly to serve the veteran community locally and nationally, both as our area co-ordinator for Poppyscotland and as vice-chair of the Homeless Veterans Project, which she helped to establish in 2019. She is very often seen at events in my constituency in her Paddington Bear outfit, raising funds for homeless veterans. Donna recently received recognition for her outstanding work in the King's honours. As we approach Armed Forces Day, will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Donna on her British Empire Medal for services to veterans and the wider Renfrewshire community, and thank her for her immense contribution to the lives of so many veterans?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for this well-timed question during Armed Forces Week. I join her in congratulating Donna Louise Armstrong on her years of service to her local community and on her very well deserved British Empire Medal for services to our veterans community. Her friends and family should be very proud of her.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): In the past hour and a half, I have received several emails and telephone calls. Let me read one of the emails:

"I am writing this email as I have been reliably informed that bidding has commenced for turning Linton-on-Ouse RAF base into an immigration detention centre. I am deeply concerned as this proposal was put forward four years ago and caused great stress and turmoil to our local community. I would also like to know why the local community was not informed of this decision before the decision was made to use the base for something that was deemed unsuitable years ago."

May I ask the Leader of the House whether we might have a statement before the end of today's business so that some of these questions may be put directly to the Minister before we break for the weekend?

Sir Alan Campbell: That matter was raised earlier, and I understand Members' concerns. Let me take this away and see if we can get the assurance that the right hon. Gentleman and others are seeking.

Mark Swards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): As a member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I have seen at first hand the courage and dedication that

our service personnel show each and every day, and, as this is Armed Forces Week, I want to commend them for it. One of my constituents is a newly attested Army reservist. He is proud to serve our country but his experience shows some of the barriers faced in training. It took nearly a year to train, but, crucially, he had to spend nearly £1,000 on travel, equipment and medical appointments. Unfortunately, that barrier resulted in many other dedicated applicants dropping out. On his behalf, will the Leader of the House grant a debate on the need to support the recruitment and training of our Army reservists?

Sir Alan Campbell: My hon. Friend is right to raise this matter during Armed Forces Week. Reservists are an integral part of the effectiveness of our armed forces. They bring experience from defence, strengthen resilience and provide specialist skills that cannot be generated or sustained in regular forces alone. I encourage him to seek a Westminster Hall or Adjournment debate, so that he can make his strong case in greater detail.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): The UK Parliament's school outreach worker for the south-west saw 20,000 children and 780 adult learners last year. In rural and coastal areas, that provision is absolutely vital. Some schools in my constituency cannot get to Parliament, and the ones that can are struggling to get places. Students from King Charles primary school have been in London since yesterday, but they could not come to Parliament because there was no space. I would be grateful if the Leader of the House found Government time for a debate on the impact that getting rid of the parliamentary school outreach team will have on rural and coastal areas, people with special education needs, minorities and people with disabilities.

Sir Alan Campbell: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns. I acknowledge the important work of outreach in educating the public about what Parliament does and why it matters. This is, of course, a matter for the House. I know that some Members have raised it directly with the House authorities via oral and written questions, and I am sure that the House authorities have heard her concerns as they weigh up this matter.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): Buried in a bulging Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council budget consultation is a plan to lay off lollipop people in my constituency. Of the few hundred consultees across BCP, half had not used a school crossing patrol service for a year. Meanwhile, my petition has received many hundreds more responses in my constituency alone, and all the respondents are clear that they want to save our lollipop people. I recently met Martin, Georgia, Stella and other members of the school crossing patrol. They are friendly faces at the school gate who do such fantastic work to keep kids safe. I thank my constituents Stephanie, Sarah, Lisa, Hazel, Laura, Gina, Paul, Emma and Charlotte, who are fighting for the lollipop people. Does the Leader of the House agree that BCP council should think twice and stop laying off lollipop people, and will he write to the relevant Minister to arrange a meeting with me and our local lollipop people?

Sir Alan Campbell: My hon. Friend raises an important matter. Road safety for children is vital. The work that lollipop people do for our young people is paramount.

[Sir Alan Campbell]

I hope that those at Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council hear my hon. Friend's contribution and take his concerns seriously. I pay tribute to Martin, Stella, Georgia and the many lollipop people across our communities for their work. I hope that this can be resolved properly.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): Earlier this month, the Government announced that they are putting yet more money into the lower Thames crossing, meaning that we will now spend more than £3 billion on a road that costs more per mile than High Speed 2, and we will privatise away Dartford toll revenues for the privilege. Meanwhile, despite welcome steps by the Government for market towns and villages such as those in my constituency, buses remain more of a hypothetical concept than a regular and reliable form of daily travel. May I gently request a debate on ensuring that transport spending matches the genuine priorities of our constituents?

Sir Alan Campbell: My hon. Friend knows that bus transport in particular is a key priority of this Government—buses are so important to towns and villages—and we are making real progress on it. He will also know that this is not a clear either/or matter. If he wants a debate to weigh up the best use of those resources, I encourage him to apply for a Westminster Hall or Adjournment debate so that he and others can make the case for the best possible public transport in their areas.

Steel Trade Measure

12.26 pm

The Minister for Trade (Chris Bryant): With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement on our steel trade measure, which will come into force on Wednesday 1 July.

Let me start with first principles. The UK needs a strong steel sector, both in production and downstream, but the whole sector is facing an existential moment. Fifty years ago, the UK produced 27 million tonnes of steel a year, and even in 2010 we produced 12 million tonnes, but in 2024 we produced just 4 million tonnes and met just 30% of UK steel needs.

No Government can or should ever accept such a sharp decline in an industry that forms the backbone of so many other sectors, including defence. We promised that, in government, we would do two things in tandem. First, we promised to launch a steel strategy to tackle all the key issues facing the sector in the round. That strategy, which we published on 19 March, includes up to £2.5 billion of Government investment on top of the £500 million pledged for steelworks at Port Talbot, plus active support for this energy-intensive sector through the British industry supercharger. Secondly, we said that we would introduce a robust new steel trade measure that secures the future of the UK's steel industry, to protect our ability to produce steel for defence and critical national infrastructure. Today, I will address the latter point.

Why do we need the steel trade measure? A key part of the existential threat to UK steel production is global overcapacity, a lack of transparency about international subsidies and artificially depressed global prices, all of which price UK steel out of the market. For the past eight years, UK steel production has enjoyed some protection thanks to the UK's steel safeguard, which it inherited from the EU. That allowed us to protect categories of steel manufactured in the UK with quotas and a 25% out-of-quota tariff. That protection, which was introduced by the previous Government, was clearly not sufficient, as our steel sector has continued to suffer. In the seven years under the safeguard, up to 2024, steel production has continued to fall by 3.3 million tonnes—a stunning further 45%.

We now face a key moment. That safeguard must legally expire on 30 June, as World Trade Organisation rules firmly prevent an extension of a safeguard beyond eight years—it is precisely the same for the EU. If we put nothing in its place, our steel production sector will lose all its protection. That would not just bring our steel industry to its knees; it would kill it completely. That is why I promised the House that I would not allow a gap between the expiry of the safeguard and the implementation of our future steel trade measures. We are making good on that promise today.

There is an additional concern. Canada, the United States and the EU have already put in place similar toughened measures to protect their industries, so if we do nothing, or if we delay the introduction of new measures, we will immediately become the global dumping ground for cheap steel from across the world. Again I say: that would mean the end of UK steel production. That is why we must take similar action to the European Union, which announced its measure on 7 October last year. Earlier this year, we committed to introduce a 50%

out-of-quota tariff on imported steel, and in April we published provisional quotas for several key categories of steel. This measure needs to work not just for our steel producers but for our manufacturers, who depend on steel—those who source it from the UK and those who source it from abroad. Our aim is solely to protect categories of steel that we produce in the UK, so we have deliberately excluded many categories from the measure. To be absolutely clear, nearly three quarters of UK steel imports by value, and 53% by volume, are out of scope of this measure.

Today I announce the final design of our steel trade measure, which will take effect on the same day as the measures imposed by the European Union. The total quota volume will now be 3.2 million metric tonnes. That is an increase of over 560,000 metric tonnes of steel that can be imported tariff-free compared with the provisional volumes that we announced—a significant 21% uplift. Today's announcement includes the final quotas in each category. Having listened to Members and industry, we have increased the quotas in several instances so as more accurately to protect categories of steel that are manufactured in the UK.

Some of the changes reflect the fact that the European Union remains our largest export market for steel and that we have highly interconnected supply chains. Since we announced our measure in March, we have engaged intensively with the European Union and UK industry. We have reached a mutual outcome with the EU as a result of those discussions. On our side, we will increase the EU's quota access from the announced 1.58 million tonnes to 2.08 million tonnes, and the EU will announce quotas under its own measure shortly.¹ That will provide stability for UK-EU steel trade from 1 July while we continue to work together to strengthen UK-EU steel trade in the longer term. We have also worked closely with our international partners, and we are committed to constructive engagement with them on our steel measure. We will continue to prioritise working with our partners to tackle overcapacity.

I want to be very honest with colleagues: there are tough trade-offs here. We are determined to ensure that steel continues to be forged and made in the UK by proud steelmaking communities across the UK—in Port Talbot, Motherwell, Scunthorpe, Sheffield and on Teesside. The Labour movement was forged in these communities, just as steel was, and we will not let them down. But we know that businesses will sometimes need to find specialised steel that we simply cannot procure in the UK. In those cases, quotas have been designed to allow for imports and to ensure continued availability for UK businesses without unnecessary additional costs. To ensure continuity within supply chains for business, we are also introducing a transitional arrangement. That means that our new trade measure will not apply to steel under contract before 14 March, and imported between 1 July and 30 September. We will conduct a review after 12 months and actively monitor implementation of the measure from day one to ensure that it operates as intended and remains responsive to emerging evidence and stakeholder feedback.

There are some who think that steel is an industry of the past. Others think that the market alone should provide—“Just buy it as cheap as you can, whatever the cost to British industry.” I could not disagree more, because I know how that script runs. We buy cheap this year and next year, and maybe for a decade. Unable to compete, our national steel industry dies in the meantime. Every

single UK steel mill closes. Then suddenly, miraculously, the global price rockets up, and we have nowhere to turn because we are caught in a trap of our own making. I fully understand the concerns of those who worry about this measure, and will seek to address them, but I say to them that this is in the interests of the whole sector—producers and users alike.

Finally, I will be hosting a drop-in surgery for Members on Monday 29 June from 3.15 pm to 5 pm, where colleagues can meet with me and officials to discuss any concerns and to understand the impact of this measure on the particular businesses in their constituency. I hope that will be of convenience to Members.

I would especially like to thank my officials, including Beth Sedgwick, Malte Werner and Chris Taylor, and the wonderful Lola Oates in my private office, for all the work they have done on this. I commend this statement to the House.

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

12.34 pm

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement.

We welcome the partial U-turns that have been announced, the engagement there has been and the reflection, even at this very late hour, that the original proposals from the Government would have done great damage to British manufacturing. This decision could, however, have come months ago. If not, it could have come weeks ago, when Members of the House and businesses started raising the alarm and engaging with the Department. It took this Government—if Members can remember—more than a year and three quarters to come up with their original steel strategy, yet the industry is now expected to adjust with less than one week to go. That is not a reasonable way on which to proceed.

The Government have left untouched the 50% tariff rate, and that will do great damage to British manufacturing, house builders and those who construct the nation's infrastructure. It will mean higher inflation, fewer jobs, fewer homes and fewer public projects. The Government have made some welcome concessions on how much steel can be brought in but conceded nothing on the rate that punishes imported steel the very moment that the quota is exceeded.

I know, as does the Minister, that he has received significant private representations from industry on this issue, particularly from defence and aerospace, and I imagine that the Minister does understand that this measure will not be enough. Of the 60 codes that we believe are relevant to aerospace and space, just two codes have been removed, and while quota uplifts have been applied, they are not particularly useful to the small-scale, high-value defence manufacturers, as commodity buyers will snap up all those quotas at the start of the year before they get a look-in.

As a result, we are, I am sad to say, putting the defence of this country at risk by imposing a shock to defence industry prices, and it will either be the Treasury or the Ministry of Defence that picks up the bill. Projects such as AUKUS, Tempest, drones and much-needed munition rearming will all be vulnerable as a consequence.

1. *Official Report*, 7 July 2026; Vol. 789, c. 3WC. (Correction).

[*Andrew Griffith*]

Finally, let me put some questions to the Minister on behalf of the industry. Will he commit to publishing the impact assessment on downstream steel sectors before Parliament rises for the summer? Does the Minister understand that by not exempting pre-agreed purchase contracts, which may in some cases run for years, he is damaging good, decent British manufacturing firms, even those in Rhondda and Ogmore? His exclusions rest on a test of “no production, or production paused”, but will he explain how he justifies keeping specialist grades in scope when in some industries, such as aerospace, it takes years to certify suppliers? Can he confirm that the EU’s reciprocal quota for exports from the UK will fully protect the 2.4 million tonnes of annual British exports of steel that would otherwise be at risk?

Chris Bryant: I honestly just do not think that the hon. Gentleman understands how this works—any single element of it, to be honest. Let me first address his point about the timing. I would have much preferred to give greater notice to everybody, and I worked towards being able to do so. Unfortunately, one of the key parts of the interaction is with the European Union, and we only completed our negotiations with the European Union over the last few days. I point out that the EU itself has not as yet announced its quota, either with us or for any other country, and will not do so until Monday. I wanted to bring this forward as soon as I possibly could.

The hon. Gentleman refers to U-turns. We have listened to the concerns both from specific businesses—I know that some are very pleased with some of the categories we have changed and the quotas we have increased—and from hon. Members, who have brought their concerns to the Chamber or directly to Ministers. We have tried to address as many issues as possible, but, as I said in my statement, there are difficult trade-offs here.

The hon. Gentleman suggests that we should cut the 50% tariff rate. I am not sure that is a point he has made anywhere previously, but if we had a lower tariff rate than other countries, in particular the European Union, we would—this is why I do not think he understands how any of this works—immediately become the dumping ground for all the cheap steel in the world. We would be a magnet for that and we would be exacerbating the problem for steel production that we already have in the UK.

The shadow Secretary of State raised the question of defence. I have looked carefully at this. Of course, he wrote a letter this morning that made some rather ill-founded remarks about what is likely to happen to defence. First, Sheffield Forgemasters is already providing significant amounts of UK steel precisely into the UK defence sector. When the defence investment plan is produced, I want it to deliver jobs in the UK rather than just everywhere else in the world, and I would like more of our defence industry to be based on using UK steel, because that would be a double win for us.

I note that when the previous Government were in place, they commissioned: Type 26 frigates—65% of that steel came from Sweden; Type 31 frigates—all the steel from Finland; and four Royal Fleet Auxiliary Tide-class tankers—44,000 tonnes of steel from Korea.

When the Dreadnought-class nuclear ballistic submarines were commissioned by the last Government, where did the steel come from? From France! We can do far, far better than this. It is absolutely preposterous that only 30% of UK steel needs are being met by UK steel production. We need to get that number up. We have committed to getting it to 50% and that is why I am immensely supportive of the measure that we are introducing today.

I also want to make it clear that a lot of categories of steel—as I said, three quarters of the steel by value—is not in scope of the measure at all. That means it can come in and out of the UK without any tariff. Also, the 50% tariff is not on all the steel in a particular category; it is only on that above the quota. In significant areas, we have increased the quota and, for instance, in categories 4, 6, 12A and 7, which is particularly important for the defence sector, the final quotas are higher than the levels of historical trade because some of the previous quotas were not even being fully used. I am afraid that the hon. Member is wrong in nearly every single element of his analysis—and that is not the first time, is it?

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Although I certainly welcome the protection of our steel industry, I remain concerned about some tariffs and quotas affecting some products. I am pleased to hear the Minister reiterate what the Industry Minister said on Wednesday: that, alongside measures to protect our industry, our Government are absolutely committed to increasing the range of products that we make in the UK. To that end, will the Minister meet me to discuss a proposal from a constituent of mine in Llanelli to open a manufacturing facility to produce steel bands, which currently have to be imported from the EU, so we can bring that production back to the UK?

Chris Bryant: That is an extremely well made point. Gun barrel manufacturing is being done in the UK again thanks to a Sheffield Forgemasters contract that has been secured. We need to bring more of these categories back into UK production. I am happy to meet my hon. Friend. She might want to come along to the surgery that I am doing on Monday afternoon with officials. If she wants to talk to me, she knows how to find me. She is absolutely right that we need to increase the total quantity of steel that we are producing in the UK, protect what we are already doing and find new areas where we can produce steel. We will never do that unless we introduce tough protections in trade measures to deal with the problem of global overcapacity.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Lib Dem spokesperson.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): I am grateful to the Minister for advance sight of his statement. Steel matters. It matters for our national security, our defence and our critical infrastructure, and it sustains jobs right across the United Kingdom. British Steel supports thousands of jobs and over a billion pounds of economic activity through its own operations and supply chain. It also underpins hundreds of thousands more jobs and several billion pounds of activity across the industries that depend on it. It has been battered by Trump’s trade war and by years of unfair practices from China.

Steel is an industry worth defending, and Liberal Democrats support that goal, but we have been vocal about our concerns regarding the impact of the Government's proposed tariffs on downstream manufacturers. Downstream steel-using industries employ 300,000 people, including some of my Hazel Grove constituents. A blanket approach risks weakening a far larger manufacturing jobs base while doing little to protect British steel.

I am pleased that the Government have listened to our concerns and to those of industry. The quota increase and product code removals are positive steps, so I have just three questions. First, categories 14 and 27 cover specialist steels required by aerospace, defence, Formula 1 and precision engineering, which cannot be sourced domestically in the required grades and volumes. Do those categories fall within the 11 product codes that have been removed from the arrangements? Secondly, the transitional arrangements only protect contracts signed before 14 March. What protection exists for manufacturers who have signed contracts in good faith between March and today? Thirdly, the WTO process will begin in the autumn. Will the Minister confirm that any permanent tariff increases resulting from that process will not permanently lock in higher tariffs on specialist steels that cannot be sourced domestically?

Chris Bryant: I think the hon. Lady was confusing product codes and categories. If I start with 17, we have increased the quota by a significant amount. I hope that that will reflect the lack of production at the moment, which several Members have already raised with me. We have done that specifically to answer those questions. We have done likewise in category 14, stainless bars and light sections.¹

The hon. Lady asked about the transition arrangements. I referred to that in my statement. If she wants further details, she can come and talk to me about it on Monday. Also, I am not sure whether Minister are meant to admit this, but I did not fully understand her last question. If she wants to either grab me later or drop me a note, I will respond to her that way.

Sureena Brackenridge (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Tata Steel's Steelpark in Wednesfield and manufacturers across Wolverhampton North East and the Black Country rely on resilient supply chains for steel. Will the Minister set out how today's statement on increased quotas and steel under contract before 14 March will continue to back British-made steel production while giving downstream manufacturers the competitive certainty and confidence that they need?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is right to defend her constituents' interests. We have tried to meet the precise concerns that she raises. I would be happy to go through with her on Monday afternoon each of the different categories of steel that might be applicable to her area. Some people have given the impression that we are cutting all categories of steel and that nobody will be able to bring in categories of steel without being tariffed. Actually, the quotas in most areas allow for historical levels of imports, and in others areas where we produce in the UK we are trying to persuade people to buy and use British steel. That is the whole aim of the measure. We are trying to get two wins out of this. As I say, I am

¹ *Official Report*, 7 June 2026; Vol. 789, c. 4WC. (Correction).

happy to take my hon. Friend through the various specifics in relation to individual categories, if she wants, on Monday afternoon.¹

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): Hundreds of my constituents work at Scunthorpe steel, so I am obviously supportive of any action that the Government take that will protect those jobs. I also welcome the adjustments that the Minister has announced, and I agree that it is preposterous that defence contracts do not ensure that we use British steel. Surely doing that is one of the benefits of not being tied to EU procurement rules. Does he agree that it is in the Government's gift to ensure that the industry benefits from reduced energy costs? What will the Government do to ensure that the Scunthorpe works benefit from lower energy costs in the very near future?

Chris Bryant: The hon. Member will know that we changed the rules of the supercharger in April this year, taking the support from 60% to 90% of energy costs. The point is well made about energy costs being one of the things that have made it difficult for steel over the last decade. On whether we are better being in or out of the European Union, one of the ironies is that if we were in the European Union, we would not have to be negotiating about its imposition of tariffs and quotas on us. I am not sure that that is a very good line of argument. Finally, I was pleased to see in Kyiv in January that one of the six bridges that had been destroyed by the Russians when trying to invade the city had been rebuilt—and guess where the steel was made? The United Kingdom. That is the kind of thing that we should be investing in.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): My constituency has many steel fabrication businesses, some of which I visited recently. Will the Minister please outline how he listened to such businesses and their concerns before this announcement?

Chris Bryant: My officials and I have spoken a great deal to the kind of businesses that my hon. Friend is talking about—not all of them, but a large number of them—and have tried to explain that we are trying to tackle only those categories of steel that can be and are being produced in the UK. Those are the ones that we are trying to protect; as a south Wales valleys MP, like myself, he will fully understand the obvious reason for that.

That has meant that we have increased some of the quotas to allow more tariff-free imports—precisely to answer the question that some of my hon. Friend's companies may have. If he wants to go through the specifics of the companies in his patch, I would be happy to do so. I will not have pleased everybody—in my life, I very rarely ever have. [*Laughter.*] I did not mean to unite the Chamber on that point. We have tried to listen where we possibly can, but there are difficult trade-offs.

David Chadwick (Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe) (LD): The imposition of tariff barriers alone is not sufficient to address the shortcomings in our steel industry. The Minister said that it is important to provide more opportunities to help people buy British steel, but there is a difference between saying that and making it happen.

¹ *Official Report*, 9 July 2026; Vol. 789, c. 8WC. (Correction).

[David Chadwick]

He will be aware that we lack the heavy plate steel and plate rolling capability needed for building offshore wind turbines, which could be made in Port Talbot rather than having to be imported from abroad, and that specialist plate for defence applications is also limited. What are the Government doing to close those strategic capability gaps? Have they assessed whether developing a heavy plate mill at Port Talbot could help to underpin the offshore wind industry that we could build in the Celtic sea?

Chris Bryant: The hon. Member makes a good point. This is why we have a steel strategy as well as the steel trade measure, which is only part of the steel strategy. The Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Chris McDonald), was in the Chamber answering an urgent question on some of these issues last week. Some of the energy issues that others have raised are key to making this happen, as is, of course, Government procurement policy. One of the first things we did when we arrived in government in 2024 was introduce a new procurement strategy in relation to steel. The very least we could do is ensure that when the Government are spending taxpayers' money, they are spending it on British steel wherever possible.

Mr Alex Barros-Curtis (Cardiff West) (Lab): I refer to my membership of GMB and Unite. I thank the Minister for his statement. I understand the trade-offs he referred to and the need to take measures to rebalance the sector. He knows, because we have spoken about it a lot, that the steel strategy refers to 50% of future UK-made steel being Welsh steel. Will he say a bit more about that? It is something that my constituents are particularly passionate about.

Chris Bryant: There is a very fetching photograph of my hon. Friend and me at the electric arc furnace at 7 Steel in Cardiff. It is a very impressive operation—it is a very impressive photograph—and he makes a good point. We want to get to 50% of UK steel needs being met by British-made steel; it is a very simple campaign. The sector has now been in decline for decades, and we are at a critical moment. I have heard people say, “Why can't you just delay this measure for a few months?” That would be the end of UK production of steel—completely and utterly. We simply cannot allow that to happen, given our defence needs, infrastructure needs and, frankly, national security needs. That is why we are committed in the way that we are.

Sir Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): The Minister spoke about monitoring this policy from day one, but there will not be a review for 12 months. What will the monitoring comprise, and what happens if that monitoring reveals problems very early on? Will he have to wait until the review after 12 months, or will he be able to implement impacts and analysis from the monitoring?

Chris Bryant: That is a fair point. We have tried to do two things. In key areas, we want to ensure that people can maintain historical trade flows, so we need to monitor how those trade flows are progressing. We can do that with His Majesty's Revenue and Customs on a

regular basis. If there is a sudden spike, we may need to address it. There may be special events, like the fire in Port Talbot the other day; that has not presented the kind of problem we thought it might, so we have been able to stick with our plans. Speciality Steel, for instance, has not been able to get up and running yet, which is why we adjusted some of the codes. We always reserve the right to make a significant intervention during that period if we absolutely have to, but I want to provide industry with as much predictability as possible. That is why we are talking about a one-year review.

Gurinder Singh Josan (Smethwick) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's statement and the ministerial team's engagement with Members to understand the concerns of our businesses. I have previously raised the challenges faced by downstream producers in my Black Country constituency. Pargat Housewares, which uses steel suitable for kitchenware, was facing a 60% hike in raw materials costs, and Hadley Industries is already looking to reduce headcount, which means knock-on effects in its supply chain. I welcome the increase in quotas and the removal of the majority of categories from the scope of the measure, but will the Minister explain how the Department has been and will be working with individual businesses to understand their concerns and support them going forward?

Chris Bryant: I have never known a policy area that so depends on the granular detail of individual companies and individual codes and categories of different steel. I talked to people from one business who were very concerned at the beginning of our conversation, because they thought that all their steel imports would be in scope and would be tariffed at 50%, but it turned out that the business did not actually use a category of steel that is in scope. That is why I am keen to go through the fine detail with Members where I can. My hon. Friend has raised the issue of ceramics and bakeware, and I am happy to have that conversation. If he wants to come along and talk with officials on Monday afternoon, that would be great.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): I congratulate the Minister and his departmental colleagues on listening to the representations that were made. It is worth reinforcing that some 75% of steel imports are not impacted by the measure, which is good news. Does the Minister agree that the reason we are in this pickle is that the previous Administration had no steel strategy for 14 years and allowed the whole industry to collapse by 66%?

Chris Bryant: I think I am going to have to resign, because I agree with every single word of what the hon. Gentleman just said.

Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's statement, and particularly the decision to remove products where there is no domestic production. That will make a real difference to specialist manufacturers in Calder Valley, but they are understandably worried about what the tariffs will mean for their businesses. Will the Minister clarify whether galvanised wire products, which I have written to the Secretary of State about, are covered by the exemption? Companies in my constituency such as Siddall & Hilton, which makes specialist fencing, cannot get UK-produced supply and therefore get inputs from the EU, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

Chris Bryant: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments, and I know that he has raised some of those issues with the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North. It is probably best that we go through the granular detail of the particular company's concerns.

Let me also correct the idea of there being an exemption. There is not an exemption; it is just that we are including some categories of steel in the trade measure and not including others. As the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) just said, nearly 75%—it is actually 74%—of steel imports are not covered by the trade measure at all.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I too am grateful to the Minister and his colleagues for the flexibility they have shown so far, and I will come and see him on Monday. First, could he be a little clearer about how dynamic he will be on quotas? At first look to me and the businesses in my constituency that are concerned, some of the quotas look a bit tight. If there was a sudden spike in prices following the imposition, can he move quickly and, if so, how quickly, because obviously decisions are made with a long-term view? Secondly, he said that without these quotas the UK would become a dumping ground for cheap steel. We may well now become a dumping ground for cheap fabricated products, so what will he do on fabricated products alongside this? Thirdly, this means that the Government will collect millions of pounds from British businesses importing steel that will still import above the quota. What will happen to that money?

Chris Bryant: The last question is a clever one—that is a matter for the Chancellor, however. On fabricated steel, the right hon. Member makes a good point, which I know several people made in the urgent question last week, or whenever it was—I was in Türkiye trying to negotiate a free trade agreement with it and, in fact, talking a bit about steel as well. It is a good point, and we will look at that. I do not want to overpromise on the idea that at the moment, if there is a fluctuation in prices that we as a Government will suddenly move in and change all the quotas, because predictability and continuity are often as important for business as anything else so they know the terms under which they are operating, so I do not want to overpromise. Our main point is that we will do a review after a year, and we will engage with everybody all the way through.

Kit Malthouse: So nothing will change.

Chris Bryant: The right hon. Member says from a sedentary position that nothing will change. I am just trying to moderate his expectations of change, but obviously, if there is a very significant, exceptional moment then we may need to act. The kind of thing I am talking about is speciality steel, for instance. When we started this process, we thought that it would be up and running again. It is not now, and that is one of the reasons that we have been able to change those categories' quotas. But I do not want to give the expectation that the moment somebody experiences some concern that we will suddenly change, because in the end, as I say, there are difficult trade-offs here and we want to ensure that UK production of steel survives and grows.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for his statement—he is very much the Government's man of steel. Protecting British steelmaking capacity means we will have a reliable supply for years to come, but can the Minister confirm that this announcement is good news for downstream producers in my constituency, such as MRI Fabrications, LWC Engineering and—my favourite—the Harlow Group, all based in Harlow, for today and years to come?

Chris Bryant: If I had a bit of advice to my hon. Friend—I know he is relatively new to the House—I would not have favourites in one's own constituency because then the other people who are not your favourites end up being very irritated with you. I have 14 rugby clubs and have to be very careful. He makes a good point. Just to deal with the individual companies, it would probably be a good idea if he came along on Monday afternoon. I am making a lot of dates, aren't I?

Lincoln Jopp (Spelthorne) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for his statement. When the Minister came here with the statement the other day, I asked him about Thames Covers, a boat fitters in my constituency which relies on stainless steel tubing, and got lots of warm words about, "We're going to go away and consult." I listened to his statement today and read it in great detail. Will stainless steel tubing now not be hit by an additional 50% price, which is what its suppliers are telling it? I am seeing Thames Covers tomorrow at 2.15 pm. I would love to be able to give the business a definitive answer.

Chris Bryant: I am afraid that the hon. Member will have to come along on Monday afternoon—I do not want to give him a false or inaccurate answer now—or if he wants to grab me afterwards with officials, I will try to give him the precise answer.

I just want to make it absolutely clear because some people have gained the impression that all their steel will automatically immediately—if it is imported—be subject to 50% tariffs. I know the hon. Member understands this, but some other people have clearly misunderstood. It is only the out of quota stuff that is subject to 50% tariffs. In many categories—I am not sure about the precise category that his company uses—the quota is bigger than historical trade flows. In other words, there is no reason why it should be affected, but I do not want to give him a false impression, so I am happy to either see him at the back of the Chamber afterwards or on Monday afternoon.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): I am going to change my question on the hoof based on what the Minister just said. Does he share my concern for the smaller steel fabricators that cannot buy large bulk orders of steel? They are reliant on being able to order when an order comes in for them. I have a steel fabricator in my constituency called S-FABS. It is a fifth generation business, and it is telling me that this is the hardest it has ever had it—it is worse than covid. It is not sure that it will be able to survive because overseas manufacturers will just start fabricating steel to avoid the tariffs. Can he please reflect on the effect on the small and medium-sized fabricators that currently feel like the strategy is all to protect British Steel, and they are behind that, but to the detriment of those downstream providers?

Chris Bryant: The hon. Lady is not the only person who has raised this point about fabricated steel with me, and it is one of the things that we do have to watch very closely. It is one of the things we will be looking at from day one. I cannot promise that that means we will suddenly include fabricated steel, but it is something we have to be careful of. I think only Canada has introduced a similar measure in relation to fabricated steel, but its steel measure is much tougher than ours and covers, I think, more categories. That is why it has also introduced a compensation scheme. I hope we will not need to go down that route. When some countries have suggested increasing fabricated steel, that provides a different incentive, which can be just as counterproductive, so again, there will be trade-offs in that sphere. Again, I am happy to meet her on Monday afternoon if she wants to come along.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement, and his clear commitment to defining the issues and making things better for us. It is a real pleasure to hear a statement with so much positivity. I want to ask a question about Northern Ireland. Will the Minister acknowledge the severe, disproportionate impact that stringent steel tariffs and red tape are having on manufacturing and emergency businesses across Northern Ireland? Will he commit to providing immediate financial mitigation or regular flexibility for Northern Ireland steel users, thereby ensuring that our foundational industries are not penalised by mainland trade policies and the complexities of the Windsor framework?

Chris Bryant: I have pages and pages on the Windsor framework in relation to this somewhere, but I have only two words on it here. Apart from anything else, part of our negotiations with the European Union had to be about how we ensure proper provision for Northern Ireland. When the EU announces its measures on Monday, I hope that the hon. Member will be pleased with where we have got to on all that. He asked about financial mitigation, which I think means compensation. I am afraid that I am not able to offer that; I want to be very straight with him.

As I say, there are trade-offs here. We need to ensure that we have a strong steel sector. I was thinking about my two grandfathers. One grandfather was a naval draughtsman and an architect on Clydeside. My other grandfather

worked on the railways in the docks in Cardiff. For both of them, steel was absolutely essential. I am sure when they were working on Clydeside or in Cardiff, they would have expected all the steel to have been made in the United Kingdom. If we do not take this step today, we will find that we will not have any British Steel at all, and that is why we are keen to take the necessary and, I believe, proportionate steps that we are taking.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that in a former life, the Minister was punctilious about standards in this House, so I seek your advice as to how he may correct the record. He referred to a letter that I believe he said his office had received this morning or yesterday. In fact, the Department will have received copies of two letters, one which was sent a week ago, not on my behalf, but on behalf of hundreds of thousands of small manufacturing businesses that were desperately worried, with one week to go before the tariffs. There was a second letter on Tuesday, jointly from me and the shadow Defence Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), again, sent on behalf of this vital industry, which keeps us all safe. I have not yet received a reply to either of those. I would not necessarily have expected to, but it would not be right for the record to reflect that he had only received the letter this morning.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The Minister is in his place and may wish to respond.

Chris Bryant: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for the correction. I am terribly sorry; I was only referring to the latter letter. We have had a lot of letters on this, and I appreciate that lots of Members have written to Ministers about it. We tried to respond as quickly as we could, once we had settled the final quotas. I wanted to come to the House to be clear on precisely what we have done, in order to meet some of the concerns. I do try to answer my letters as punctiliously as I can. You do not have to have been a priest in the Church of England to do that, though God is working Her purpose out, as year succeeds to year.

Draft Conversion Practices Bill

1.10 pm

The Minister for Equalities (Olivia Bailey): If I may, I will start with an apology to the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield (Mims Davies). I had intended my statement to be sent much earlier today, and I understand that it did not reach her in time; I apologise for that, because that certainly was not my intent.

With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the Conversion Practices Bill, which we are publishing in draft today. Across the House, we can all agree that nobody deserves to be abused, no matter who they are, but right now, gaps in the law are allowing a very specific form of abuse to occur: abuse driven by the false belief that being LGBT+ is shameful, that it can be forcibly changed, and that if you cause someone enough pain, you will somehow stop them being who they are. We are talking about people being shamed in front of a congregation, and pushed to the ground in an effort to remove the devil; about families threatening to rape and murder people, if they do not change their identity; and about people being beaten or sexually assaulted by those trying to “correct” who they are. These are real stories, real people, and real abusers getting away with it. Today, with this legislation, that stops.

The draft Bill that we are publishing today fills gaps in our criminal law in order to ban abusive conversion practices. It gives victims and authorities a clear definition with which to identify, tackle and prevent this abuse. Specifically, the Bill creates a new criminal offence of abusive conversion practice, measured by three specific criteria: first, conduct intended to change a person’s sexual orientation or transgender identity; secondly, conduct that is abusive, in line with other criminal law; and thirdly, conduct that causes serious harm, alarm or distress that has a substantial effect on the victim’s day-to-day activities. We have listened to concerns that this legislation must not create a loophole that pushes abuse abroad, and have included a second offence of encouraging or assisting an abusive conversion practice outside England and Wales.

We are also creating new conversion practice protection orders, to support victims as well as those at risk of abuse. These will be similar to protection orders for forced marriage and female genital mutilation, and can protect people even before abuse has happened. Breach of a protection order may be prosecuted as a criminal offence. Offences will carry a maximum penalty of five years in custody or a fine, while breaching a protection order carries a maximum penalty of two years or a fine. In addition to bringing in the new measures in this Bill, the Government will continue to fund the conversion practices support helpline, and are taking wider action to tackle abuse against the LGBT+ community, including by equalising hate crime legislation through the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

In developing this Bill, I have consulted widely and spoken to many who have legitimate concerns about legislating in this area. I have heard concerns about freedom of expression, parental rights and religious freedoms. I have spoken to therapists who worry that their important exploratory work with young people might be impacted, and that they may be accused of

conversion practices. I want to be completely clear today: I have heard those concerns and acted on them. This Bill does not remove anyone’s right to freedom of expression or religion, or to choose how to parent; this Bill simply prevents abuse. To ensure that there is no inadvertent chilling effect on important healthcare, there is an exemption in the Bill for all healthcare professionals.

Across the globe, countries are acting to ban conversion practices. We have learned from the 28 countries that have some sort of ban in place. We have drawn on the important framework from the Council of Europe, fought for by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow and Gateshead East (Kate Osborne). We have studied the evidence on the prevalence and types of conversion practice abuse, and we are clear about where there are gaps in the law. In the Bill published today, we are confident that we have learned the right lessons and got the balance right. This will be a comprehensive ban on abusive conversion practices, with no loopholes, and we have clarity that we will not inadvertently impinge on freedom of expression, important healthcare and people’s ability to parent how they choose.

There has been a cross-party consensus for years on the importance of this ban. It was Baroness May who first promised legislation on this back in 2018, and there are Opposition Members who have held my job and worked hard on this issue. This ban has been in the manifestos of parties from across the political spectrum, because despite our other political differences, we can all agree that abuse is unacceptable. I hope sincerely that we can work constructively on this issue across the House. I welcome cross-party engagement as we discuss our draft legislation, and that is why we have requested and welcome pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill by a Joint Committee. I am confident that this process will make our Bill stronger.

There are people today suffering crushing, hateful abuse because someone has decided that their identity is wrong and can be changed—abuse that is allowed to happen because our legal framework simply does not acknowledge it. I understand that this draft Bill will cause debate—these are not easy issues—but I welcome that challenge and that debate, because we cannot let fear of argument prevent us from remembering what matters: it is our job and our moral responsibility to prevent this pernicious abuse. I am confident that the Bill we are publishing today will do just that.

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

1.16 pm

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): I thank the Minister for the brief sight of her statement and for her apology. Let me start by setting out a principle that I believe rightly commands support across this House: we must protect people from harm. Violence, abuse and coercion are wrong—unequivocally so—and they are also already illegal under our current framework. The offences and the powers exist, and many of the examples the Minister used are already, rightly, illegal.

This is a challenging area, so we must be careful that bad laws do not get on to the statute book. The duty before us is to consider whether any new legislation is necessary, proportionate and workable. There is a fundamental question about the current evidence base

[Mims Davies]

underpinning this proposal, so in any change, the Government must demonstrate why existing criminal law is insufficient and how a new offence would materially improve outcomes. If a non-abusive conversion practice is not a crime, why would we write it into a new law? Is the Minister reassured that a mother helping their child with their feelings when growing up is not accidentally being criminalised? What are we doing when it comes to invasion of young lives and how we support children and parents through any childhood issues?

We must be honest about the risk of unintended consequences for families and parents. It is right to highlight the real concern that broadly drafted provisions, particularly in relation to gender identity, could have a chilling effect on those acting in good faith and stop our young people having the time and space to find out who they are and are comfortable being. Parents, teachers, clinicians and therapists must be able to support, guide and, where appropriate, challenge. That is not harm; that is safeguarding.

Gender-related distress is complex and requires careful, sensitive and roundly exploratory engagement. If this Bill has the effect—intended or not—of creating an affirmation-only culture, we risk failing the very young people we are trying to protect. We have already seen the catastrophic impact where professionals have felt unable to raise legitimate concerns, most notably on the grooming gang scandal, and we must never sacrifice safeguarding for ideology.

Let me turn to questions for the Minister—these are real ones; as the Minister laid out, this is difficult. Will she confirm that the pre-legislative scrutiny will be by a Joint Committee of both Houses? Given the legal, ethical and societal complexity of this issue, will the Government ensure that vital scrutiny is broad and rigorous? Will the Government undertake their own full public consultation, in addition to any evidence-gathering process carried out by the scrutiny committee? This issue affects families, clinicians, faith groups and individuals across the country, and their voices must be heard directly.

Can the Government guarantee that exploratory therapy will be explicitly protected in the Bill, alongside appropriate support for those who detransition? Cases such as that of Keira Bell have highlighted the importance of ensuring that individuals can reflect on and, where necessary, reassess any earlier decisions. Professionals must not be deterred from providing that support. Will the Minister explain how the Bill will recognise the principle of informed consent for adults engaging in exploratory therapy in relation to gender distress? Consenting adults must remain free to discuss, question and explore their experiences without fear of criminal sanction.

How will the proposed legislation interact with existing safeguarding guidance, particularly in schools, children's homes and social services? Those working on the front line in safeguarding need clarity, not confusion, and must be able to act in the best interests of the child without fear that fulfilling their duties could expose them to legal risk. We currently have a lack of clarity in that area regarding consent in the new puberty blockers trial, so this area is already unclear. Puberty blockers are in reality a form of conversion therapy. How will they be separated from this process?

Will the Minister point out any abusive conversion practices that she has directly identified that are not already criminal offences, and spell out directly the current problem she is seeking to fix? Will she clarify and be specific about the current legal gap, and say what she sees as the true gaps in the law and what is currently legal? Can she guarantee that a young person who is simply same-sex attracted will not be encouraged to go down a pathway that will actively lead them away from their sexuality and being the gay person they are, as they need to be helped to be happy and comfortable with that?

Those questions go to the heart of the Bill. We have seen well-meaning legislation such as hate crime offences have a chilling effect on free speech. Conservative Members believe in pragmatic evidence-based policymaking and in strong safeguards. In conclusion, we firmly stand against abuse and coercion. We must ensure that this Labour Government are seeking to prevent harm, and that they do not create any new harm.

Olivia Bailey: I understand that the shadow Minister did not have my statement in enough time, but I am disappointed with the way that her comments have massively broadened and misrepresented the scope of the draft Bill. I would encourage people to look at the detail of the draft Bill, and the very specific thresholds that we have established, because it is beholden on us all to ensure that this conversation is based on real facts. I am also disappointed that the Conservative party, to which I gave credit for its commitment to equalities issues in the past, has found itself in the position of having promised for years that it supports a ban on conversion practices, but now sounds as though it does not. That is a grave shame.

The hon. Member asked some good questions, which I will attempt to answer. She asked whether such practices are already illegal, and my answer to that is no. There are two reasons for that. First, gaps in existing law mean that we cannot prosecute offences properly. With domestic abuse legislation, for example, or coercive control, the legislation is designed for someone who has a relationship with an intimate partner, and it would not capture an offence committed by someone they did not know. There are many such examples where there are gaps in the law. Secondly, it is important that we have a definition of conversion practice in law. As with other offences such as upskirting or non-fatal strangulation, a definition is important to help victims understand what has happened to them and be able to come forward, and for prosecutors to build a case. I am confident that there is a need to legislate in this area.

The hon. Lady asks about the evidence base for the use of conversion practices. I have just come from an event this morning, and a report published by Galop—I have it here today. It contains hundreds of case studies of people it has spoken to on its helplines over the past few years, and of the appalling abuse that is happening right now in this country. The examples I used in my statement were from those case studies—people being threatened with rape and assault; people being beaten because of their identity in an attempt to change them. The evidence is clearly there, and I say to the hon. Lady that one case of abuse is too many.

I also say categorically to the hon. Lady that the cases she mentioned steered widely clear of the remit of the draft Bill. For example, the case of a mother helping a child is categorically not captured under the draft Bill.

The case of an exploratory therapist helping somebody to understand their identity, and taking time in asking supportive questions, is categorically not included in the Bill. A healthcare exemption is included in the Bill to ensure that we do not have a chilling effect on healthcare professionals providing this vital service to young people, and indeed any person—*[Interruption.]* They are legitimate questions, and I am answering them today.

The hon. Lady asked me about the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which will be a Joint Committee of both Houses. I look forward to it—I genuinely want to have cross-party and good conversations about the draft Bill, and I hope that Conservative Members engage with that process in good spirits, just as I intend to engage with it. She asked about the principle of informed consent. We are talking about a criminal threshold for an abusive practice that is in line with other forms of criminal abuse, for example domestic abuse. I do not think someone can consent to abuse. That is a fundamental principle, and it is right that it moves forward in the legislation.

The hon. Lady asked other questions about how, when the Bill becomes law, it will interact with other safeguarding requirements or guidance in schools. Those are all important questions, and we will, of course, address them in detail as the Bill moves towards the statute book. I welcome the hon. Lady's engagement, but I remind her that she says she stands against abuse, so I urge her and her party to think again. This Bill fills a gap in the law to stop the most abhorrent and pernicious abuse faced by LGBT people in our country, and I urge her to change her mind.

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I warmly congratulate the Minister on publishing this draft Bill, and I very much welcome the fully trans-inclusive ban on abhorrent conversion practices. Although the Bill will enable the punishment of those who carry out those abusive practices, its real value will be as a deterrent to stop anybody being subject to such practices in the first place. What plans does the Minister have to develop a real understanding of the Bill, particularly among communities where such practices are currently prevalent?

Olivia Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and for everything she did when she held my role to get us to a position where we are now able to publish the draft Bill. She did a great service in her role, and I am grateful to her for it. She is right to say that the value of the Bill is a simple statement of intent and principle to the LGBT community: "there is nothing wrong with who you are, and it's not okay for somebody to forcibly try to change you, to abuse you, or to harm you". This place sends out that important message to the country, and to people who are in these terrible situations and feeling fear and shame.

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

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): The Liberal Democrats welcome the draft Bill, because conversion therapy is not a thing of the past. One in six LGBTQ+ young people today have been offered it in an attempt to cure them. The Minister referred to the Galop report. That is an important piece of reading, and I recommend

that all Members take time to look at those harrowing testimonies. It has always been a form of abuse, far too often carried out by those in positions of trust, whether family members, religious leaders or medical professionals who have been conducting this archaic practice.

It is offensive and dangerous to suggest that sexual orientation or gender identity is a problem to be treated or cured. As far back as 2018, Baroness May, the former Prime Minister, promised to end these abhorrent practices, which can cause mental and physical harm. That position was adopted by the Labour Government, who promised legislation to address it in their first King's Speech. Since those initial promises were made, individuals from LGBTQ+ communities have continued to face abuse and discrimination for years under the guise that they can be cured. We should all celebrate finally seeing the legislation that will end that horrendous practice, protecting vulnerable individuals and allowing people to live freely as themselves.

The Liberal Democrats are ready to scrutinise the draft Bill to ensure that it is comprehensive and inclusive, and to work cross-party to ensure that legislation can be put into law as soon as possible. Will the Minister lay out a timeline for the legislation, especially given current uncertainty around the Administration? What engagement is the Minister having with representatives of the LGBTQ+ community, so that they can ensure the legislation is shaped with them, not for them? Does she agree with me that while France, Canada, New Zealand, Norway and many other countries have already passed legislation to ban the practice, the UK has significantly fallen down the inclusivity league tables, and that today marks an important step in reversing that decline and establishing the UK as a world leader in being a safe society for all to live in?

Olivia Bailey: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions. I am grateful for her party's support for the principle of the legislation and look forward to engaging with her further as we go through the process of pre-legislative scrutiny.

On the timeline for the legislation, we will set up a joint Committee with both Houses as soon as possible. That process tends to take about 12 sitting weeks, on average, but the Committee will be able to set out more details once established. We will then press on with the legislative process as fast as we can, to ensure that we get the Bill on to the statute book. I emphasise that this is a manifesto commitment for this Government and that we will continue to adhere to it.

On representations and engagement, I have already had many wonderful conversations with members of the LGBTQ+ community as I have gone about designing the legislation, and I will continue to do so. At an event this morning I was able to thank those organisations for the work they have done over many years to campaign for the ban. I particularly thank those who have come forward with their own stories about the appalling abuse that they have suffered. I thank them for having the courage and bravery to share their stories so that others may not have to experience the same fate.

The hon. Lady mentioned legislation in other countries. There are now 28 conversion practice bans around the globe. We have been able to learn from the wonderful experiences that those countries have had and the approaches that they have taken in the development of

[*Olivia Bailey*]

our legislation, which has been very useful. She points to the league tables. We are hosting the European International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia—IDAHOT+—forum in London next year, which I am very exciting about, and I hope and expect that we will climb back up those tables.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): I thank the Minister for talking to me in advance of her statement and the publication of the draft Bill. Does the symmetry in the Bill allow detransitioners to bring retrospective cases against therapists and professionals who transitioned them using the affirmative approach that was in use at the Gender Identity Development Service and is still prevalent in many settings today?

Olivia Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and her conversations with me on this important topic. Let me be clear about what the Bill does. The legislation is symmetrical in its approach to abusive conversion practices that attempt to change somebody from one gender identity to another or from one sexual orientation to another. There are three parts to the criminal threshold as set out in the Bill: first, there must be an intent to change somebody; secondly, that must be through an abusive practice in line with other legislation, including the Domestic Abuse Act 2021; and thirdly, that practice must have caused significant harm. Those are the tests that will be used by the courts when determining whether prosecutions should be brought.

Rebecca Paul (Reigate) (Con): I am concerned about the Bill's impact on families, which the Minister has touched upon, and I am worried that positive, healthy interactions within a family could potentially fall in scope of the Bill. It is good to hear that she does not think the Bill will cover such interactions, but it is written quite broadly and I am sure that we will have further conversations about that. If a child wants to transition and to participate in the Pathways clinical trial, but their parents do not consent, will that be an abusive conversion practice under this legislation?

Olivia Bailey: I am clear that the Bill will not impact the ability of parents to parent how they wish. The abuse thresholds, which I have set out several times this afternoon, are clear about that. To repeat: there has to be an intent to change somebody, there has to be abuse—the abuse that we have defined in the legislation mirrors the abuse in the Domestic Abuse Act—and there has to be serious harm. It is not the case that there are exemptions for parents relating to any other form of abuse that takes place in a family relationship, and I do not think that it is appropriate for such an exemption to be in place in this legislation.

David Burton-Sampson (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward the draft Bill and on all her work on it. Having grown up as a gay person in the early '90s, I know what it is like to feel as if you are not normal and do not belong. There are some parties, particularly Reform UK, whose Members are not in their places, and seemingly, from the words of the shadow Minister, the Tories, who would take us back to the days of section 28. Does the

Minister agree with me that alongside this draft Bill that prevents the evil practice of conversion therapy, we must also protect the freedoms of the LGBTQ+ community to be their authentic selves in our society?

Olivia Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for all his work campaigning for those freedoms. When considering the legislation, I reflected on the impact of my experiences growing up as a young lesbian and the impact that shame had on me. I cannot even begin to comprehend how that might feel for someone who has been subjected to this kind of abuse, which is one of the important reasons why we must act to prevent it. This Labour Government are committed to defending and extending the rights of LGBT people everywhere. I am proud that we have equalised the hate crime laws, and I am proud that we are putting this draft Bill before the House today.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I congratulate the Minister on the Bill, which has been a long time coming. I was in the Chamber in 2018 to hear the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, promise that there would be a conversion ban. It seems that it was almost impossible for the Conservative party to live up to that promise, and at last we have it coming from a Labour Government. The timing is important, reflecting what the Minister said about sending a clear message to the LGBTQ+ community that they will be respected and protected, but does she agree that the Bill sends a message to those in this place and beyond who seem determined not to protect the rights of the LGBTQ+ community? It makes it absolutely clear that Parliament will do everything it can to ensure that they are free to live the lives that they want, as the people they are.

Olivia Bailey: I thank the hon. Lady for her support for the draft Bill and I look forward to engaging with her further on it. It is vital that we continue to defend and protect LGBT rights in our country and around the world, where we have a proud role to play too. That is something that this Government and I are committed to doing with our equalisation of the hate crime laws and through this draft Bill.

Mr Alex Barros-Curtis (Cardiff West) (Lab): I congratulate all the campaigners who have brought us to this moment, including my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith) and the Minister, who has really spearheaded this work in the few months that she has been in the job. She should be really proud of what she has achieved.

I have spoken to the Minister about this Bill extensively. As has been said, the community of victims has been waiting eight years for this legislation since it was first promised by a Conservative Government. People do not need fixing; they are not broken. Abuse is not and should never be permissible, so abusive conversion practices should be outlawed, and that really should not be a controversial topic.

Will the Minister tell me about the work she will do on this Bill with the devolved Administrations? It covers England and Wales, so we need to look at Scotland and Northern Ireland and consider what best practice they can follow to ensure that there are no victims. As she said, consent to abuse is not a thing and should never be a thing. We should get this law on to the statute book as quickly as possible.

Olivia Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for his support and engagement on this important topic. He is of course right: abuse is never acceptable, wherever we find it, and this is a really important piece of legislation to make that completely clear. To be clear, LGBT people are subject to that abuse at the moment because we have not legislated in this area, and legislate we must.

Let me turn to my hon. Friend's question about the devolved Administrations. We are going into the process of pre-legislative scrutiny, and I hope very much that conversations with the devolved Administrations will be very productive in that period. We look forward to working with whoever wants to work with us to make this legislation a reality.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): I really welcome the Minister's statement today and the introduction of this draft legislation, and I look forward to writing to constituents who have been in touch with me to express their disappointment that conversion practices are still legal. In particular, I will mention Isabelle from Offerton, who is the most recent constituent to write to me about this matter. The Minister mentioned in her opening remarks the carve-out for health professionals and how to mitigate the risk that somebody, under the guise of being a health professional, might set up a mental health charity in an attempt to circumvent the aims of the Bill. Will she say a little more about that?

Olivia Bailey: That is a really important question. Let me explain how this will work. It is my view that legitimate healthcare would not fall under the remit of this Bill in any way, shape or form, because legitimate healthcare would never be abusing somebody to try to change their identity and causing them serious harm. However, I recognise the concerns about the risk of a chilling effect. We do not want that, because good therapy and good conversation is really important. That is why we have put this exemption on the face of the Bill.

I am clear that if somebody falls below the standards expected of them in a healthcare profession, they will fall under this Bill. That would prevent the example that the hon. Lady outlines, in which somebody pretends to be a healthcare professional in order to perform an abusive conversion practice. I am confident that there is no loophole here, but that is a clear statement that healthcare professionals can continue to do their important work.

Danny Beales (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Lab): Today has been a long time coming. I thank the Minister for her hard, relentless and committed work in delivering this comprehensive and inclusive draft Bill. We were promised it in 2018, and it has been in four King's and Queen's Speeches.

The LGBT community will rightly welcome today's statement, but it is unfortunate that the official Opposition have not. As an LGBT person myself, that is a reminder of how much fear there is in the community now about the change of discourse in this country in relation to LGBT rights. That has been fuelled by the far-right and by international Christian and other organisations in America funding organisations here in the UK. We have seen the official Opposition potentially abandon their support for this Bill, and we have seen the unofficial opposition in Reform champion hatred and push against equality for LGBT people.

I and others in the community are afraid. That is why today is important, because the Government are making a clear and definitive statement about conversion practices. Does the Minister agree that conversion practices are abuse, plain and simple? Will she assure me that, as this is a draft Bill, there will be time to discuss the issue, mentioned previously in Committee, of the definition of medical professionals? That must be tightly defined so that we can ensure there is no back-door get-out for those who would seek to continue these abusive practices.

Olivia Bailey: On my hon. Friend's last question, I can say that there will absolutely be time. One of the many merits of the pre-legislative scrutiny process is that we can work through those issues together. The question of the definition of healthcare workers is a matter for the Department of Health and Social Care, which I know will work closely with us on that process.

I agree with my hon. Friend that conversion practices are abuse, plain and simple, and that is why we are legislating to stop them. I also agree with him about the toxicity and hostility towards the LGBT community in our current debate. I reflect on the fact that one hon. Member from Reform has written something essentially calling for a return to section 28 in our schools, and I note that Reform has defunded Pride events across our country and said that we should not be advertising Pride events. We must stand up to that divisive, hateful politics as firmly as we can.

James Asser (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for all the hard work and conscientious effort she has put in to get us to this point. This is not just a Government promise; this is a long-standing request by the LGBT community, and it is a significant gap in our 30-year journey to legislative equality. That journey has been underpinned by a need to prove that we are not people to be pitied, treated, cured or, dare I say, reformed, but people to be respected, and this legislation will do that.

My hon. Friend is wise and experienced, and she knows that there will be pushback—the same old tropes and bigotry dressed up as plausible excuses and sympathetic concerns. Does she agree that the key to fighting that is to put the voices and experience of those who have been abused in this way at the front and centre—people like my friend, who had to flee his house, his family and his city to avoid being forcibly “treated and cured” of being gay? Does she agree it is the case not just that they need to be protected from that abuse, but that their voices and experiences should be heard?

Olivia Bailey: I agree with my hon. Friend wholeheartedly. As I said earlier, I really want to thank the brave people who have experienced these appalling practices for having the courage and strength to come forward and talk about their experiences. I agree that they should be at the front and centre of this conversation as much as they want to be. It is because of their courage and strength that we are acting today and can prevent this abuse from happening to anybody else.

Kevin McKenna (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Lab): I am so grateful that the Bill is finally approaching this stage in its journey towards becoming law. I think of my younger self, in the 1980s—a gay man in a religious household. Family relationships were put under so much strain because of religious pressure not to come out as

[Kevin McKenna]

gay and not to be honest. Frankly, the community pressure at the time had an impact not just on me, but on my parents. It is so great that we can get to a point in our country's development where parents will get support and will not be put under pressure forcibly to convert their children. This is an incredible moment.

I want to explore a little the protection around health professionals, as others have mentioned, particularly for people who might not fit the more common boxes that people think about, such as being gay, lesbian or transgender. For example, people who are asexual come under insidious and forcible pressure to have sex. Some of that pressure comes from assumptions in the medical community that all human beings should aspire to have an active sex life, but this is part of normal human variation; some people just do not have that desire and are coming under pressure, under the guise of clinical interventions. Will the Minister explain how that will be addressed in the Bill?

Olivia Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for all his work and support, and for his very important question. I can confirm that asexual people will be included in the remit of the Bill, because our simple principle is that abuse is not acceptable, no matter to whom it is done or where we find it.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): With your grace, Madam Deputy Speaker, and with the consent of my constituents, I wish to put some people on the official parliamentary record. Mich says:

"Conversion therapy taught me to be ashamed of being non-binary and gay, and taught me how to pretend to be someone I'm not, by changing my outward appearance and body language, and suppressing my real thoughts and feelings. It made me miserable, it made me waste years of my life pretending to be someone I'm not, but it never truly changed me. Because it can't, it doesn't have that power. The promise of conversion therapy is a harmful lie."

Three of Rosie's friends suffered from conversion therapy, one through electric shock aversion therapy and two through church-based prayer ministry. The one who underwent electric shock aversion therapy went blind and has since died. One of those who underwent prayer ministry eventually took her own life.

There is also Johnnie, who, like the two other constituents I have mentioned, fully backs a ban on conversion practices.

I could no more be straight than a trans kid could make themselves cisgender. The alternative is to stay in the closet and feel shame wash over you—a shame that leads to anxiety, depression and sometimes suicide. Our sexual orientation or gender identity is not chosen by us, but being gay or trans and living gay and trans lives very much is a choice, because being gay or trans is about choosing yourself. I am glad that this Labour Government have the backs of my LGBT+ constituents as they choose to live as they wish—to live lives that are full and happy.

My constituent Vanessa has concerns, which have been characterised unfairly by Opposition parties, that this Bill will not be trans-inclusive. In response, will the Minister confirm that the Bill will be fully trans-inclusive?

Olivia Bailey: I can confirm that the Bill is fully trans-inclusive, because abuse—no matter to whom—is unacceptable. I concur wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend's sentiments about the importance of being able to choose yourself and live your life with pride, and I thank him for sharing the testimonies of Mich, Rosie and Johnnie. They are really powerful stories that remind us of the importance of action.

Tim Roca (Macclesfield) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on all the hard work she has done to bring this Bill forward—she should be incredibly proud of herself. It is particularly timely in the month of Pride. In 2026, we still have people who are questioning the need for Pride, including Reform councils and councillors. It is an important reminder that despite the progress we have made, there is still a long way further to go.

As colleagues have said, this Bill has been in four Speeches from the Throne since 2018, and successive Conservative Prime Ministers have promised it and not delivered. To respond to the contribution made by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield (Mims Davies), questions are fine, but the tone of that contribution will have disappointed a great many people who will now consider that the Conservative party is, in effect, a fair-weather friend when it comes to fighting for equality. Will the Minister join me in recognising the fact that it is a Labour Government who are finally bringing this Bill forward and will get it on the statute book?

Olivia Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for all his work on this important issue. I often reflect on the difference that a Labour Government made to my life, as well as the difference that this House made to my life. I am very proud of our party's record on LGBT rights in government, and I am very proud that this Labour Government are going to continue that journey towards proper legislative equality.

Steve Race (Exeter) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her determination and hard work in bringing this draft Bill to Parliament—the trans-inclusive conversion therapy ban that has been eight years in the making after it was first proposed. Labour promised this legislation, and I am really proud that it is a Labour Government who are delivering it. We all know that much abuse happens in family relationships between people who know each other very well, so we should be clear that conversion therapy is abuse—no ifs, no buts—and no one can consent to abuse. However, some people are taken abroad to undergo that horrendous abuse, so will the Minister explain how the Bill will prevent abuse from being outsourced?

Olivia Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for the many conversations I have had with him on this topic, and agree with him that people cannot consent to abuse. There is a provision in the Bill to prevent people taking others abroad for abuse; we saw that was a potential loophole, and wanted to make sure it was closed. That is an offence in the Bill.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister wholeheartedly for her statement, and for the way in which she always carries herself at the Dispatch Box. I am very proud to call her my hon. Friend. I hope that

one day I will be able to call her my right hon. Friend, but that is just my personal view and not that of the Labour party—I should be careful what I say.

I have many former teaching colleagues who still talk with fear about section 28. I am really proud that it was a Labour Government who removed the terrible and divisive section 28, and I am proud that this Labour Government will ban conversion practices. Will the Minister confirm that this is a sign that this Labour Government are on the side of all of the LGBTQ+ community, in Harlow and beyond?

Olivia Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for being a fantastic ally to the community. He is often in debates on these topics in the House, and I am grateful to him for that—he is a fantastic champion for his LGBT constituents in Harlow. I agree with him that this Bill is a really important, line-in-the-sand statement of intent that it is not shameful or wrong to be LGBT, and if somebody tries to change you, abuse you or cause you harm, that should be illegal. I am proud and pleased that this Labour Government are going to deliver that ban.

Connect to Work Programme

WORK AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): We now come to the Select Committee statement on behalf of the Work and Pensions Committee. Debbie Abrahams will speak for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of her statement, I will call Members to ask questions on the subject of the statement; these should be brief questions, not full speeches. I emphasise that questions should be directed to the Select Committee Chair and not the relevant Government Minister. Front Benchers may take part in the questioning.

1.55 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I am pleased to present the Work and Pensions Committee's second report in our employment support for disabled people inquiry series. Our first report, "Disability at Work", examined workplace issues impacting on disabled people and those with long-term health conditions, who I will now refer to as disabled people. These include challenges finding employment and then staying in work. Today's report looks at the Government's Connect to Work programme, an employment support programme that aims to reduce health and disability-related economic inactivity.

One of our labour market's most persistent and challenging issues is the disability employment gap. With nearly one in four of the working-age population being disabled, equivalent to 10.4 million disabled people, it is quite staggering that only 5.5 million disabled people are employed when we know millions more want a job. It is a disability employment rate of 52.8%, compared with 82.5% for non-disabled people—a disability employment gap of nearly 30%. After historical falls, the gap has remained around 30% since 2012, and it remains above the OECD average.

Disabled people and people living in disabled households are far more likely to live in poverty than any other group. The extra costs that disabled people face and the lack of employment opportunities are key factors. As most disabilities are acquired, many disabled people have been employed before becoming inactive or unemployed. Their skills and experience are being wasted—a lost opportunity for the individuals, their families, and indeed the country. Last year, the Committee commissioned an economic analysis of the potential savings in Department for Work and Pensions spending and returns to the Exchequer from programmes like Connect to Work, and how such programmes could make that difference. That analysis was modelled on previous successful employment support programmes, and the economists estimated that if 5% of currently unemployed or inactive people—including disabled people—moved into employment, that would generate £20 billion over the life of the Parliament.

The Committee's inquiry on employment support for disabled people showed that there are multiple barriers to work, including features of the workplace itself, issues preventing people from finding and getting into work, and things making it difficult to remain in work.

[Debbie Abrahams]

Rather than attempting to cover all those issues in a single report, we felt it would be much more helpful to produce a report on each aspect. We also hope to report on Access to Work once the Government have published their proposals for reforming that scheme, which we hope will be very soon.

Our “Disability at Work” report highlighted the structural and cultural factors in workplaces that continue to limit opportunity. We found that barriers facing disabled people in workplaces are present across all stages and aspects of employment, from recruitment to workplace adjustments, employer attitudes and opportunities for progression. The report I present today complements that report by focusing on the support people need before entering work, or when they need help to get there. Our message is clear: closing the disability employment gap requires a joined-up system, not isolated programmes.

Let me recognise the significance of Connect to Work, a major, evidence-based programme with real potential. Launched in October 2024, it is intended to support up to 300,000 people—principally disabled people—into sustained paid employment over five years. It is part of the Government’s broader welfare reform strategy to reduce health-related economic inactivity, a strategy that is both economically important and, more importantly, central to improving lives.

The Committee is clear that we welcome Connect to Work. The programme is voluntary, grounded in well-established supported employment models, and combines national scale with local flexibility, offering scope for more tailored and responsive support. Models such as individual placement and support, and the supported employment quality framework, demonstrate strong outcomes in sustained employment, as well as in confidence, skills and wellbeing. These approaches are personalised, integrated with services, focused on real jobs and provide ongoing support. Connect to Work adopts these principles, which is one of its greatest strengths. The programme is well designed, but success depends on delivery. A key feature is its devolved delivery model. Local authorities have flexibility to design provision based on local needs, but with that flexibility comes risks—risks to do with, for example, consistency of delivery; workforce capacity; integration with health, skills and local services; funding certainty; and managing the transition between programmes.

We heard that different commissioning approaches can lead to variation in service quality and uneven experiences for participants. The Government need to find a balance between flexibility and consistency. The Committee’s central conclusion is that Connect to Work’s strengths will matter only if that translates into consistent, integrated and properly resourced support on the ground. To date, delivery has not been without difficulty. We heard that early implementation has been more complex and more burdensome than expected. The Department for Work and Pensions acknowledged that aspects of the early process were “clunky and unsatisfactory”. Local authorities told us that delivery plan processes were lengthy and administratively demanding, and guidance was at times unclear or inconsistent. Finally, engagement by the Department seemed to vary across areas.

Programmes of this scale depend not only on policy design, but on systems, processes and relationships. Early friction risks undermining confidence and delaying impact. In addition, more than £1 billion of employment support funding devolved to local authorities from Connect to Work for other employment support programmes this year needs to be clearly defined. There should be monitoring of outputs and outcomes. We welcome the steps that the Department has taken to address that, and the Committee will return to this issue to assess progress.

Successful delivery needs skilled practitioners and specialist expertise. Some local authorities were confident that they had the necessary capacity, but we also heard of difficulties recruiting staff with the necessary skills, loss of expertise during delayed commissioning, and a wider shortage across the sector. Without the right people to deliver them, even the best designed programmes will not succeed. We therefore call on the Government to set out clearly how they will ensure sufficient capacity, co-ordinate workforce development and address gaps.

Perhaps the most significant part is integration. Connect to Work sits alongside other national initiatives, such as Work Well. Its success depends on services delivered by numerous providers, such as those to do with health and skills. Integration, particularly with the NHS, is essential. Where systems are joined up, outcomes improve. Where they are fragmented, people fall through the gaps. Effective triage, clear pathways and strong local partnerships are therefore critical. This is not simply about programme delivery, but a coherent network of support.

We recognise the significant investment that the Government are making, but we identified concerns about rigidities in financial management across financial years, and uncertainty beyond the current spending period. For a programme of this scale, long-term certainty is essential, so that local authorities can invest in staff and the infrastructure needed to support delivery. That confidence needs to extend beyond the end of the current spending period. We therefore call on the Government to provide a clear statement of intent about the programme’s future. We also heard concerns about gaps in provision during the transition from the work and health programme pioneer to Connect to Work. In some areas, that left individuals with limited support at a critical time. While the Government have acknowledged these gaps, we are not persuaded that their full impact has been adequately assessed. This points to a broader issue, which is the need for better system-wide planning when programmes change.

As noted at the outset, this report is part of a wider programme of work. There is also our “Disability at Work” report. In addition, we have identified Access to Work as a crucial piece of the puzzle; it plays a vital role in supporting people once they enter employment, enabling necessary adjustments and support in the workplace. We therefore intend to examine it in more depth once the Government have set out their proposals for reform.

Before I finish, I thank the Committee team, particularly Polina Eaton and Paul Owen, and everyone who provided written and oral evidence to us and attended engagement sessions with us. I believe that our report sets out a balanced assessment of Connect to Work. The programme should help disabled people to get genuine access to meaningful, sustainable employment on equal terms, but its success is not guaranteed. That depends on

effective and consistent delivery, a skilled and supportive workforce delivering the programme, integration across services and sustained Government commitment. The policy is sound; the test now is whether the strong foundations that the Government have established translate into consistent, high-quality support in practice. That requires programmes and systems that work together to close the disability employment gap. I commend this report to the House.

Backbench Business

Windrush Day

2.5 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab):
I beg to move,

That this House has considered Windrush Day 2026.

I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for this debate. Windrush Day is on 22 June, the anniversary of the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush at Tilbury docks. The Windrush has become a symbol of a period in our history when many people came to the UK from the countries of the Commonwealth. I am grateful to Arthur Torrington, who co-founded the Windrush Foundation with his dear friend, the late Samuel Beaver King, for his work documenting the history of the Windrush. Later this week, everyone will be able to read Arthur's new book, "Windrush Myths and Misconceptions", which I highly recommend.

The Windrush began its voyage in Port of Spain, Trinidad, on 20 May 1948. It made a number of stops in the Caribbean, including at Kingston in Jamaica. We do not know everything about the passengers on the Windrush, in part because the ship's manifest records limited information, and in part because there were a number of service personnel on board who, for security reasons, were not recorded on the manifest. We know that there were at least 1,067 passengers on board, probably considerably more. The Commonwealth passengers on the Windrush travelled straightforwardly on British passports, knowing that they had the right to come to the UK, the place they called the mother country.

The passengers were a diverse group with differing levels of income, different reasons for travelling, and a range of skills and occupations. Among them were 66 Polish refugees. Not all the passengers were coming to look for work. Some were visiting the UK as tourists, and at least one was coming to watch a relative who was competing in the 1948 London Olympics. Upon their arrival, around 230 of the passengers were provided with temporary accommodation in the Clapham Common deep shelter, from where some of them came to Brixton and found work and accommodation. That gives my constituency a proud and direct relationship with the Windrush, recognised in the naming of Windrush Square in the heart of Brixton.

One of the passengers was Sam King, an RAF airman who had served during the second world war. He returned to the UK on the Windrush and regarded the voyage as historic. He made great efforts to ensure that it would not be forgotten, keeping in touch with his fellow passengers and, from 1968, bringing them together to commemorate anniversaries. Sam King became known as Mr Windrush, and started the tradition of Windrush Day, long before it became a national day recognised by the Government in 2018. Sam King achieved many things in his life, including working with Claudia Jones to found the Notting Hill carnival. We are immensely proud in my constituency that he became the first black mayor of Southwark.

HMT Empire Windrush entered our narrative as a symbol for a whole cohort of people who came from the Commonwealth to live in the UK from approximately 1948 to 1971. They became known as the Windrush generation, and we have a debt of gratitude to them.

[Helen Hayes]

They came here to contribute, founding businesses, working in our NHS and transport systems, helping to rebuild our country from the ruins of the second world war. They enriched our culture and national life through food, music and faith communities, and they helped to forge the identity of modern Britain.

Members may have seen the “Windrush Untold Stories” exhibition that has been installed in the Portcullis House atrium for the whole of June. The exhibition features beautiful portraits of 18 individuals who are all either members of the Windrush generation or their descendants. They include: the Reverend Michael King, son of Sam King; the late Clovis Salmon, wheelmaker and documentary maker, who lived in my constituency; and Dawn Hill CBE, one of the founders of the Black Cultural Archives. Each portrait has a QR code, through which people can listen to the subject telling their story. I encourage anyone who has not yet done so to listen to the stories. They are moving, humbling and inspiring. They capture perfectly the courage, grit, determination and passion of the Windrush generation, alongside some of the pain that members of that generation endured. I pay tribute to Ros Griffiths, who initiated the “Windrush Untold Stories” exhibition; Amit Lennon, who took the photographs; and the Empathy Museum, which gathered the stories and produced the exhibition. I look forward to celebrating Windrush Day with Ros at the Big Caribbean Lunch on Windrush Square in my constituency this weekend.

However, our celebration of the Windrush generation is not a sentimental thing. Despite their commitment and contribution, members of that generation faced terrible racism, hostility and hardship, from the signs in the windows of rental properties that read, “No Blacks, No Dogs, No Irish”, to the workplace racism, and eventually the Home Office scandal, which broke in 2018. The Windrush scandal saw the citizenship of those who had come here on British passports—whether before or after the British Nationality Act 1948—being denied their citizenship, often with utterly devastating consequences.

Eight years on from the scandal coming to national attention in the media, there is still work to be done to secure justice for its victims. I pay tribute to the former Minister for Migration, my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), for the work she did to rebuild trust with many of the victims of the Windrush scandal. She reformed the compensation scheme and resourced the Windrush unit in the Home Office, resulting in an event that many would never have thought possible: the holding of a Windrush conference in the Home Office itself, which was attended by many elders of the Windrush generation and many victims of the scandal.

But there is still considerable work to do. Research by JUSTICE and the University of Sussex has found that claimants to the compensation scheme received an average offer of £11,400 when they applied for compensation by themselves, but an average of £83,300 for the same cases once they had legal representation. Such disparity is completely unacceptable, and it must be addressed. There are still victims who do not trust the Home Office to administer the scheme, and who have not come forward to apply for the compensation to which they

are entitled. There are still individual cases—including at least one that I have been made aware of in detail—in which people are being denied their status, based on an inaccurate understanding of history.

We should not mark this year’s Windrush Day without reflecting on the fact that political parties in our country are now seeking to rewrite the definition of Britishness as being based on ancestry alone. They are trying to create a false and completely unacceptable distinction between native Brits and non-native citizens, focusing implicitly on whiteness. This is a divisive, abhorrent and, most importantly, completely inaccurate articulation of Britishness, and we must reject it with all our strength. In recent weeks, the stoking of racist hatred and division has resulted in long-term residents of Belfast being hounded out of their homes based on the colour of their skin, in a sickening echo of the “No Blacks, No Dogs, No Irish” signs that greeted many of the Windrush generation. It is making many black and brown Britons feel anxious and fearful in their own communities. It is shameful and it is wrong.

We do not have different categories of British citizen; we just have citizens of many different backgrounds, all together. We are one United Kingdom, with more in common than divides us. People come to citizenship through a range of routes—some by birth, and some by naturalisation. We are diverse, but we are all equal in status. Our task as citizens is to live well together in our communities and have respect for each other, to contribute to our society in the ways that we can, and to build places in which all our children and grandchildren can thrive.

I pay tribute to all those who work to preserve the history of the Windrush generation, to educate people about it and to campaign for justice. In particular, I want to mention Arthur Torrington and the Windrush Foundation; Bishop Desmond Jaddoo and the Windrush National Organisation; Garrick Prayogg and Justice for the Windrush Generations; Sir Patrick Vernon, who I was delighted to see knighted in the King’s birthday honours this month; Ros Griffiths; the Windrush Justice Clinic; the Black Cultural Archives in my constituency; and Dr Les Johnson and Denize Ledeatte at the Windrush Museum.

I want to make a number of asks of the Minister. Will she take seriously the need for support for victims of the Windrush scandal who apply to the compensation scheme, and work with the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice to ensure that they have access to funded legal support? In the light of concerns that the scheme is not on an equal footing with others, such as the infected blood compensation scheme and the Post Office/Horizon scandal compensation scheme, will she work with the Home Office to commission an independent review and address any disparities? Will she raise with the Home Office the calls for the scheme to be made fully independent from the Department responsible for the scandal?

Will the Minister start work to plan for the 80th anniversary of the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush in 2028 so that commemorative and celebratory events like the Big Caribbean Lunch can take place across the country? Will she consider calls to deepen our celebrations by having a Windrush Month or a national Windrush motion, to embed Windrush history further within our civic life? Will she provide support for recording and

preserving the oral histories of members of the Windrush generation, as has been done for the “Windrush Untold Stories” exhibition? Those stories are powerful, and they have an important role to play in educating people about our shared history.

As part of that work, will she support the campaign by Sir Patrick Vernon and others to raise the anchor of the HMT Empire Windrush from the Mediterranean seabed, so that this important symbol of resilience and hope can be restored and used as an opportunity to tell this story? Finally, in the light of the abhorrent narratives on immigration that are currently gaining currency in our politics, will she commit to do everything possible to ensure that the Government’s policies always reflect and celebrate our rich and complex identity as an island nation to which people from all over the world have always come to make their home, including through upcoming legislation on immigration?

The story of the Windrush generation is remarkable in so many ways. Most importantly, however, it is part of the story of us. It is an integral and interwoven part of the history of our country and our identity as a nation, and we must never forget it.

2.17 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): It is an absolute and wonderful pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and her beautiful tribute to the Windrush generation and her constituents. I know how much they appreciate the fact that she calls for this debate in Parliament every single year, and I concur with her on the beautiful exhibition in Portcullis House. However, I slightly disagree on raising the Windrush’s anchor. I have had this conversation with Sir Patrick Vernon, and I would prefer the money to be spent on a learning centre and an educational trust. I feel that would be a more worthwhile spend of money.

My mum and dad came here on British passports. They would be considered part of the Windrush generation, and they are extremely proud of coming on their British passports. The way they were taught English in school was way better than how we were taught English in school, and we often got into trouble for how we spoke, because we were not speaking the Queen’s English. I remember being in the garden with my father one day and asking him to sing the national anthem. He started singing “God Save the Queen”, but I wanted him to sing the Jamaican national anthem, because I wanted to learn it. There is a deep history there. As my hon. Friend said in her moving speech, some politicians are trying to divide us, but there is so much that unites us.

The Windrush scandal has been such a painful time. The first time I heard of it was when Winston, as I will call him, came to see me in my surgery. He had been working for the council for 40 years and was looking forward to his retirement, but when it was time for retirement, he was told that because he was not legally here, he would not have access to his pension. I was absolutely stunned by that. Sometimes constituents do not tell us the full story, and I thought that maybe there was more to it, but on further investigation I found that it was just a complete injustice.

Winston was embarrassed and ashamed. I would say to him that it was not his embarrassment or shame to carry, because this was something done to him by

the British Government. However, there is a lack of understanding of the pride that this generation brings with them, as seen in how they carry themselves, how they speak and how they dress. People carrying things in a plastic bag is a no-no in the Jamaican community. If it is see-through, it is called a scandal bag, and is embarrassing because nobody should see what someone has in their bag. There is a lot of pride, which is why this has caused such embarrassment and shame.

I asked Jacqui McKenzie, who is the head of immigration, asylum and Windrush cases at Leigh Day, about the cases she is currently dealing with. The first issue, she said, is the excessive delay, with some people waiting four years. Many of them are very elderly, and the stress of the wait has caused illnesses such as dementia. We should hold our heads in shame. There are problems with claims for loss of earnings and the impact on people of a life lived in limbo, waiting for a decision, or in shame, waiting for the Government to acknowledge they belong in the country. That has a profound effect, and the fact that it is not considered is unacceptable. People were sacked from their jobs and they did not get their promotions. Some people could not find places to live or to rent, and as I have mentioned, they did not get their pensions. All of this is unacceptable.

Caseworkers are currently not sufficiently trained. Constituents have told me that caseworkers have said to them, “Whereabouts is that?” or, “Are you sure?” when they present information. Teachers have contacted me saying that they can vouch for the West Indian children they taught in their schools if we need evidence, and that is how the community is coming together to try to right these wrongs.

Jacqui also mentioned the misinterpretation of demonstrating lawful status, which has led to cases being refused incorrectly. For example, two brothers, now in their 30s, applied for indefinite leave to remain in 2008 as children of settled Windrush parents. The Home Office wrongly refused their application, but years later the Home Office admitted it had made a mistake. However, it has not corrected the knock-on effects that the error caused, and those brothers are still waiting for justice five years later.

I have constituents who went to Jamaica to visit family or bury a relative, and when they went to the airport, they were told they could not come back and they were stuck in Jamaica. We have cases of people stuck in Jamaica for 10 years—10 years! One resident who is stuck in Jamaica has plenty of evidence, but he has been refused compensation based on having no lawful status, which is wrong. He was offered £10,000, but then was told that giving him that amount of money was a mistake, which has retraumatised him, and he is now showing signs of dementia.

There are problems with requests for updates, and there is a lack of transparency and a lack of care. All of this is unacceptable. As my hon. Friend mentioned, there is also a discrepancy between claimants in decision making. In exactly the same cases, sometimes in the same family, when people have presented their information, they have been given different awards. Some get no award, some get £10,000 and some get £40,000. All this shows that the system is not fit for purpose.

The scheme should be moved from the Home Office, which should never have been the administrator of a scheme when it was responsible for the injustice it has

[Dawn Butler]

inflicted on others. We also need a truly independent appeal mechanism, as well as more experienced staff. At the moment, constituents have to go to the ombudsman, which means they have to go to their MP, who has to sign the application, so we need a straightforward appeal system. The current system is built to retraumatise people who have been wronged.

Lastly, we need a Windrush inquiry. We really need to know and understand the cause of the scandal, but also why it is still ongoing. We should be providing redress instead of causing trauma. Next year is the 10th anniversary of this scandal, and the consequences and injustices are still ongoing. It is our job to do this, and when the Minister gets to her feet, I hope she will commit to our putting these injustices right.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Are you wishing to contribute?

Joy Morrissey: If I may.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You may.

12.25 pm

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was so inspired by the speech of the hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) that I thought I would say a few words.

I just want to thank the Backbench Business Committee for bringing forward this debate and to say a personal thank you to the Windrush generation and their grandchildren for making me feel British when I first came here. We talk about what we have in common and what divides us, and what is great about the Windrush generation is that they came here, they contributed, they were proud to be British and they have brought so much enrichment to being British. When I came here as an immigrant, it was my West Indian friends who taught me how to be British, and who showed pride in being British and pride in the flag.

My first coronation party was a Jamaican-inspired coronation party, and that is the best kind of party to have. As the hon. Member mentioned, there were none of those transparent bags; it was classy and wonderful, and I had the best time. I think my being proud of being British came from the kindness shown to me when I first came here as an immigrant.

I just want to thank the Backbench Business Committee for having this debate and the Windrush generation and their grandchildren for their incredible contribution to this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That was just lovely. I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

2.27 pm

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) for bringing forward this important debate, as I know she does every year on behalf of her constituents. I also thank her for setting the scene so beautifully as we celebrate Windrush Day.

It is a pleasure to speak today to celebrate the incredible contribution of the Windrush generation to our society, while also recognising the immense failings of the state in its treatment of them. The Caribbean and broader black communities have enriched the social fabric of the United Kingdom, adding vitality to our streets, shops and culture throughout the country. That generation and their children and grandchildren have inspired us, as the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) has said, and served our national interest through their contributions to our public institutions.

We would be a poorer, less exciting, less dynamic and less colourful country had individuals not boarded ships such as the HMT Empire Windrush destined for the United Kingdom to help us rebuild after the second world war. The hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) spoke about Winston being embarrassed or ashamed by being a victim of what was a scandal, when he should just have felt pride in his contribution to our society after serving the council for decades.

The hon. Member also asked some really important questions about the efficacy of the compensation scheme. We often hear similar issues raised, when we are talking about the infected blood compensation scheme or the LGBT veterans who were kicked out of the armed forces, about how these schemes run and the case workers on them. It is so important that we get this right, so that people are not retraumatised or expected to provide information that they quite often do not have and cannot provide.

In my constituency of Chichester there were four passengers on the Empire Windrush—that we know of—Roger, who was a student; Violet, a domestic worker; Samuel, a member of the Royal Navy; and we, too, had a Winston, an accountant. Their stories and experiences will no doubt have varied, but Chichester was undoubtedly enriched by their presence, no matter how long they stayed with us. Winston's daughter was the late Andrea Levy, who represented so many of that generation in her writing about the lived experiences of Jamaicans who moved to the UK.

In my constituency we have seen extraordinary performances at Chichester festival theatre, often featuring and written by black actors. I refer members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: I am a trustee of Chichester festival theatre. Our city is not very multicultural—I think we are 96.8% white—so we have been on a real journey, as a theatre, to make sure that when people come to provide incredible shows, they feel welcome while staying in our city. I know that the theatre has done a lot of work to make sure that those experiences are the best they can be.

Our local students in Chichester have benefited from the work of Hakim Adi, the first African-British historian to become a professor of history in the UK, who taught at the University of Chichester. Meanwhile, locals and tourists can learn much about the involvement in Britain of those who came here during the Roman empire when they visit our remarkable Fishbourne Roman palace.

In Chichester, and throughout the country, we owe our black communities so much, yet at times we have let them down badly. The scandal that led to people being wrongly detained and deported due to a lack of documentation was a shameful chapter in our history.

They were invited here as British citizens, yet their dignity and rights were disregarded because of failings in the state apparatus.

The previous Conservative Government failed to deliver the justice that those Windrush victims deeply deserve. There was dither and delay in the implementation of the recommendations of the Windrush lessons learned review, and the independent Windrush commissioner has recently emphasised that the Windrush compensation scheme is not fit for purpose, as the hon. Member for Brent East mentioned. Claimants often find the process of applying for compensation exhausting and painful. Many receive no payment at the end of a lengthy and difficult process. Currently, six in 10 applications result in no compensation being awarded. The Liberal Democrats would urgently implement all the recommendations of the lessons learned review in full and make the compensation scheme independent of the Home Office.

Beyond the scandal, far too many people's lives are still blighted by prejudice, discrimination and inequality. We all have a responsibility to recognise that reality, and the role that we can play in challenging those injustices. That is even more important in this Chamber because of the unequal experiences of people from ethnic minority backgrounds across our public services. Whether it is in the criminal justice system, the NHS or education, outcomes and opportunities are not equal, and it should be the ambition of us all to change that. It is particularly important in parts of the country that are not as diverse as others. As I said, my constituency of Chichester is proportionately less diverse than others. Having said that, growing numbers of individuals from different ethnicities are moving into my city. It is important that we commit to ensuring that this is not used as a political football to stoke division or hate.

I am proud that the Liberal Democrats are committed to fighting for racial equality, which means unequivocally condemning racism in all its forms and tackling injustice wherever we see it. In our election manifesto, we committed to implementing a comprehensive race equality strategy aimed at reducing the disproportionately high maternal mortality rates experienced by black women and eliminating racial disparities in maternal health through a cross-departmental target and strategy. We also want to end the disproportionate use of stop and search and require all police forces to adopt ambitious targets for improving the diversity of their workforce throughout the country. We have also called for the reversal of the Conservatives' voter ID scheme, which disproportionately excludes minorities from democracy, and for all parties to publish candidate diversity data.

As has been outlined today in the outstanding contributions, the Windrush generation, and our Caribbean and black communities more broadly, have given so much to this country. I would particularly like to put on record a tribute to my noble Friend Baroness Floella Benjamin. Her story, her upbringing, her work and her continued advocacy on behalf of the Windrush generation—those invited here to help rebuild Britain—are truly inspiring. She continues to hold the Government to account in the other place to ensure that people just like her, who came here from the Caribbean in the 20th century, receive the justice they deserve. I believe that she first proposed the idea of a national Windrush Day, so I pay tribute to her. I put on record our thanks to the Windrush generation for their incredible contribution to our society over the past 80 years.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It gives me huge pleasure to call my constituency neighbour, the shadow Minister Mims Davies.

2.34 pm

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; it is always wonderful to see you in the Chair.

Where to start? I always love this debate. I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to it. It is always a privilege to speak on behalf of His Majesty's loyal Opposition. The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) opened the debate very strongly in her typical style. I hope that at Windrush Square she and those commemorating have a wonderful time. I concur with her comments on the story of us.

As we have heard from Members across the House this afternoon, celebrating the immense contribution of the Windrush generation is so important—the men and women who answered Britain's call in the years after the second world war and helped to rebuild a nation truly in need. The hon. Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) and I are politically very different, and we approach things very differently, but in humanity we are so united. It is always wonderful to hear her speak. I loved her reflections on the Queen's English. That was exactly what my mum said to me—I think it may be a parental stock phrase—around minding my p's and q's. Perhaps we were all told that.

As I said, this generation answered the call, united by shared British values, as the hon. Member for Brent East rightly pointed out. They brought with them not only their labour but their resilience, their values and their determination to contribute to this country. It was, of course, not the first call answered by the Caribbean nations. On 3 September 1939, the first message received by the British Government following the declaration of war with Germany was a reassuring one: "Barbados is with you." That short message was backed up by thousands of Caribbean men and women who served to defeat the greatest threat to freedom we have ever seen. Following the war, the Windrush contribution to British society was profound, as we have heard, and continues to be far-reaching. That should be celebrated.

In our economy, the Windrush generation filled vital roles—we all know them—in our public services, the NHS, public transport and industry, truly becoming the backbone of post-war recovery. In politics, as we have heard, they and their descendants have truly enriched democracy with new voices, perspectives and, crucially, leadership. In sport, goodness knows what we would do without the Windrush generation, representing Britain on the world stage with distinction and inspiring generations through their excellence and perseverance. And in culture, as we have heard this afternoon, particularly from my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey), they have transformed British life—from music and literature to food, language and art—giving modern Britain its vibrant, diverse character.

Alongside that story of contribution, we must also acknowledge a painful truth, as we heard about briefly this afternoon: the reality of the racism experienced by many in the original Windrush generation was real, harsh and deeply unjust.

Dawn Butler: My hon. Friend and I co-chair the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament. There are many times when we agree on things, believe it or not—people think we do not agree across the House sometimes. Does she agree that not only was the racism real then but it is really disappointing that that generation is now saying that what is happening on our streets and the abuse that they are getting today is very reminiscent of what happened when they first came to the country? We must set a better example and ensure that parliamentarians stop stoking division and hate in our country.

Mims Davies: I believe the hon. Lady to be my friend as well. I completely agree with standing up to that abhorrent behaviour and to those seeking to divide us. It is right that we reflect on the discrimination that many of the Windrush generation felt around housing, employment and daily life—barriers that no one in a fair society should endure. That is true now as much as then. Any injustices that are lingering need to be understood and dealt with.

The hon. Member for Brent East rightly said that the experience of racism should belong to the past. We must never forget it, but we should also recognise that, as a country, we have changed fundamentally. As the Sewell report made clear, Britain is not a racist country, and that ought to be celebrated as an immense achievement, giving us renewed commitment, as the hon. Member said, to continue to tackle inequalities and ensure that they do not remain.

There is a balance to be struck. In confronting injustice, we should also recognise how far Britain has come, so that people do not drag us back to the past. The overt racism that shaped the early experiences of the Windrush generation is unthinkable in today's society—although we must recognise that some people may still experience it.

The Conservatives truly and simply believe in treating people as individuals, not categories. Perhaps that is why we have been led by four women, and two people with ethnic minority backgrounds, and I am incredibly proud of that. That brings us to a broader truth about modern Britain: the Leader of the Opposition has argued that our country stands as a successful multiracial democracy, where people from different backgrounds rightly can and should be able to live together under our shared laws, values and institutions with respect. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield reflected on learning to be British, but we still love her accent—she did not hear that because she is not listening, but there we go.

Our diversity is real, but so too is our unity. As the shield of Jo Cox on the Chamber wall behind me says—10 years on—there is so much more that unites us than divides us, and we truly have more in common. That was pointed out by the hon. Member for Brent East, who is my co-chair on the all-party parliamentary group on women in Parliament. We must push and highlight the importance of women having voices and the vote, as we head to 2029 and the anniversary of universal suffrage. We cannot stand by and let any of that be eroded in this country or beyond. Our public bodies and institutions must have a common commitment to fairness and opportunity, so that we can preserve all that lies within that ideal.

The Windrush generation shows that people from different backgrounds can come together, contribute, and fully and roundly succeed, by not retreating into separate identities—that is the danger—but building something that is truly shared and celebrated.

I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. I particularly loved hearing about the work of Baroness Benjamin—I think we all look up to the Baroness. In fact, coming to work in this place and finding out that she worked here too was pretty cool, which slightly shows my age—I don't think I should keep going down that route! Today, we truly honour the Windrush generation's great legacy. We do so with gratitude and we celebrate their success. It is a national success that is worth sharing this year and into the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): The shadow Minister is evergreen—which means very young.

2.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Nesil Caliskan): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) on securing this important debate and on her poignant speech, and I thank other Members for their brilliant speeches on this important topic. It is an issue that Members across the House have deep and personal feelings about. Windrush Day means so much to so many across the country, including many in my constituency of Barking in east London. I am grateful for those contributions today, because they speak to the independent and personal experiences of many of our constituents. There have been a number of excellent speeches, and I will address some of the specific asks.

To participate in a debate that has such a powerful and vivid history brought the Windrush story to life. I begin by paying tribute to the Windrush generation and their descendants. Earlier this week we marked the anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush at Tilbury 78 years ago. The people who disembarked in Essex on that June day in 1948 came to the country in a moment of profound need; a country still reeling from the trauma and destruction of the second world war. They helped to rebuild Britain, working in a range of settings, including construction, public transport and manufacturing, as well as our NHS. Even more precious than that generation's contribution as members of the workforce was the important part they played socially and culturally in this nation. From food to music, literature to art, as Members have already outlined, the Windrush generation changed our society for the better. The Windrush story is indivisible from our national story. Those who came in the middle of the last century, and subsequent generations, are owed our thanks.

And yet, the tragic truth is that they have not always had our thanks. In fact, for years many were made to feel that they were imposters in their own country, and were subject to terrible injustices by the very state that had called on them to come here. The Home Office Windrush scandal reminds us of an embarrassment in our country's history. That is why this Government will strive relentlessly to provide those affected with the support and justice that they deserve.

As other Members have reflected, today is primarily a moment of celebration. It is at this point every year that we come together to mark Windrush Day and honour the immense contribution made by the Windrush generation and subsequent generations through a range of events that are taking place across the country. Each one is a unique tribute to the Windrush story and the people who live it. This year alone, the Windrush Day grant scheme has funded 33 projects, bringing communities together right across the country. Hon. Members across the Chamber will have visited the exhibition in Portcullis House. It is very important that we, as legislators, never forget the Windrush generation. I encourage those who have not been to visit the exhibition, which runs until 3 July.

Despite adversity, the Windrush generation continue to build, create and contribute so much to British society. The Government are proud to support Windrush Day through the grant scheme and wider engagement across the country. It is a time to commemorate the legacy of the Windrush generation, to pause and reflect, and to give thanks—to ensure that the Windrush generation and their contribution are not forgotten.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): Britain is a great country, and Bournemouth is a great town; everywhere I go I see the values of unity and decency. I saw this recently at St Walburga's primary school in Bournemouth, where I was invited by one of the teachers, Kern Browne, to hear from year 6 students who were remembering the Windrush generation. Bruno, Takondwa and Poppy read out diary entries and Alesia, Zack, Beatrix, Luke, Leo and Abigail read out poems that they had written after reading Benjamin Zephaniah's "Windrush Child". At the same time as she thanks the Windrush generation, will the Minister thank these young people for trying to spread diversity in our communities?

Nesil Caliskan: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting how important it is that young people in our constituencies have the opportunity to learn about, talk about and celebrate the contribution of the Windrush generation and what they gave this country. It is vital that they are able to articulate that, and I thank the young people in his constituency for doing so.

As well as celebrating the contribution of the Windrush generation, it is right that the state recognises the hurt caused by the Home Office Windrush scandal. The Government are committed to ongoing efforts to give those who were affected the support they deserve and the compensation they are owed. Through honest engagement and meaningful reform, the Home Office has worked to make the response to the Windrush scandal fairer, faster and more compassionate. The aim is clear: to right the wrongs as far as we can and deliver the maximum compensation as quickly as possible. More than £128 million has been paid in compensation, and more than 19,000 individuals have been issued with documentation confirming their British citizenship.

Although that demonstrates real progress, I recognise that some remain deeply frustrated. I know that no amount of compensation will undo the pain, suffering and loss of many victims who suffered. I have had the honour of meeting many from the Windrush generation, their children and grandchildren, both in my constituency of Barking and Dagenham and across the country.

They speak about their experience and of feeling betrayed following the scandal. They know that the impact still lingers. The truth is that we should do everything we can to talk about their experiences so that we can get this compensation scheme to a much better place. Today is an opportunity for me to reiterate the Government's position: we are determined to ensure that those affected receive the documentation they require and the compensation they deserve.

The Government have been clear that community feedback must be at the heart of improving the compensation scheme. I take particular note of the important points made by hon. Members, in particular on the disparity between the compensation secured when individuals apply for compensation alone versus the amount they might secure if they have legal advice. The Home Office will continue to listen and act on these concerns, and I will certainly be making that point in particular.

We know that the voices of those affected need to be heard loudly so that their views can shape the Government's approach, as does the insight and expertise provided by the Rev. Clive Foster, who was appointed by the Government as the first Windrush commissioner a year ago. His role is to provide independent scrutiny and challenge in relation to the Government's response to Windrush, support cultural change in the Home Office and act as an advocate for those affected by the Home Office Windrush scandal.

I note with interest the important points that Members have made about the cultural change still required in the Home Office so that victims are supported in an appropriate way. The re-established Windrush unit is working with the Windrush commissioner and stakeholders to ensure that we take a trauma-informed approach when designing restorative dialogue events, the purpose of which is to listen and acknowledge the harm that occurred and identify the actions that the Department and wider Government must take to rebuild trust and ensure that the lessons learned from the scandal lead to meaningful and lasting change. The Home Office is also completing a review of all 30 recommendations from the Windrush lessons learned review before considering the next steps.

I note the call for the compensation scheme to be moved from the Home Office to a different Department. I recognise that is in part because of the frustration with the process and the speed at which victims are able to secure their compensation; however, the Home Office view is that moving the scheme to a different Department may risk a delay in payments altogether. The focus is really on improving the experiences of claimants at this point.

This year marks 78 years since the arrival of the Windrush; in two years, it will be the 80th anniversary, which provides an important opportunity for us to mark this national commemoration and recognise the lasting contribution of the Windrush generation and their descendants. I wholeheartedly welcome the calls from Members across the House to ensure that we are ready as a Government and as a country to celebrate the Windrush generation, and steps are already being taken by the Government to secure a steering group to establish what events can take place across the country in order to adequately mark the occasion.

[*Nesil Caliskan*]

I once again thank all Members who have contributed today and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood for securing the debate. I have heard all the points made. I will take them to the Home Office and speak to colleagues in my own Department—MHCLG—and across Government. The scrutiny that this kind of debate provides is absolutely critical to ensuring that we get the compensation scheme right.

I conclude my remarks with this reflection. As the granddaughter of two people who decided to leave one island to come to another, I know just how important it is that the experiences of those who live in this country are recognised even when they were not good ones—in fact, particularly when they were not good experiences. It allows us to be a better society and to recognise that the rich and diverse communities we live in have been built on the back of their experiences. As we celebrate the contribution of the Windrush generation, we also redouble our efforts to right the wrongs of the past. We do so for all those in the Windrush generation, because they deserve it, and it is the very least that we can do.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Helen Hayes to wind up.

2.55 pm

Helen Hayes: I thank all Members who have contributed to the debate. I received many messages from others who would have loved dearly to contribute but were unable to come—for reasons to do either with fleeing the weather in London or with the by-elections taking place here—so the relatively small number of speeches should not in any way be interpreted as a lack of interest in Windrush Day. The speeches that we have heard have been excellent.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) for sharing her family story and experience, and for raising so clearly the problems with the compensation scheme and the need for urgent further reforms, including independent legal representation and more experienced caseworkers. We must not forget that

this work is urgent; the Windrush generation is ageing. It is particularly egregious that people have died while waiting for compensation from the scheme.

I thank the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) for her recognition of the Windrush generation and for sharing her memories. I thank the hon. Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller) for mentioning Andrea Levy and for her tribute to Baroness Benjamin. Sadly, I am old enough to be regarded by Baroness Benjamin as one of her “Play School” babies. She deserves all our respect for her incredible work to secure the national Windrush monument at Waterloo—although I think a few different people would lay claim to being the first person to raise the need for a national Windrush Day.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for responding to the debate, for her heartfelt tribute to the Windrush generation and for agreeing to take our concerns back to colleagues in Government. In my experience, many members of the Windrush generation recognised 18 months ago the reasons for not making the compensation scheme independent. They recognised that reform, if possible, would speed things up, and that people would not be left waiting for so long. However, the Government must take seriously the fact that experiences have not improved to the required extent over the past 18 months, and that there are still calls for independence. We have not seen change at the scale required to address all those concerns. I would be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister took that back and seriously considered the call for independence from Rev. Clive Foster, the Windrush commissioner.

Finally, I wish everybody well in their celebrations and commemorations of Windrush Day over the coming days and at the weekend. We must remember that this particular Windrush Day takes place at a very serious time in our history. We must do everything possible to ensure that the cancer of racism cannot take hold in our society. Our task is to support all the wonderful, rich and diverse communities across the country to live well together.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Windrush Day 2026.

Neuropsychiatric Conditions: PANS and PANDAS

2.59 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the diagnosis and treatment of Paediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS) and Paediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections (PANDAS).

It is a pleasure to open this debate, and I am grateful to colleagues who have attended, despite the immense heat. I welcome the members of the PANS PANDAS UK youth board, and the families impacted by these conditions who are here to watch the debate from the Gallery, and I am grateful to the Doorkeepers for their accommodation in that regard. The heat has meant that many families who were planning to attend, as well as the PANS PANDA UK team, have not been able to travel down, and I know how understandably disappointed they are, but I am pleased to still have the opportunity to speak about this condition on behalf of the thousands of children, young people and families who want to know that their voices are being heard.

PANS, which stands for paediatric acute-onset neuropsychiatric syndrome, and PANDAS, which stands for paediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders associated with streptococcal infections—you can understand why we say PANS and PANDAS—are post-infectious conditions that affect the brain. They are recognised by NHS England as clinical syndromes.

PANS is a condition in children and young people that can result from an initial mild infection, such as chickenpox or even covid. PANDAS is a specific sort of PANS that stems from a strep infection. While the initial infections might be mild, in some cases they trigger a misdirected immune response and/or a brain inflammation that causes the rapid onset of severe symptoms. I want to emphasise that rapidness; children can go from being healthy and thriving to experiencing obsessive compulsive behaviours, tics, extreme anxiety, eating restrictions and profound neurological symptoms almost overnight.

PANS PANDAS UK currently supports around 8,000 families, but we know that that number is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg. In reality, there are likely to be children and families affected in every one of our constituencies. Looking at Members in the Chamber today, I am sure that many have been contacted by a constituent who is struggling to get support for their children. Constituents get in touch with their Member of Parliament, and that is often why we become engaged in these issues. That was the case for me. I first became aware of PANS and PANDAS when constituents reached out to me for support for their daughter, who was struggling to get a diagnosis and the medication that she needed.

I want to emphasise the key point that early diagnosis and treatment are crucial. When the conditions are identified early, outcomes are significantly better, and in some cases a simple course of antibiotics can alleviate symptoms. However, people are very much experiencing the opposite to that. They are experiencing delay, confusion and inconsistency. Research from PANS PANDAS UK

suggests that over 53% of affected families wait more than a year for diagnosis, and 37% wait for more than two years.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this important issue to the House. The Government are introducing guidelines on this in the autumn. Does she welcome the publication of those guidelines, and does she hope that they will get rid of the inconsistencies and postcode lottery that she is describing?

Wendy Chamberlain: As always, the hon. Gentleman is ahead of the game; I was going to mention this. I am very much looking forward to the guidance, but we need to ensure that it is understood and shared.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The hon. Lady mentioned the all-important fact that early diagnosis, coupled with the prescribing of a quite common antibiotic—I believe amoxicillin is one of them—can make a crucial difference. In May last year, I asked in a written question whether the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care would take steps to facilitate the circulation of material to general practitioners, advising them on how to recognise PANS and PANDAS, and treat them with antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medications. The response that I got from the Minister for Care was that this is all a matter for the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, which is an independent body. The Minister said that NICE has

“no plans to issue guidance on paediatric acute-onset neuropsychiatric syndrome (PANS) and paediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorder associated with streptococcus (PANDAS)”.

He also said,

“should the evidence base develop further, we would look to the NICE to update clinical policy.”

It seems that the early use of antibiotics is not yet accepted by the medical establishment. Does the hon. Lady know whether there is hard evidence to show that the medical establishment needs to get its act together on the matter?

Wendy Chamberlain: The right hon. Member may recall the debate we had in a previous Parliament on this subject. The Minister at the time gave the commitment that she would ensure that GPs and other medical practitioners were aware of the guidance that PANS PANDAS UK was producing. I hope we will hear today that the Minister is looking at that. There is clearly a challenge, and although the condition is recognised by the World Health Organisation and by NHS England, there is more to do to minimise the postcode lottery and ensure that we can get support for young people.

Sir Julian Lewis: I am sorry if I did not express myself clearly enough. It is not so much a question of the non-recognition of PANS and PANDAS, but whether it has been recognised that early treatment with antibiotics can make all the difference.

Wendy Chamberlain: I am sure the Minister can address that in her closing remarks. We absolutely need to ensure that. As the right hon. Member has said, amoxicillin might be one of the antibiotics that could be used. It is straightforward to use, and in the vast majority of cases it works, but if it does not, potentially PANS and PANDAS could be ruled out.

[Wendy Chamberlain]

Too many families face rejected referrals, long waits and, in some cases, misdiagnosis. Only a small proportion of cases are diagnosed within the NHS, and many people are forced to travel long distances or turn to private care. That is not possible for all families; getting the private care needed for their child can bring families to their knees. To give an example from my constituency, in the same GP practice, one GP will provide support and the other does not recognise the condition. That makes things very difficult.

A number of families whom I have engaged with have had to seek private support, and that makes me ask—I hope the Minister is sympathetic to this—what about the children from families who are reliant on NHS support, and do not get the diagnosis? They may be absent from school for long periods. Their family may be written off as problematic, and the children as having problematic behaviours, when ultimately the condition could be at the root of the problem. From the point of view of our ongoing economic wellbeing, we need to support children's being in education as much as we can. That is why the research is so important—because we need to ensure that families can get the support that they need, no matter their financial situation.

A National Institute for Health and Care Research-funded evidence synthesis is under way; that has changed since the last time this topic was debated. It is already highlighting significant gaps in our understanding, particularly around effective treatments. Also, with other members of the all-party parliamentary group on PANS PANDAS, which I chair, we met doctors some time ago who are researching how the brain functions. Their work suggests that there may be biomarkers that indicate a higher likelihood of developing the conditions, and they have produced fascinating research that I encourage colleagues to read. We need to understand how severe the impact of PANS and PANDAS can be on a child. It is clear that further research is urgently needed to aid both diagnosis and treatment, which often needs to be ongoing.

Awareness and training are fundamental. Without them, as has been mentioned, healthcare professionals miss the signs, and teachers misinterpret symptoms. Children who experience sudden neurological decline are too often viewed through the lens of behaviour, anxiety or neurodivergence, rather than as having a medical emergency. From the children that I have engaged with through the youth board, I have learned that it is a terrifying experience for a young person to deal with those symptoms.

I am pleased to say, however, that we are at an important turning point. The UK clinical guidance, which the hon. Member for Harlow (Chris Vince) mentioned, is expected later this year, and there has been significant work since the last debate, which I held in September 2023, to bring PANS and PANDAS further into the policy landscape. I pay tribute to PANS PANDAS UK for that, because the charity has been the key driver in making that happen. Guidance alone will not be enough, however; it must be consistently embedded across the NHS, so that we end the postcode lottery in diagnosis and care. I suspect that we will hear about some of that from other Members. The consequences are profound; the human cost of delay and misdiagnosis is devastating.

Children lose the ability to attend school, lose previously secure skills, and experience severe psychiatric and physical symptoms.

Just a few months ago, I hosted a roundtable in Parliament, at which the PANS PANDAS UK youth board members were able to speak directly to MPs about their experiences. As MPs, we engage with parents in the first instance, but it was very powerful to hear directly from children who are experiencing the condition. They might not be in the Gallery, but many of them will be voting; as we were informed, they are the voters of the future and are paying attention to what we do right now. It was an eye-opening session, particularly for those who had not heard of the condition. The children spoke about wanting to be believed and understood, and wanting to get help more quickly. Their message was clear: earlier recognition could change everything. They explained how PANS and PANDAS have impacted their lives; they described watching their peers progress, while they feel stuck behind, and being too unwell to attend school and so having to repeat years. That adds to a feeling of isolation. We can all remember when we were younger and times when childhood was quite cruel.

Families have described watching their child disappear in front of them. Parents leave work to provide care: 36% report having to stop working entirely, and many families face financial losses as a result, as well as from seeking private care. At the youth board roundtable, we also heard from the siblings of children diagnosed with PANS and PANDAS—I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo) has a constituent in Parliament this afternoon who is part of the sibling community. It was a stark reminder of how these conditions impact entire family units; there is the financial impact of having to seek healthcare, and of a parent leaving their job, and the impact of home becoming an unstable and unpredictable environment.

The conditions also have a devastating effect on learning. Nearly half of affected children miss more than six months of school, and over a third miss more than a year. They often experience the sudden loss of core learning skills. Under the current system in England, which is designed to support gradual, stable learning needs, rather than acute onset, as well as under aspects of the proposed special educational needs and disabilities reforms, there is a real risk that those children are misunderstood. Without clear guidance, education professionals default to familiar frameworks. A sudden loss of skills can be misinterpreted as a behavioural issue or neurodivergence, leading to inappropriate support and a delay in the medical intervention required. That is why the alignment between health, education and local authorities is so critical.

I obviously speak as a Scottish MP. We must ensure alignment across the UK, so that there is no postcode lottery in the level of support available. My Scottish Liberal Democrat colleague Adam Harley, the new MSP for Strathkelvin and Bearsden, recently raised a constituent's case in the Scottish Parliament; I was particularly disappointed in the response of First Minister John Swinney, who referred to PANS/PANDAS as a "rare disease". It was clear that he knew nothing about it. Despite my own correspondence with his Government, we have seen limited progress in Scotland. I must emphasise that it is not a potentially rare disease; it is an undiagnosed one. I genuinely believe many children with PANS/

PANDAS have not been diagnosed and are therefore not getting the support they need. That underlines the need for close engagement with devolved Governments to ensure a truly joined-up approach to improving support.

Today's debate will largely focus on children and young people with PANS/PANDAS, but it is equally important to recognise the challenges faced by adults. One adult with PANS/PANDAS shared with me that she has experienced mostly neuropsychiatric symptoms, rather than physical ones. Research shows that PANS and PANDAS can be associated with systemic inflammation and autoimmune responses affecting the whole body, including conditions such as arthritis and other inflammatory diseases. In that person's case, tests revealed ongoing systemic inflammation that has damaged tissues and organs over time, as the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy cells, rather than protecting them. Too often, the symptoms that PANS/PANDAS can manifest are put in the "too difficult to deal with" basket.

These are the practical steps that we are asking the Government to consider. First, when the UK clinical guidance is published later this year, there must be a clear commitment that steps will be taken to ensure that it is embedded consistently across the NHS, not left to chance, and that appropriate stakeholders are engaged to support its dissemination.

Secondly, we need training for healthcare professionals and those working in education, so that symptoms are recognised early and acted on appropriately. Thirdly, we must have a renewed commitment to research funding, building on the work of the National Institute for Health and Care Research, to address the significant gaps in evidence and improve treatment pathways. I ran the London marathon—my first ever—at the end of April, and one of the charities I was fundraising for was PANS PANDAS UK. It should not take fundraising to deliver the funds that are needed for the research that will provide the right support for these children.

Finally, there must be clear signposting and alignment with the forthcoming local authority guidance to ensure that schools and services are equipped to meet their legal duties. As one clinical psychologist working with a young person with PANS has stated,

"Without training...pupils risk unnecessary and avoidable long-term loss of skills."

I will be pushing on exactly this matter in Scotland.

This debate is an opportunity to put these issues firmly on the record, to raise awareness across Parliament and to ensure that families living with PANS and PANDAS feel heard. I am grateful to colleagues here today and look forward to hearing their contributions and the Minister's response.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I am in awe of the hon. Member for running the marathon and, of course, for raising funds for PANS and PANDAS.

3.14 pm

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for introducing the debate so well. It is always a pleasure in this place when I discover that I have something in common with Members from across the House. In recent months, the hon. Lady and I have discovered that we share an interest and passion for Jane Austen and

hard agree that the BBC 1995 production of "Persuasion" is by far the superior, but more importantly, that we share an interest and desire to improve the diagnosis, understanding and clinical treatment of people of all ages who are living with PANS/PANDAS.

I first became aware of PANS/PANDAS when my constituent Joanne came to see me about her son Jake shortly after my election. Jake has lived with PANS/PANDAS for more than six years. For a period of time, treatment was effective, and NHS continuing healthcare funding enabled Jake to access the care of a specialist immunologist. However, despite the progress that had been made, the family have since faced repeated challenges in securing the treatment and funding, resulting in uncertainty, stress and significant personal expense. I therefore appeal to North East and North Cumbria integrated care board to please help urgently resolve these issues, and I have an outstanding query with the ICB on exactly this point. Joanne has worked tirelessly to advocate for her son, yet she continues to encounter delays, poor communication, a lack of clarity, and uncertainty about funding—a story all too typical of families trying to support a family member living with PANS/PANDAS.

While this case is deeply personal, it also highlights the wider challenges faced by these families. Too often, parents like Joanne find themselves navigating complex systems, spending years seeking access to appropriate care and treatment, all while battling for recognition of their child's condition. It was thanks to Joanne that I had the privilege of meeting members of the PANS PANDAS youth board when they visited Parliament in April. As has been said, they shared their personal stories with me and other parliamentarians. I welcome them again in Parliament today.

I welcome the Government's work with the royal colleges, specialist clinical bodies and PANS PANDAS UK on the development of clinical guidelines. In her remarks, will the Minister indicate when the Government expect to publish the first UK clinical guidelines for PANS and PANDAS? The guidelines should, I hope, result in a clearer and more consistent framework and recording of these conditions. Without an official diagnostic pathway and reliable data collection, it is difficult to understand how many children and young people are affected, the scale of the unmet need, or to ensure that appropriate services are available. Better recognition and data would therefore not only support future research and service planning, but help ensure that families like Jake's receive timely, co-ordinated and compassionate care.

3.18 pm

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for securing the debate and for her advocacy in raising the profile of PANS/PANDAS. I also thank the hon. Member for Carlisle (Ms Minns) for the comments she made. I hope that she gets a response from her ICB very soon—I am waiting for one from mine.

Last month, I attended a meeting organised by the all-party parliamentary group on PANS PANDAS, which my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife leads, to hear from young people directly on their experiences

[Freddie van Mierlo]

of the condition and the impact on their lives. What stuck with me from that meeting was a powerful comment by one of the young people there, who said, “We don’t want your sympathy. We want your action.” Let that comment last with the Minister, too—action, not sympathy.

One young advocate at the meeting was my constituent, 10-year-old Albie and his mother, who are watching the debate today from the Gallery and braved the heat to come here from Oxfordshire. Albie’s brother is diagnosed with PANS/PANDAS, and Albie has become a tireless and devoted campaigner on his brother’s behalf. Albie has launched a letter-writing campaign. He is already 19 months deep into his campaign and has become pen pals with the most powerful and influential people in the country, including His Majesty the King, the high sheriff of Oxfordshire, the Prime Minister, various Ministers, NHS leaders and leading clinicians and, of course, the Speaker’s Office.

Albie proudly showed me in a constituency surgery and again this afternoon his beautiful handwritten letters and the responses, all stored safely in a binder. I am proud to have on my wall in my office here in Westminster a thank you card from Albie, with his trademark drawing of a panda. His next campaign is to write to all 26 main children’s hospitals, asking them to send a doctor or member of staff to the PANS PANDAS UK clinical professionals conference in October in Royal Leamington Spa. His hope is that if more clinicians learn about recognising and treating PANS/PANDAS, children like his brother will receive help more quickly. Albie is an inspiration to all of us and is driven by love for his brother. I wish him continued success, and he has assured me today that he is already dusting off his pencils to write to the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham).

However, at just 10 years old, Albie should not be having to do this. He feels compelled to do it because the NHS and successive Governments have failed families like his. His family have had a difficult time getting the diagnosis and treatment needed, and that is not unusual. When surveyed, only 2% of patients and families said that GPs recognised that their child could have PANS/PANDAS. The path to diagnosis can take months or years, with persistence from parents required to advocate for children. Many are forced to spend thousands of pounds on private assessments and treatment because NHS support is inadequate. When asked by a show of hands at the all-party group meeting, every single young person said their family had paid for private treatment. It is unacceptable that an entire condition requires, by default, private care. It bakes in inequality and places extreme stress and strain on parents. I know as a parent that I would do anything for my child, and Albie’s mum is no different, but the financial pressure placed on ordinary, hard-working families like hers is devastating.

The lack of specialist clinicians and knowledge within the NHS appears to be a major cause of this, with too many clinicians misidentifying the condition and refusing treatments being deployed in the private sector. We urgently need better guidance for the NHS to close this gap. Families are fighting to be heard by professionals who all too often dismiss or do not recognise PANS and PANDAS. I therefore welcome the announcement that NICE will review independently produced guidelines

from the PANS clinical guideline development group and PANS PANDAS UK through the guideline collaboration programme. However, I am concerned by my most recent correspondence on this topic with the Minister for Women’s Health and Mental Health, who sits in the other place, in which she said:

“Should the evidence continue to increase, organisations such as the NICE will consider updating clinical policy”.

My reading of this is that there is no clear commitment that clinical guidance will be adopted by NICE, and I would be grateful if the Minister here today could comment specifically on that point.

Sir Julian Lewis: At the risk of labouring the same single point I want to make again and again, there really does seem to be no downside to telling all GPs that if there is any question at all that a child might have PANS or PANDAS, the GP should prescribe them one of the basic antibiotics, because they could benefit from it tremendously, and there is no risk of harm.

Freddie van Mierlo: I wholeheartedly agree with the right hon. Gentleman. There are very few downsides of prescribing an antibiotic, especially in this instance, given the seriousness of the condition. As he says, there is really no good reason to withhold this medication.

A second challenge facing families is the impact on a child’s ability to participate in education, as they miss months of school because they are too unwell to attend. That not only affects their learning but limits opportunities to socialise, make friends and have a community beyond home. Every child has a right to an education. PANS/PANDAS does not limit ambition or ability, but our education system is placing limits on children with the condition. Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 is in place to stop that happening, and it requires local authorities to arrange suitable education for children who cannot attend school due to illness. However, the provision is not always effective for children living with PANS/PANDAS, and parents still need to be advocates for their own rights, rather than being proactively told them and guided through the process.

There is a wider point. Families are often left fighting for support from multiple systems at the same time, including healthcare, education and local authorities, while trying to take care of a very unwell child. It is the last thing they need. There are steps that the Government can take to limit the challenges. First, PANS/PANDAS must be researched in greater depth. It is currently unknown how many people are affected by PANS/PANDAS in the UK, and there is no official guidance on the diagnosis and treatment of those conditions in the NHS. Secondly, we need training of health professionals to recognise and treat the condition. PANS and PANDAS are conditions with a high risk of long-term disability, exclusion from society and failed education. Families express that if only their children’s condition had been recognised sooner by health professionals, it could have had a significant impact on their child’s wellbeing and outcomes.

Thirdly, we must improve the support offered to children in education. The publication of local authority guidance is anticipated this summer, and it is important that it ensures that schools and services meet their statutory duties for children with PANS/PANDAS. Thousands of families are fighting for support from multiple systems

while taking care of unwell children. It is time for the Government to do their part, and eliminate the barriers to diagnosis and treatment for those living with PANS/PANDAS.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Albie is a superstar, as is his mum!

I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

3.26 pm

Susan Murray (Mid Dunbartonshire) (LD): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for securing this debate, and for all her work to raise the profile of these childhood conditions. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for selecting this topic for debate.

As she said, my hon. Friend first raised PANS/PANDAS in this House more than three years ago and has pushed for change ever since. Indeed, I was pleased to meet the impressive PANS PANDAS UK youth board on their visit to Parliament. For families, the onset of PANS/PANDAS is often sudden and deeply distressing. A child who was well one week can, the next, be gripped by anxiety, tics or obsessive behaviours. What follows is too often not treatment, but a search from GP to specialist and back again for someone who can provide a diagnosis.

Almost three years ago, my hon. Friend asked the Government for a small number of reasonable things. I am sorry to say that families still have not seen the change that they are entitled to expect, but I hope that what we heard earlier means that it will be coming soon. The Department of Health and Social Care has said that it does not hold data on how many children are affected, and NICE has not yet produced guidance, after concluding there was insufficient evidence to produce useful guidance. Clinicians are still left without a clear national pathway to follow, even if they are aware of the conditions.

The result, as we have heard, is a postcode lottery. A survey for PANS PANDAS UK found that just 2% of families said their GP even considered PANS/PANDAS as a possibility for their child's symptoms. Families who can pay go private to see specialists; children whose families cannot pay, lose their childhood, miss school and fail to thrive. Such delays are not administrative inconveniences; they are a risk to children's lives. According to PANS PANDAS UK, 43% of parents say that their child has talked about taking their own life, and 61% say that their child has expressed a desire to no longer be here. These are young children, made desperately unwell by a treatable condition, yet they are waiting months or years for someone simply to recognise what is wrong.

There are two mothers in the Gallery today, one from my constituency of Mid Dunbartonshire, and one from just next door. Both have been forced to spend significant sums of their own money on diagnoses and treatment, including travelling down to London to see specialists in private clinics. As we have heard, that is not unusual. Nearly a third of affected families report a financial impact of more than £50,000, and one in eight report an impact of more than £100,000, simply to get their child diagnosed and treated. We have a system in which a recognised diagnosis is reserved for those who can afford to pay for it, and those who cannot are often left behind.

Two weeks ago, my Liberal Democrat colleague Adam Harley MSP, who represents many of the same families that I do, raised one of the cases with the First Minister in the Scottish Parliament and called for properly recognised NHS guidance. Health is a devolved matter, but families across Scotland face the same barriers as families anywhere else in the UK, and they frequently end up in England to access treatment. Has the Minister had any discussions with the Scottish Government on taking a unified approach to tackling the issue? Given that we are expecting clinical guidance to be released in August, I am sure that families in Scotland would greatly appreciate co-operation between the Governments in Holyrood and Westminster to help bring the postcode lottery they currently face to an end.

PANS/PANDAS are treatable conditions, and children can get their childhood back. To make that happen, I urge the Government to help plug the current gaps in evidence and knowledge around these conditions, including the number of children affected, through supporting research. The Liberal Democrats have called for an increase in research and development spending to 3.5% of GDP to help drive British research, to develop a greater understanding of conditions like PANS/PANDAS, and to evidence the efficacy of available treatment.

An effective treatment can change a child's life—children like Isa and Hugo—for as little as £9. Effective diagnosis and treatment will save the NHS money. Our NHS was founded on the idea that it would treat according to need, not ability to pay. Sadly, in the case of children with PANS/PANDAS, too often that principle is not being upheld. Families simply trying to find treatment for their children are being failed and we must rectify that, wherever in the UK they live.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Minister and welcome him to the Dispatch Box.

3.31 pm

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): It is a privilege to respond to the debate on behalf of His Majesty's loyal Opposition. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for securing the debate and for setting out the landscape facing those with PANS/PANDAS in the UK, as well as recognising the lack of knowledge about the conditions and the challenge that presents. I thank her for her sustained work through the APPG on the issue.

Many right hon. and hon. Members have contributed to the debate. The hon. Member for Carlisle (Ms Minns) spoke movingly about Joanne and Jake, who have been living with PANS/PANDAS for the past six years, and the challenges of not getting the treatment or the funding that they need. The hon. Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo) made a good point about how those affected do not want sympathy but action. He talked about the excellent campaigning by Albie, who is in the Gallery today, following his brother's diagnosis—I suspect Albie's handwriting is somewhat better than my doctor's scrawl and I commend him on his campaigning. The hon. Member for Harlow (Chris Vince), who is always keen to speak up and champion issues on behalf of his constituents, spoke about the importance of guidance. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) talked about the importance of the early use of antibiotics.

[Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst]

Above all, I want to speak directly to the families and children who are following the debate and who live with PANS/PANDAS every day, some of whom are with us in the Gallery today. For them, this is not an abstract discussion about guidance, systems or clinical pathways; it is about the child they love, the moment something changed and the exhaustion of trying to explain that change to people who may never have heard of the condition before. It is about parents who overnight become advocates, researchers, case managers and campaigners, while simultaneously trying to hold their families together, and about the children and young people whose lives can be altered suddenly and terrifyingly.

As we have heard, PANS/PANDAS sit at the intersection of neurology, psychiatry, immunology and infectious diseases. That matters because they do not fit neatly into one service, specialty, clinic or budget line. For the children affected, symptoms can be sudden and severe. They include obsessive-compulsive behaviours, restricted eating, tics, anxiety, behavioural change, sleep disturbance, regression, movement difficulties, school refusal and distress that can overwhelm the entire family.

For some families, the story is stark. A child who was settled and sociable becomes frightened, withdrawn and unable to eat. A child who was thriving at school begins to struggle. Families find themselves moving from GPs to child and adolescent mental health services, from paediatrics to emergency departments, and from school meetings to safeguarding conversations, often without a clear pathway or a clinician who is able to say, "Do you know what? I recognise this, and this is what we need to do next."

The first task before us is to diagnose the problem honestly. The problem is not that every scientific question has been answered, because clearly it has not. There is uncertainty and professional disagreement, and there is a need for stronger evidence, better data and more research into diagnosis, treatment and long-term outcomes. However, uncertainty has too often translated into inconsistency. It has meant too many families left without a clear answer, too many clinicians left without guidance, too many schools unsure of how to respond and too many children caught between services. Each see part of the picture, but they do not see the child as a whole.

At present, there is no official NHS clinical guidance for the diagnosis and treatment of PANS/PANDAS. NICE has previously concluded that the evidence was insufficient to provide useful guidance. The Government have said that data on the number of children affected is not currently collected, because internationally the criteria cannot be agreed. Local integrated care systems are expected to plan services, but they are asked to do so without consistent national direction, which risks variation.

As we have heard, in reality variation leads to a postcode lottery. It means that one family may find an informed GP, paediatrician or neurologist, while another family is left scrambling for help. It means that one school may understand the sudden onset and fluctuating need, while another school sees only challenging behaviour. It means that one parent may feel believed, while another parent feels blamed. That is the difficulty at the heart of this debate.

PANS/PANDAS cut across the way our systems are organised. The NHS is still too often structured around separate silos, whether it is mental health, neurology, infectious disease, immunology or paediatrics, but children living with these conditions do not arrive in neat administrative categories; their needs are complex, sudden and overlapping. That makes it hard for families to know where to turn, as well as for clinicians who want to help but may not have had the training to do so, and for schools that see a child's behaviour change dramatically without understanding what is driving it.

We must also be candid about the emotional difficulty. Parents can feel dismissed. They can feel treated as difficult or seen as overanxious when they are simply trying to explain what has happened to their child. No child should be left waiting for help because the system is unsure about where they fit. The previous Government did not solve this issue, but foundations were laid through the UK rare diseases framework, annual action plans and engagement with research, including with the APPG and the working group.

The current Government have welcomed clinical guidance being developed by PANS PANDAS UK and have said that NICE will consider national guidance as evidence improves. They have also pointed to NIHR research and extended the rare diseases framework into 2027. Where the Government do the right thing, we should welcome it, but the question is whether those actions are sufficient. Do they need to go faster? Are they reaching the families on the ground?

Families do not experience this as a framework, action plan or written answer; they experience it as the moment when a child refuses food, compulsions appear, school attendance collapses or a parent is told that a professional has never heard of the condition. If the problem is complexity, inconsistency and a lack of recognition, the solution must be equal in its seriousness. The foundations have been set, and now we must all go further.

We need action on guidance. The clinical guidance being developed by PANS PANDAS UK and the PANS guideline development group brings together expertise from general practice, paediatrics, neurology, immunology, infectious diseases, psychiatry, psychology and nursing. I would be grateful if the Minister could set out how the Government will engage with that guidance once it is published. Will she commit to a clear process for assessing emerging evidence?

We also need to take action on professional awareness. I recall reading about these conditions in Kumar & Clark when I was a medical student, but I do not recall receiving any formal training on them. It is not enough to ask our clinicians to be responsible for keeping their knowledge up to date; atypical, complex and contested conditions require practical support. As such, I ask the Minister to consider an awareness package for frontline professionals, developed in conjunction with clinicians, families and experts. We also need action on data and research—we need better data, diagnostic clarity, and research into treatment and long-term outcomes. With that in mind, I would appreciate the Minister setting out how the Government intend to support that work and encourage greater patient involvement.

There is also a need for greater consistency across local systems. If support is left entirely to local discretion, care will depend on where a family lives or how hard

they are able to fight for it. Clearer information on how suspected cases can be supported across specialties should be available to ICBs, and schools also have to be part of the answer. For many families, school is where the change is first noticed; better awareness of sudden onset and fluctuating symptoms could help ensure sensible attendance policies and flexible, rapid and responsive classroom adjustments.

This debate should not be one that divides the House, but one that unites it. There will be different views on the evidence, on treatment and on guidance, but there should be no difference between us on the need for children to be seen, for families to be heard, for clinicians to be supported, and for care to be based on evidence, rather than the accident of geography. For families living with PANS/PANDAS, progress will be measured by whether the next family gets an earlier answer, whether the next child is believed sooner, whether the next GP has somewhere to turn, and whether the next school understands. That is a fair and compassionate standard, and it is the one that the Government should now meet.

3.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mrs Sharon Hodgson): I thank the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) and the Backbench Business Committee for bringing forward today's debate. I think we can all agree that, although the number of attendees has been small, it has been mighty in terms of the quality of contributions we have heard from hon. Members. I am also grateful for the opportunity to speak today on the subject of PANS/PANDAS.

As hon. Members have highlighted, these conditions cause significant distress to many children and young people and their families. It is therefore vital that we approach this issue with both scientific care and genuine compassion, recognising and responding to the lived experiences of those affected. We have heard from hon. Members today about some of those experiences, and I thank them all for their contributions.

As we have heard, PANS and PANDAS are closely related, but distinct, clinical syndromes in which an infection can trigger acute and often dramatic changes in both physical and mental health—often as quickly as overnight, as we heard from the hon. Member for North East Fife. They are areas of evolving clinical understanding, with diagnosis based on observed signs and symptoms rather than definitive tests. That means that it is typically a diagnosis of exclusion, requiring clinicians to rule out other causes. While this can make diagnosis complex, it underlines the importance of a holistic, joined-up, child-centred approach.

Treatment is similarly tailored and delivered through multidisciplinary teams, with psychological therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy commonly used to manage symptoms, along with pharmacological interventions where appropriate. Alongside clinical interventions, supportive care is essential. This includes helping families to understand the condition, supporting school attendance where possible, and ensuring access to appropriate mental health services. Effective care requires co-ordination across services to provide consistent and holistic support.

We recognise the challenges that families face—I welcome the families who are in the Gallery today—particularly as these conditions can sit at the intersection of physical and mental health services. Good clinical practice emphasises the importance of a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, including close collaboration with parents, schools and other agencies. However, the absence of definitive biomarkers and fully understood mechanisms has contributed to a variation in how care is delivered. In response, NHS England began working in 2020 with the charity PANS PANDAS UK, which I commend on its work in this area to improve awareness, understanding and care. This led to the establishment of the PANS/PANDAS steering group, which brings together representatives from key royal colleges, specialist clinical bodies and the charity sector.

The steering group has since progressed several important initiatives. First, work is under way to develop the first UK clinical guidelines for PANS and PANDAS, led by a multidisciplinary group and supported by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Ms Minns) asked me about timelines for that guidance. I am happy to tell her today that those guidelines are expected to be published in autumn this year, and they will support more consistent care across the system. Until then, clinicians are advised to draw on existing international guidance, including the Nordic clinical guidelines, which were published in 2021.

Secondly, a dedicated research group is advancing efforts to strengthen the evidence base, including through a nationwide surveillance study. Thirdly, a cross-sector group is developing practical guidance for local authorities to improve support for children and young people living with PANS and PANDAS. That guidance is due to be published later this year, and it will ensure more consistent access to appropriate educational and social care services. As we have heard today, clear and consistent frameworks are essential to improving co-ordination across services and strengthening recognition of PANS and PANDAS.

NHS England's forthcoming children and young people's modern service framework will address health system challenges that affect all children and young people, improve access to specialist advice, promote more integrated working across physical and mental health services, and strengthen the strategic commissioning role of integrated care boards. More widely, NHS England is also supporting local systems to implement neighbourhood multidisciplinary teams, bringing together professionals across health and social care and wider services to deliver joined-up, community-based care, ensuring that all children and young people can access co-ordinated support and paediatric expertise closer to home.

The Lib Dem spokesperson, the hon. Member for Mid Dunbartonshire (Susan Murray), asked me about discussions with the Scottish Government and devolved Administrations. I understand that there have been no direct discussions so far, so I commit that, following this debate, my officials will engage and raise this issue with devolved Government counterparts at the next opportunity.

Alongside these developments, there remains a clear need for high-quality research, and this includes improving understanding of the underlying causes of PANS and PANDAS, refining diagnostic criteria and building stronger evidence on the effectiveness of different treatments. The Department supports research through the National

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

Institute for Health and Care Research, and we welcome applications across all areas of health, including for these conditions. Recent collaborations include the “PANS PANDAS Unveiled” project, which completed an evidence and gap map on the epidemiology, prevalence, treatment and experiences of PANS/PANDAS. In the meantime, integrated care systems are responsible for planning services for their populations and should continue to draw on emerging evidence and guidance to improve care and outcomes.

Sir Julian Lewis: I detected that the Minister was moving towards her conclusion, so I thought I would intervene before she did. She has a fine record, before she became a Minister, of campaigning on mesh-damaged women. That was an occasion where something simple was done that led to very complicated problems. Here, we have a complicated condition, but it is thought that something simple could be done—namely, guidance should be given to all GPs that if this condition is even suspected, a simple course of antibiotics should be given. I have not yet heard anything in what she has said as to whether the research backs that up. If the research has not been done, will she undertake to make sure it gets done and that general practitioners are advised accordingly?

Mrs Hodgson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, who I have worked closely with on a number of health matters over a number of years, and he mentions the work that we did together on mesh. I studied my speech after listening to your earlier intervention and the conversation about antibiotics—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. It was not my intervention, but that of the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis).

Mrs Hodgson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I should know better after 21 years in this House; it just goes to show—you can always teach an old dog new tricks.

Following the right hon. Gentleman’s intervention on antibiotics, I noticed that there was nothing about that in my speech, so I have come to the conclusion that that will come forward in the guidance later this year. I will be looking for that closely, and I am sure that my officials heard the point mentioned in the debate. As the right hon. Gentleman says, if a simple course of antibiotics is going to make all the difference, we would want to ensure that it is provided.

In closing, I want to emphasise that the experiences of children and families affected by PANS/PANDAS are real and significant, and that we are taking action to strengthen the system and deliver meaningful change. Our responsibility is to respond with compassion, to listen carefully, and to ensure that support is accessible, timely and appropriate. By strengthening clinical awareness, improving integration across services and continuing to build the evidence base, we can move towards a system that delivers better recognition, more effective support, and improved outcomes for children and young people, and their families.

3.51 pm

Wendy Chamberlain: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your very kind remarks about Albie and others in today’s debate. A number of themes have been discussed by the hon. and right hon. Members, and I have always found that the number of MPs who join the PANS PANDAS all-party parliamentary groups increases over the term of the Parliament, because they get involved through casework. Hearing from the hon. Member for Carlisle (Ms Minns), and from my hon. Friends the Members for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo) and for Mid Dunbartonshire (Susan Murray), about their constituents’ experiences brought that to light.

I commend the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Solihull West and Shirley (Dr Shastri-Hurst), for his debut at the Dispatch Box. Both he and the Minister talked about the intersection that PANS/PANDAS, their diagnosis and symptoms represent. What families are finding challenging is that that intersection has not been properly recognised, and children often end up going down a mental health pathway, where they are left in limbo for far too long. We often talk about the pressure on mental health services and young people, but if we could diagnose PANS/PANDAS sooner, we would potentially not set off children down that pathway.

I want to mention young people and their families. The challenge that is presented has been well illustrated, and I hope that those in the Gallery, and those watching online, feel seen and heard following both today’s debate and the recent youth board. In the last Parliament, I passed a private Member’s Bill that gives people the right to carer’s leave. When I was doing that work, we spoke to carers who talked about feeling guilty that the administration involved in being carers prevented them from actually being able to care. In relation to PANS/PANDAS, that comes through very strongly.

We clearly need to do a whole lot more to build awareness. My husband and I were watching the film “I Swear” a few weeks ago—if any Members have not seen it, I highly recommend it. My husband turned to me at the point when John Davidson, who is depicted in the film, attempted to kill himself as a young person who was starting to deal with his Tourette’s. My husband said, “Do you think PANS might have caused his condition, given the way that it came on and was described in the film?” That might just be the case. How many conditions or symptoms that we see could be down to PANS/PANDAS? As the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) said consistently during the debate, early treatment and testing via the use of antibiotics might just be the way to prevent some of the more serious symptoms.

I have been encouraged by what I have heard from the Minister today, and I look forward to engaging with her and supporting her engagement with the Scottish Government. I thank everybody for being here on such a warm day and for taking the time to contribute.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the diagnosis and treatment of Paediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS) and Paediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections (PANDAS).

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee in respect of the Taxation (Energy and Vehicles) Bill may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before it has been read a second time.—(*Claire Hughes.*)

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Claire Hughes.*)

3.55 pm

Emma Lewell (South Shields) (Lab): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting me this debate.

South Shields is a beautiful constituency, with our gorgeous coastline matched only by our friendly, lovely locals. Houses in multiple occupation are buildings or flats in which two or more households share a bathroom, toilet or cooking facilities. It is important to make the distinction, when discussing HMOs today, that I am not discussing supported accommodation, which provides much-needed care, supervision and support for those in need, nor am I discussing student accommodation or blocks of self-contained flats. This debate is also not about well-managed HMOs, because in South Shields they are not the majority of our HMOs, nor is this about stigmatising residents of HMOs, who, without a room in an HMO, would be homeless and literally have nowhere else to go. It is also not about asylum seekers in temporary accommodation. We have a welcoming community in South Shields, and have never turned away anyone in genuine need or seeking protection from conflict, war or persecution.

The fact that HMOs are used as a substitute for good social housing or supported living environments is a result of the failure of successive Governments to build enough affordable homes. It is a false economy, though, to saturate an area with HMOs instead of focusing on building good-quality social housing. I know the Government are taking steps to address this, but progress is painfully slow.

I have been to visit some of our HMOs in South Shields, and they are absolutely shocking. People living in HMOs deserve better, and my constituents putting up with the badly run HMOs blighting our community deserve better, too. In South Tyneside, we have approximately 60 HMOs, 51 of which are in my constituency. That accounts for 85% of the total across our small local authority. However, since a licence for an HMO is needed only if there are five or more people living in it, we really do not know how many they are. Smaller HMOs are not accounted for in the figures. Answers to written questions to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have also said that the Government have no idea how many HMOs there are, nor do they know how many have been closed due to licences not being properly adhered to.

But I live in my constituency. It is my home, and as all MPs do, I speak with my constituents regularly. We know and we see that the number we have in South Shields is unmanageable. In one street, there are properties housing nearly 100 HMO residents. In some streets, nearly every other property is an HMO. This is heavily concentrated in two parts of my constituency, Beacon and Bents, and West Park. We are all completely fed up of the crime, antisocial behaviour, violence, theft, damage to property and drug paraphernalia on our streets. We are fed up of drug addicts and alcoholics wandering around, exposing themselves and leaving excrement on

[*Emma Lewell*]

our streets. We are fed up of the noise and the violence, the general rubbish and the rats, and the decline of our overall environment that is common to some of these HMOs.

I remember talking to one lady who said that she and her neighbours no longer let their children play out in the front garden or street. The last time they did, a drunk with his head split open tried to approach their little girls. This is not the South Shields that I grew up in. Streets that were once lined with grand houses leading down to our beautiful coast and into the town centre now feel unsafe to walk down for me and those of us who are proud to call South Shields our home.

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for obtaining the debate. In the town of Bridgwater, we have had an increasing number of HMOs being developed. It leads to an enormous number of vehicles trying to park on a single road, it changes the nature of an area, and the council seems powerless to stop it. Does she agree that local authorities need additional powers to restrict the number of HMOs in any particular area, and furthermore, that permission should be required for HMOs with fewer than five people?

Emma Lewell: The hon. Member pre-empted what I am going to talk about later in my speech. I am also going to explain what we actually did in South Shields: residents and I forced our council to do exactly what he suggests.

The character and history of our housing is being demolished before our eyes. Housing is being chopped up by greedy developers who want to make money off the back of vulnerable people. These are streets I have known my whole life, and it is heartbreaking that this has been allowed to happen. It is impacting the quality of people's daily life, house prices and community cohesion. Residents and I are totally fed up of it. We spent years working together to try to get the council to stop new applications and increase inspections. Every single time, we were tied in knots when it came to the legislation, and were told, "Nothing can be done. It's just the way it is." Last year, on 3 November, I presented a parliamentary petition on behalf of the people of South Shields demanding action, and that the council use the powers that it had to stop the proliferation of HMOs. I also asked in that petition for the Government to strengthen legislation in relation to the monitoring of HMOs, so that the badly run ones could be closed down quicker. Two days later, the council decided to implement what we were asking for: a borough-wide article 4 direction. That meant that regardless of the size of a property, planning approval would be needed.

Daniel Francis (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate. We have an article 4 direction in the London borough of Bexley—I am one of the borough's MPs. However, under the Charities Act 2011, charities running temporary accommodation for people suffering from drug or alcohol abuse, or a mental disorder, and registered providers do not need that permission. In my caseload, I see landlords joining with charities to put people in that accommodation who are not in those categories. In that way, they

circumvent the restrictions in place. Does she agree that we need to ask the Government to look at how, following an article 4 direction, some landlords use that restriction to further circumvent regulations?

Emma Lewell: I completely agree. In South Shields, developers are doing exactly the same; they are getting around the article 4 restriction. Some of them have started to create "Airbnbs"; they are HMOs, but developers refer to them as Airbnbs in law, and are getting away with it once again.

We had an article 4 direction in force in parts of my constituency, just as my hon. Friend does in his, but that was after we were already saturated with HMOs in other parts. Prior to the article 4 direction, a property housing up to five residents in most areas of the local authority did not need planning permission, but that does not necessarily mean that new applications will now go to a planning committee; a request has to be made for it to do so, via me, as the MP, or an elected councillor.

It should not have taken years of meetings, letters, parliamentary questions and a petition to get the council to act. It worries me how many other areas are not using the article 4 direction. Even when applications have been refused, developers are appealing them. It cannot be right that hundreds of residents' voices are being ignored in favour of developers who do not live in our area. Much to my dismay, South Shields is actually advertised on developer websites as the place to go to set up an HMO. My message to those developers is that it is not the place to come to set up their HMOs. We will not be treated in that way, nor will we allow vulnerable people to be.

I have been made aware that there is a statutory instrument before this House that will mean that local councillors and MPs will no longer be able to call in planning applications for HMOs. That means that local people will literally have zero say in what happens in their neighbourhoods or streets—or to the house next door. Instead, officers in the local authority will make the decisions. That is outrageously undemocratic. I cannot believe that the Government think it is acceptable to discount the voices of entire communities in favour of developers who do not live in the area, and who then delegate important decisions to officers, who often do not live in the area either. It is a really crude way to address the housing crisis, and it will completely fracture communities. It also places council planning officers in a difficult position with the communities they serve.

As for those HMOs already in existence that are badly run, the licensing regime is supposed to ensure that certain standards are adhered to. However, since the inspection that goes with the licence can happen only every five years—at the renewal of that licence—the system is not very robust. We can all agree that if something is not inspected for five years, a lot can go on. Licences must meet mandatory conditions around fire safety, minimum room size and provision of amenities. Crucially, landlords are supposed to pass the fit and proper person test, a principle that is open to wide and broad interpretation. In South Shields, we have seen that test simply not work in practice.

One of our former guest houses was being used illegally as an HMO. Residents were quite clear with me, the police and anyone who would listen that it was

being used for prostitution and drug drops. That was after the landlord had already received a significant fine for poor management of a previous HMO. Another HMO was opened by landlords who had previous convictions for letting properties with cannabis farms in them. It would appear that it is almost impossible to fail the fit and proper person test.

The Minister is knowledgeable, and is known for being thoroughly across his brief, but the Government's response to my petition and questions has been a little lacklustre. They stated that

"Local authorities already have planning powers to limit the proliferation of small HMOs",

and that the Government keep the powers to regulate them under constant review. Will the Minister explain to me when the Department last thoroughly reviewed this dire situation that is damaging our communities? Is he willing to conduct a full review, and to take steps to collate the relevant data that the Department was unable to provide me with? If we do not know the size of the problem, it is difficult to take steps to solve it.

Will the Minister ensure that licensing is strengthened, and that powers for revoking licences are much stronger? I also ask that he revoke the SI that is currently before this House. It will strip our constituents of their ability to exercise their democratic right to object to planning proposals that directly affect their neighbourhood. My constituents and their views matter.

We in South Shields love where we live. We get on well with most of our neighbours. We are proud of our history, our heritage and our buildings. The people of South Shields will always have me, their MP, by their side when they say, "We do not want any more HMOs in South Shields." We want the existing HMOs that are causing problems to be closed down, through the introduction of robust and enforceable licensing requirements. After years of trying to get someone to act, we are pleading with the Government to take some action, once and for all.

4.9 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Emma Lewell) on securing this important debate, and I thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) and the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Sir Ashley Fox) for their contributions.

I fully appreciate the concerns my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields raises about houses in multiple occupation, and in particular about their excessive concentration in two parts of her constituency, and the many problems that flow from that, which she described so vividly. HMOs can play an important role in the housing market, providing relatively low-cost accommodation for rent, as my hon. Friend acknowledged. However, it is right that local planning authorities can act, where appropriate, to minimise any negative impacts that such houses may have on local communities.

My hon. Friend made a number of points about the interaction between HMOs and the planning system. As she rightly said, larger HMOs always require an application to the local planning authority for planning permission. However, nationally permitted development rights allow for existing homes to change use and become

a small HMO for up to six people without the need for a planning application. Such small HMOs are also able to change back to standard family homes under similar rights. We recognise that the free operation of these nationally permitted development rights is not always suitable for all areas, which is precisely why local planning authorities can remove permitted development rights in a specific area by introducing an article 4 direction, following consultation with the affected local community.

As my hon. Friend made clear, South Tyneside council has introduced a borough-wide article 4 direction, which means that all new HMOs in its area will need a planning application, regardless of their size. She has previously drawn attention to the impact of the growth of HMOs in her constituency, and will therefore welcome that change; I know the role that she played in pressing her local authority to make it.

All planning permission applications are considered by the local planning authority in question in line with the development plan for the area, and in consultation with the local community. It is therefore key that local planning authorities have relevant and up-to-date policies in place. As my hon. Friend will be aware, South Tyneside council last adopted a local plan back in 2007, which means that the policies in the plan are significantly out of date. It is one of the oldest plans submitted in the legacy planning system.

Following the council's repeated failure to agree to submit its new plan for examination by an independent inspector, I intervened to ensure that the plan progressed to examination. I am pleased to report that the examination hearings have been completed, and we await the inspector's final report. Following receipt of the inspector's report, and in line with my intervention direction, the council will need to consider adoption of the plan. Adopting the plan will ensure that the council has up-to-date planning policies in place for South Tyneside, which is hugely important.

My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government recently consulted on a new national planning policy framework. The consultation included proposals for a more flexible policy on the use of article 4 directions, so that local planning authorities can remove nationally permitted development rights where that is necessary to safeguard the amenity or wellbeing of an area—where, for instance, there is an over-concentration of small HMOs. We are analysing the feedback received on that consultation, and will publish our response in due course.

It is essential that HMOs are safe and well managed, which is why all HMOs are subject to management regulations. These regulations place duties on managers of HMOs to take safety measures, supply and maintain gas and electricity, and maintain common parts, fixtures and fittings. In addition, all local planning authorities must license HMOs with five or more people from two or more households who share facilities such as a kitchen or bathroom. Local authorities also have the power to require HMOs to be licensed where there are three or more people from two or more households sharing facilities. This means in practice that most HMOs can be licensed, where necessary. Local authorities can impose licence conditions to ensure that landlords effectively manage HMOs, and also have the power to inspect properties without notice, where they believe an offence has been committed under HMO legislation.

[Matthew Pennycook]

Furthermore, the licence holder must undergo a fit and proper person test to assure a local authority that they can manage the property responsibly, safely and lawfully. I note my hon. Friend's concerns about the operation of that test and its potential shortcomings, and I am more than happy to sit down with her and work through some of the examples she provided, so that we can learn more about its operation. If a local authority finds that the licence holder is no longer fit and proper—for instance, where they have committed a serious or repeated breach of licence conditions—it can revoke their licence. Local authorities have additional robust powers to tackle landlords who breach HMO regulations. That includes civil penalties of up to £40,000, rent repayment orders.

Emma Lewell: The Minister is right: regulations are in place and there is a fit-and-proper test—but they are not working. That is why I secured the debate and why my colleagues and I are asking for stronger regulation. Everything that is in place is simply not working.

Matthew Pennycook: As I have said, I am more than happy to sit down with my hon. Friend and other hon. Members to hear their suggestions on where the regulations need to be strengthened. As a Department, our experience has been that, in some areas of the country, the powers are being properly enforced and the regulations are working. I want to understand more, if she is able to provide the evidence.

Emma Lewell: Will the Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will give way in a second, but let me briefly mention resources, which are really important.

It is vital that councils have the capacity to take action where needed. That is why we have provided £18.2 million in 2025-26 and £41.1 million for 2026-27 to support the new enforcement responsibilities that local authorities have taken on under the Renters' Rights Act 2025. We plan to establish a more sustainable funding system for enforcement in the private rented sector over the longer term based on future database revenue fees, but, again, I want to understand the challenges that particular local authorities are facing in that respect.

Sir Ashley Fox *rose*—

Matthew Pennycook: Let me just give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields before I come to the hon. Gentleman.

Emma Lewell: Can the Minister say how many licences have been revoked?

Matthew Pennycook: I do not have that information to hand. I am more than happy to follow up in correspondence with my hon. Friend, as I said. I will bring that data, and any further data we have available, to any meeting that we might have on this subject.

Sir Ashley Fox: I suspect the answer to the hon. Lady's question is "very few indeed."

The issue in my Bridgwater constituency is that Hinkley Point C—a nuclear power station—is being constructed a few miles away. Many thousands of good workers have come to the town—their number will peak at around 12,000 in the next couple of years. The local council needs the power to restrict the number of HMOs in any particular street or district. Clearly, there is a housing need, so one understands why landlords convert those houses, but the resulting economic pressures bring a change upon the nature of certain areas. Councils need the power to restrict the concentration of HMOs.

Matthew Pennycook: Councils have that power. I do not know off the top of my head whether the hon. Gentleman's local authority has consulted on and put in place an article 4 direction, but if it has not, I strongly encourage him to make that case so that his local authority makes full use of its powers.

This is the crucial point. Are the powers in place inadequate—in which case let us have that conversation among hon. Members—or are individual local planning authorities unable or unwilling, for whatever reason, to exercise properly the powers that they have? If that is the case, we need to understand what more they need in the way of resources, support and guidance to be able to do so.

Let me briefly touch on social and affordable housing. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields rightly said, the ultimate solution to ensure that we have enough housing supply in any given area is to build enough homes of all tenures, including social and affordable homes. She has welcomed our new £39 billion 10-year social and affordable homes programme, the largest long-term investment in social and affordable housing in recent memory. Our ambition is to deliver around 300,000 homes over the lifetime of that programme. As she knows, our target is for at least 60% of the homes delivered to be for social rent, to provide the genuinely affordable homes that families need in her area and others.

We are also taking decisive action to reinvigorate council house building, including a new 10-year housing rent policy, and we have reinstated rent convergence. That will strengthen councils' capacity and confidence for building new homes. We are taking action to reform the right to buy, including returning right-to-buy cash discounts to between £16,000 and £38,000. Again, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields knows, we will go further in implementing the next phase of reforms through our Social Housing Bill, which is making good progress in the other place. Its measures include allowing councils to keep 100% of the receipts generated by right-to-buy sales, with increased flexibilities in how they can be spent.

We are already seeing many the fruits of many of the reforms that we have put in place. Data released just this morning by Homes England and the Greater London Authority in respect of affordable housing starts and completions shows that starts are up 26% and completions are up 8% on 2024-25, and we are delivering the highest number of social rent starts since 2010-11.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields mentioned the national scheme of delegation. We are modernising how planning committees function, and we have been very clear about the case for doing so. We want to ensure that in exercising their democratic oversight,

planning committees are focused on the applications that require member input, not on revisiting applications and decisions that have already been taken.

We published a working paper on this in December 2024, and we carried out extensive engagement following that. We formally consulted twice on the reforms, once in May 2025, on the principle of a two-tier system with some decisions delegated to planning officers, and once in March 2026, on the draft regulations and guidance. We are to debate those guidelines next week.

I will gently push back on my hon. Friend's contention that local voices and objections are cut out. Nothing in those regulations will stop local residents objecting to applications or registering their discontent, but we do think that on a certain set of applications, it is right that expert planning officers make the decisions.

I also just make the point that schemes of delegation are in place across most local authorities in the country. The problem is that there is huge variation, which is creating issues in the planning system. We want to streamline that with a simple set of rules across the country and a national scheme.

Emma Lewell: I thank the Minister for being incredibly generous and giving way again. Regarding the statutory instrument before the House, of course constituents and residents will still be able to voice their concerns, but will those concerns go to a committee to make a decision, or will all decisions on HMOs go directly to council officers for decision once the SI is in force?

Matthew Pennycook: I am happy to sit down and run my hon. Friend through the instrument in lots more detail than I can give from the Dispatch Box, but it is the case that the national scheme of delegation does not specify HMOs in particular. However, development not covered by the HMO permitted development right will fall into schedule 1 of the regulations relating to the national scheme of delegation, where those decisions will be delegated to expert planning officers. As I said, we want to ensure with these reforms that planning committees, and their valuable time, are focused on the most controversial applications where their democratic oversight is best placed.

Sir Ashley Fox: I am grateful to the Minister for being so generous with his time. One reason why so many HMOs are required is the lack of social housing, certainly

around Bridgwater. I have had developers approach me who have completed a private scheme, and they want housing associations or a charity to take those social houses off their hands, but they have not got the funds to do it. I have raised this with the Minister before, and he told me that he set up a register to match housing associations with developers who have social housing to effectively dispose of the units. Could he update us on how successful that register has been?

Matthew Pennycook: The register was successful in its aims in terms of providing operators with a chance to submit uncontracted, unsold section 106 units. Roughly over 4,000 units were put into that clearing service, which closed on 1 June. Through the policy intervention we made, we encouraged local authorities to consider how best to get those units moved, cascading to market sale in instances where they felt that they needed to do that. But that small number, which is far below the estimates we heard from some quarters, is a sign that some of the problem is working itself out. We are providing registered providers of affordable housing with greater financial capacity through our rent settlement, rent convergence and all the interventions we are making. Those measures are allowing them to buy more section 106 units and get those stalled schemes moving.

To conclude, local planning authorities already have powers to restrict the proliferation of HMOs. They already benefit from or can deploy licensing powers to ensure that HMOs are safe and well managed, and they do have, we believe, robust powers to ensure that landlords of HMOs comply with all relevant regulations.

As I said, I am very interested to hear from hon. Members about particular cases where they think that their local authority is not able to enforce the regulations that already exist, and of instances of actors circumventing that system—I was very interested in the example that my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford gave. Those are the types of things we want to work through. If it transpires through those examples that the regulations are lacking in some way, we will take that into account. I have made it very clear that we keep the regulation of HMOs under review to ensure that the system works in the way that we want to see it work.

Question put and agreed to.

4.24 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 25 June 2026

[SIR ALEC SHELBRooke *in the Chair*]

Home Ownership Affordability

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

1.30 pm

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (in the Chair): We begin with the Select Committee statement. Will Forster will speak on the publication of the second report of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, “Affordability of Home Ownership”, for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call Will Forster to respond to those in turn. Questions should be brief and Members may ask only one question. I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called. I call Will Forster on behalf of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee.

Mr Will Forster (Woking) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship this afternoon, Sir Alec. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for this statement on the second report of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee. I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Committee in place of my colleague, the hon. Member for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi).

Our report is on the affordability of home ownership in England, a topic that affects so many people across the country. Some have suggested that in the current market, affordability of home ownership is a contradiction in terms. Everyone who has tried to buy a home recently, or knows someone who has, knows how difficult and expensive it has become.

Housing affordability has been getting worse for decades. The majority of British people still want to own their own home, but fewer of them can do so. Over 20 years, the rate of home ownership has dropped from 71% to 63%. It is even worse for young adults: the rate of home ownership for 27-year-olds fell from 43% to 25% over not 20 years, but 10. It is deeply unfair that someone’s chance of owning a home is more dependent on whether their parents own a home than their own earnings. That is unacceptable and needs to change.

Of course, affordability is exceptionally complicated. House prices have risen while incomes have stagnated. Mortgages have been hard to obtain and there are systemic barriers that slow down the whole home buying process. Successive Governments have tried to tackle the problem, but have failed to measurably improve the situation. The current Government must not fail as well.

What, then, are the Government to do? First, as we know, more homes are needed. The Government are right to address the historical undersupply of homes, and we support their target to provide 1.5 million new homes

by the end of the Parliament. At the same time, we are concerned that they might not meet that target and, even if they do, that 1.5 million new homes may not be enough. The last time homes in this country were built at the pace required to hit that Government target was over 50 years ago.

Back then, 40% of homes were built by councils, but those days are long gone. Now, 75% of home building is done by private developers, which are facing their own challenges. The costs of building are rising, and if private developers cannot make a profit, they will not build the homes in the first place. We are seeing that happen across the country, with developers such as the Berkeley Group scaling back operations because of the volatility caused by the conflict in the middle east.

In my constituency of Woking, over 2,000 homes in and around the town centre alone have got permission, but none is even under construction. The Government are right to encourage councils to build again, including through their social and affordable homes programme, but private developers are vital to building the homes we need. We have asked the Ministry to write to us twice a year about its actions and progress on increasing home building rates by developers.

The Government could do more, however, including using the hundreds of thousands of homes around the country that are lying empty. Those homes are an unused stockpile, representing a significant chunk of the 1.5 million new homes the Government want to build. Councils already have some powers to take control of vacant homes, but those powers carry risks and are rarely used. We concluded that the Government need to make existing powers easier to understand and use, and to provide new powers where necessary.

The evidence we saw during our inquiry shows that high loan-to-value ratio mortgages are important for first-time buyers, so it is good news that such mortgages are becoming more available because of the prudential and financial regulations affecting the property market. But there is more to be done, and we need to encourage lenders to change their affordability assessments so they are fair and mortgages are accessible to those who need them most. For example, it should never be the case that a renter is turned down for a mortgage because they cannot afford the repayments, when those repayments are less than what they are already paying in rent.

Other financial products besides mortgages can also be put towards the cost of a new home. Some products are even backed by the Government, such as the lifetime ISA. I will not go over all the problems with lifetime ISAs now; as part of our inquiry, we sat jointly with the Treasury Committee, which has published a separate report. Suffice it to say, the Government have promised to replace the lifetime ISA with a new product that is specifically designed for first-time buyers, and we support them in doing so.

The new first-time buyer ISA will be introduced in 2028. The Government launched a consultation on its design just two days ago. We are glad that, in line with our recommendations, the design is geared specifically towards first-time buyers and does not have a withdrawal charge that could cost people their initial investment. However, we also recommended that the Government should avoid a static property price cap that could make the product useless in some parts of the country. The Government have not yet set out the details of their

[*Mr Will Forster*]

property price cap for the new ISA, so we are still waiting to see how they will ensure that the product remains useful over time and in every region of the country.

As well as publishing our inquiry report, we also wrote to the Minister on 29 April to set out our concerns relating to the home buying and selling process. We found that it is a painful experience that reduces people's motivation to move and slows down the housing market. Barriers and unnecessary costs should be eliminated to encourage more people to move, to increase the day-to-day supply of homes on the market and to reduce the number of transactions that fall through.

In particular, we recommend that the Ministry should mandate that necessary property information is provided earlier in the process, that conditional contracts should be used to make transaction agreements binding at an earlier stage and that there should be stronger regulation of property agents. The Government promised to address the first two of these in their reform road map, which was published last week. Although the Government have stopped short of regulating property agents, they have promised to publish a code of practice for them by the end of the year. I hope that, with the political instability, that is not lost.

Lastly, I turn to the stamp duty land tax. Stamp duty directly reduces the affordability of home ownership by increasing how much people need to pay to buy a home. More than that, it slows the property market, stops people relocating for work or downsizing, and ultimately damages the economy. I wish I could say that stamp duty was an isolated problem, but all property taxes in this country, including business rates and council tax, are a mess. Similarly to a previous report, which recommended that the Government should make changes to council tax, we recommend that stamp duty should be overhauled and replaced. It is fundamentally unfair and damages our economy. Those two taxes need to be changed, and I hope the new Government take that opportunity.

Stamp duty provides £14 billion of Government revenue each year, so the Government cannot just get rid of it outright, but we have called on them to consult by the end of the year on alternative to the current form of stamp duty, including replacing it with a revenue-neutral alternative, such as an annual property tax; reducing rates to stimulate more transactions; tying tax bands more closely to local house prices; and updating reliefs to better meet Government goals. I know the new Prime Minister is keen on a land value tax, and I hope this is a priority for his new Government.

It was on this day three years ago that I moved into the first home I have owned by myself, but for so many people, home ownership is beyond reach. In my constituency of Woking, more people are having to leave their home town to buy their first home, and some cannot buy a home at all. That is not acceptable.

To address housing affordability and to ensure that our young constituents can get a foot on the housing ladder, we need the Government to go much further and much faster. We need them to use a range of approaches to improve the supply of homes and the effective demand for those homes. We welcome the steps that they are taking in some areas, but in others they must be bolder

to enact the policies that we have set out in our report, which can lead to real and long-lasting improvement in the affordability of home ownership for first-time buyers in this country.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend. I declare an interest as the former chief executive of a registered provider, the Cornwall Community Land Trust. I am now a volunteer on its board. I have therefore worked in the sector for some time.

First, I congratulate my hon. Friend and his Committee on an excellent report, and I hope the Government will take heed of it. Secondly, I was very fortunate, as you were, Sir Alec, to come high in the private Members' Bill stakes, and I have opted to advance an affordable housing Bill on Friday 13 November. There is an opportunity over the next five months to draw together a range of options and clauses, which I hope will help the Government to deliver the laudable objectives that they have established to address housing need. I think they need further tools to do so.

In relation to that, there is a concern that the planning system is still weak. The provision for affordable homes is often used as a Trojan horse by wily private developers, whose intention is to provide not affordable but unaffordable homes. That Trojan horse is often exploited. There is also a need for stronger ingredients to ensure that we can genuinely deliver affordable homes, particularly for the in-perpetuity community benefit, and a range of measures could be taken to advance that aim.

I repeat that the Second Reading of the Bill will be on 13 November. It is in gestation at the moment. I hope that the Committee, and indeed the Minister, will be prepared to work constructively with me in the coming months to look at ways in which we can strengthen and advance the cause, because it is quite clear that the Government are going to struggle to deliver what we all agree needs to be delivered to address the desperate need for more affordable homes in this country.

Mr Forster: My hon. Friend thanks me for the Committee's work. In return, I thank him for choosing housing as the topic of his private Member's Bill. It will really improve things on the housing front, and I am thankful that he is putting the topic high on the agenda. The Committee and I will look to speak as much as we can in favour of his Bill, and I hope that the Minister will work constructively with him on its passing. Even if it does not pass, the Government may take its provisions into other legislation.

In answer to my hon. Friend's point about how the viability of developments can reduce the amount of affordable housing, I am concerned that we are seeing that across the country. In my Woking constituency, brownfield developments do not include any affordable housing contributions at all because they are classed as unviable—and they are still not being built. We need to ensure that developers make contributions on affordable housing, which is why the Government's social and affordable homes programme is essential to cover that lack of viability.

The Committee has also raised concerns with the Government about changing the requirements of the Public Works Loan Board. That would ensure that councils, via their housing revenue accounts, could invest in not only maintaining properties, but building new homes, which is exactly what we need.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): I declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on council and social housing. The affordability of home ownership is one of the biggest issues in our country. I welcome many of the recommendations in this report around tackling empty homes, reforming stamp duty and ensuring that we are tying the definition of affordability to local incomes.

I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister for Housing and Planning on his role in securing the highest number of social rent homes since 2010, as announced today. That is a major achievement.

However, part of the affordability question, which perhaps could not come into the scope of the Committee's report, still lies unanswered and unaddressed. Since the 1970s, the number of homes per capita in this country has risen, despite house prices massively outstripping ordinary people's incomes in that very period. That seems in a large part down to private banks effectively being able to print money, which then flows into house prices. I wonder whether, in its future work, the Committee will consider the interaction between monetary policy and house prices in this country.

Mr Forster: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's concerns. I want to thank him for his work on the APPG. In the report, we highlighted that the Government should review and update the definition of affordable housing. We are particularly concerned about those cross-cutting issues, and we have worked with the Treasury Committee, as mentioned in the report. This is not just an MHCLG issue, but a Treasury issue.

The hon. Gentleman said nice words about the Minister, who I know will be appearing before the Committee soon. The Minister knows his subject and explains it in a plain-spoken way. It is important that we do not have another change of Housing Minister; we need that certainty. I am looking forward to holding the Minister to account while he—we—delivers the draft Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill and deliver the homes we need.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Committee for its deliberations, thoughts and recommendations. As the hon. Member for North East Hertfordshire

(Chris Hinchliff) said, one thing that I am particularly pleased to see is that the Committee is trying to address the issue of stamp duty.

I can remember building my first house on the farm at home in 1987, and it cost £27,000. My son built his house on the farm some 25 years later, and it cost him £125,000. My youngest son now wants to build a house on the farm—the same house that my other son built—but it will cost £275,000. That is the same house, but it will cost £150,000 more than it did. This is a big issue for my constituents and for my family personally. We also have a cottage on the farm, so to help my son, we will let him have that and renovate it. That will probably make it a wee bit easier for him, but not everyone has that opportunity.

What consideration did the Committee give to co-ownership—in other words, owning half a house now and perhaps buying the other part later? What consideration did it give to smaller deposits? Smaller deposits and a lower bank mortgage rate might enable more people to buy houses—perhaps with some assistance from Government.

Mr Forster: My final answer is to thank the hon. Gentleman for attending a Westminster Hall debate; it is lovely to see him here. He highlighted that there is a slight age difference between us—the hon. Gentleman built a home and moved in 27 years ago; I moved into the first home that I have owned three years ago.

Jim Shannon: It was 37 years ago.

Mr Forster: It was 37 years ago—sorry, I lost 10 years for the hon. Gentleman.

Our report focused on the affordability of home ownership where people genuinely own the full home. We have previously done inquiries on shared ownership, which I am happy to send to the hon. Gentleman. The key thing we want the Government to do is look at how they can lower the cost of building a home. Inflation has had a notable impact on the cost of home ownership. The costs of owning a home and building a new home are too unreasonable, and I hope that the Government look at this issue and tackles it.

BACKBENCH BUSINESS**National Lung Cancer Screening Programme**

1.50 pm

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD) [R]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered the national lung cancer screening programme.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Alec. I declare an interest as a governor of the Royal Berkshire hospital. A family member also holds shares in a medical company.

Lung cancer is a rapidly fatal disease that kills nearly 33,000 people in the UK every year. Fortunately, targeted lung cancer screening has become one of the NHS's real success stories, with Lord Darzi highlighting it as the only initiative across all cancers that has improved rates of early-stage diagnosis in recent years. Screening is without doubt the single biggest intervention in improving lung cancer survival. When the UK Lung Cancer Coalition was launched in 2005, five-year survival stood at around 8% which was among the lowest rates in Europe. The UKLCC has now set an ambition of 35% of patients surviving five years after diagnosis by 2035—a target once thought to be impossible, but now within reach thanks to screening.

The Government's decision to roll out fully the targeted national lung cancer screening programme in England for people aged 55 to 74 with a smoking history was a major milestone. To date, that programme has identified more than 10,600 lung cancers, with over 75% diagnosed at an early, treatable stage, compared with just 28% before screening was introduced. Without doubt, lung cancer screening is saving lives. It is cancer prevention in action and exemplifies the shift toward earlier diagnosis set out in the NHS 10-year plan. I place on record my thanks to the NHS cancer programme team, lung cancer advisers and the lung cancer screening clinical expert group for delivering the fastest roll-out of lung cancer screening anywhere in the world.

The benefits of screening extend beyond lung cancer. Screening is also identifying conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cardiovascular disease, potentially saving even more lives. Since I applied for this debate, the Department has committed in the national cancer plan to a timetable for the full roll-out of the programme. That is a significant achievement. The inclusion of screening in the NHS app is another welcome step, but we cannot be complacent simply because a roll-out is promised in a plan. Will the Government reaffirm their commitment to a national roll-out timetable and ensure that the programme continues at pace? The national cancer plan commits to reaching 100% of the eligible population by 2030. That timetable matters because any slowdown risks reversing progress on early diagnosis. Unlike other national screening programmes, lung cancer screening does not yet have guaranteed funding beyond 2030. If this programme is to remain stable and effective, it needs protected long-term funding.

We must also continue to evaluate reporting systems, national databases, turnaround times, workforce capacity and how screening is tailored to local populations. Importantly, screening is helping to reduce health inequalities by focusing on areas of deprivation. That progress should continue, supported by investment in community engagement and communications to ensure

that hard-to-reach populations are not left behind. Given the importance of reducing inequalities, will the Minister confirm whether lung cancer screening will move to section 7A arrangements with ringfenced funding beyond 2030? There is also concern about maintaining political momentum. With both drivers behind the national cancer plan no longer in post and Cabinet changes expected in the next few weeks, many in the cancer community are understandably concerned about whether the commitment will continue. I am sure the Minister will reaffirm his commitment.

England is leading the way, but early detection must not become a postcode lottery across the UK. Wales is preparing to launch a programme in 2027, but Scotland and Northern Ireland remain significantly behind. The UK Lung Cancer Coalition is supporting discussions in both nations later this year to understand the barriers and encourage implementation. Lung cancer is the UK's biggest cancer killer. Every eligible person, regardless of where they live, should have access to the same opportunities for early diagnosis. I urge the devolved Governments to learn from England's experiences and introduce screening as quickly as possible. Will the Minister engage with counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland to encourage progress towards UK-wide implementation?

There are several threats to the programme's success. First, there are growing concerns about integrated care board interference and the lack of ringfenced funding. Cost-cutting pressures on ICBs threaten to undermine progress. There are reports that high-performing screening teams—some seeing 55 patients a day—are being disrupted, and that screening resources are being diverted elsewhere. The variation in delivery across the country is striking. Lung cancer screening funding should be used for lung cancer screening, and local structures should not be allowed to dilute a programme that is demonstrably working well. Will Ministers issue clear guidance to ICBs to prevent interference in delivery? Will they guarantee that screening funding is to be ringfenced and used solely for its intended purposes? Will they ensure that ongoing ICB restructuring does not weaken accountability or performance?

Secondly, the abolition of NHS England raises legitimate concerns. The programme's roll-out, data systems and clinical governance arrangements require continuity, and many charities and organisations across the cancer sector are concerned about potential loss of expertise during organisational change. What safeguards are in place to ensure continuity of leadership, data management and programme oversight throughout the transition?

Thirdly, workforce pressures remain one of the greatest threats to the programme being sustained. Screening increases demand across radiology, pathology, thoracic surgery and genomics, yet workforce planning has not kept pace. The Royal College of Radiologists has warned that there will not be enough radiologists to support the programme by 2030. Timely diagnostic and treatment services must be available so that patients diagnosed with early-stage disease can access potentially curative treatment. Demand for thoracic surgery is also rising, as early-stage lung cancers are often best treated surgically. Without sufficient capacity, opportunities to cure may be lost. Greater awareness among GPs remains important too.

Around one in five lung cancers occur in people who have never smoked—indeed never-smoked lung cancer is now the eighth most common cancer in the UK and

the seventh most common worldwide—but smoking cessation remains a vital part of the screening programme. Smoking causes around 72% of lung cancer cases in the UK, making cessation support one of the most cost-effective interventions available. The British Thoracic Society has called for at least one specialist tobacco adviser in every hospital. As the Government pursues its smoke-free 2030 ambitions, the NHS has a critical role to play in helping people to quit smoking.

The Institute of Clinical Research has highlighted workforce challenges in biomarker testing and molecular diagnostics, both of which are increasingly important for personalised cancer treatment. As I have repeatedly argued in this House, the national cancer plan can succeed only if its ambitions are matched by investment in the workforce needed to deliver them. When will the Government publish their delayed workforce plan and how will they support the continued expansion of lung cancer screening? Will Ministers commit to increase training places in radiology, pathology and thoracic surgery?

Lung cancer screening is one of the most effective public health interventions introduced in recent years. It is saving lives, reducing inequalities and shifting diagnosis toward earlier, more treatable stages of the disease, but its future success depends on stability, protecting funds, a sustainable workforce, robust Government and UK-wide implementation. The Government have an opportunity to secure the future of a programme that is already transforming outcomes for thousands of people. The UK Lung Cancer Coalition believes that doing so is essential if we are to achieve the ambition of a 35% five-year survival rate by 2035.

2.2 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Alec. We will be together all afternoon if you are here for the next debate as well. I welcome this debate on the national lung cancer screening programme. I thank the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for securing it, and for his dedication to anything to do with cancer. The hon. Gentleman has made a name for himself in this House for putting forward these topics. I thank him for his knowledge and for his interest.

The lung cancer screening programme was set up to find lung cancer early, before symptoms appear, especially in people with a history of smoking, who are the group with the highest risk. The UK's biggest ever early diagnosis initiative for lung cancer, the programme is delivered through targeted lung health checks. The hon. Gentleman referred to how the scheme delivers checks. They take place in local hospitals and in the community, and in vans in settings such as supermarket car parks, so nobody can say they have not had the opportunity to have the check done.

The checks are designed to target those aged 55 to 74 who are current or former smokers, as identified from their GP records, who are registered with a GP and who live in an area where the programme has been rolled out. I understand that the programme is expanding rapidly, region by region and is expected to be fully rolled out across England by 2030. That is welcome. Indeed it is, I would say, almost there.

We do not know how many people have attended the checks, but the United Kingdom National Screening Committee noted that more than 1.9 million have been invited to the programme, which is operating across 25% of England. NHS England has stated that, to date, some 5,037 lung cancers have been detected early since 2019; 76% of those were found at stage 1 or 2. Early-stage diagnosis improves five-year survival nearly twentyfold compared with late-stage diagnosis, so again that is a success of the programme.

The screening programme has been an outstanding success, and I commend the Minister and all those involved in the Department and NHS England on such an extraordinary achievement—they deserve every accolade for it. It has fitted perfectly with the 10-year health plan. We should give credit to the Minister and the Government for the plan and for all they have done to improve health; there are many things they can point to as being successful. It is also nice to see the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans), in his place; it would not be a health debate if he and I were not here together—and here we are again.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for respiratory health, I warmly welcome the three shifts arising from the 10-year health plan. The screening programme is an excellent example of how well they have worked in practice. The first shift was from analogue to digital: most of the reminders for eligible patients are by text message—that is the new way of doing it; I may not be entirely geared into it, but I understand the process. The second shift was from hospital to community: running the tests in mobile units means they are less intimidating and closer to home. In fact, around 70% of initial screening was delivered via mobile units, improving access in deprived areas where smoking rates are highest. If we want to address the issue, we must go to the coal quay, as we would say, and meet and speak to the people.

The third shift was from treatment to prevention. Early-stage detection dramatically improves survival. The lung checks programme has crucially identified over 100,000 incidental findings of emphysema, one of the key conditions of COPD. However, those incidental findings are not generally followed up, nor do they lead to referrals for further investigation or treatment. Will the Minister ask his Department to consider a follow-up? If incidental findings are identified and there is a chance of curing or addressing the issue, that is the time to strike. The men's health strategy called for better incidental outcomes, and it contains the ambition of

“ensuring incidental findings from the NHS Lung Cancer Screening programme, including respiratory illnesses such as COPD, are followed up according to the NHS Lung Cancer Screening programme incidental findings protocol and relevant NICE guidance”.

Can the Minister update us on how that is progressing within the men's health strategy?

We have discussed the outstanding FRONTIER Hull trial with Professor Mike Crooks from Hull, who is piloting an integrated pathway that links screening findings to respiratory assessment and treatment in partnership with the NHS. I commend the work he is undertaking. So far, 383 of the 819 people—47%—recalled to the clinic have received a new diagnosis of COPD and started treatment through a streamlined one-stop clinic, meaning that those patients could begin treatment immediately rather than waiting while their symptoms progressed and their condition deteriorated.

[Jim Shannon]

I underline again that it has been shown that a one-stop diagnostic clinic is feasible, can be achieved and fits well with the three shifts. The approach can be tailored to meet local needs, helping integrated care systems to reduce hospital demand and improve patient outcomes. It has been estimated by Chiesi that integrating COPD case finding into lung cancer screening could save the NHS some £33 million over 10 years. That saving cannot be ignored, especially at a time when every pound counts. If it is possible to save some £33 million, it should be in part because of the screening programme.

I urge the Minister to look closely at the outcomes of the trial. This topic deserves a full debate; but more than that, it deserves an outcome. Screening saves lives, ultimately saves money and, importantly, saves needless heartbreak and pain. Let us invest in ourselves and in the process that we are discussing today.

2.9 pm

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Alec. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) on securing this debate, and on his tireless campaigning both on lung cancer and on cancer more widely. I also thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for his passionate contribution to the debate.

Lung cancer is a devastating disease that has caused suffering in every single community in our country. The symptoms are horrific, aggressive and deadly. Although treatments for lung cancer and understanding of its causes have improved, lung cancer still accounts for more deaths in the UK than any other type of cancer. It is the third most common type of cancer and kills 35,000 people a year in Britain.

Identifying lung cancer early through screening saves lives, and the current targeted screening programme in the UK has been world leading. Screening is the single biggest intervention we can make to improve lung cancer survival rates. Of course we were all delighted when my hon. Friend's campaigning helped to ensure that the national cancer plan came into being, including a commitment to complete the roll-out of the lung cancer screening programme by 2030.

The screening programme is welcome and it is already delivering results. However, there is not enough clarity about how it will be funded going forward. Funding will be central to any success on the ground, so perhaps the Minister can address that issue when he responds to the debate.

Equally, we need to support the devolved nations in implementing lung cancer screening to help them to catch up with England's programme, which is already world leading. The devolved nations are lagging behind, and that must be addressed as the roll-out of the screening programme ramps up. Charities have also raised concerns that the current reorganisation of the national health service and the abolition of NHS England could disrupt the focus on the roll-out and even hinder its progress.

Shockingly, 79% of cases of lung cancer are preventable, with the vast majority of all cases being the direct result of smoking. However, a decade of cuts to public health

hobbled smoking cessation services, with massive implications for lung cancer rates. Despite the generational ban in the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026, there are still plenty of smokers around and there will continue to be for years to come. That is why the Liberal Democrats have been advocating a return to 2015 spending levels on public health, which would boost smoking cessation services and help all those people who want to quit smoking to do so.

We must also put an end to the tragedy of people losing their lives because their cancer treatment took too long to start. Nobody should be unable to receive treatment because there is not enough equipment, and no one should suffer because there are not enough staff to support them properly.

The Government's target in the national cancer plan to meet all cancer wait-time standards by 2029 is a good one. However, if they really want to hit that target, they must be far bolder. The national cancer plan includes a commitment for 28 new radiotherapy machines. However, that is not enough, especially for such a cost-effective and successful treatment. The Government should go further and provide funding for at least 200 more radiotherapy machines, which are needed to address the backlogs that exist.

We Lib Dems are also proud that the national cancer plan incorporates our calls for every patient to have a designated specialist cancer nurse. However, the Government have yet to state how many more nurses they will provide to deliver that specialised care. Cancer nurses are already overworked and overstretched; if the Government aim to provide every patient with a designated cancer nurse, as we all want, they must be bolder in addressing the issues in the nursing workforce.

In 2023, a national targeted screening programme for lung cancer in England was announced for people aged between 55 and 74 with a history of smoking. More than 1.5 million people have attended a lung health check and more than 9,000 people have been diagnosed with lung cancer; 76% of those were diagnosed at stage 1 or 2, compared with just 30% of lung cancer sufferers outside the programme. Although the programme is targeted, it has proved to be a powerful tool, reducing by a quarter the overall gap in early cancer diagnosis between the richest and poorest areas, or from a gap of 8.2 percentage points in 2019 to 6.2 percentage points in the year to September 2025.

In the national cancer plan, the Government committed to completing the roll-out of the targeted national lung cancer screening programme by 2030, and it is expected that this roll-out will offer screenings to more than 6 million people by 2035. It has the potential to diagnose 23,000 lung cancers earlier than otherwise would be the case.

In addition to all that, the Liberal Democrats are calling for a cancer policy to reflect the fact that speed and quality of treatment are central to improvement of lung cancer survival rates. We would introduce a guarantee that 100% of patients will be able to start treatment within 60 days of urgent referral. We would replace ageing radiotherapy machines and increase the total number of such machines, so that no one has to travel too far for treatment. We would also recruit more cancer nurses so that every patient has a dedicated specialist supporting them throughout their treatment, and halve the time for

new treatments to reach patients by expanding the capability of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

To make the UK a world leader in cancer research, we would also look to pass a cancer survival research Act, which would require the Government to co-ordinate and ensure funding for research into those cancers with the lowest survival rates, including brain cancer.

We would also start a fellowship programme for US cancer scientists who have seen their funding gutted by the Trump Government, waiving burdensome fees and bureaucracy for international researchers as a whole. Global talent visas for top researchers cost £6,000 per person for a five-year visa—that is £18,000 for a family of three. That is much more expensive than most of our competitor countries, where it is typically £200 or £300 per person. The cost of visas for Cancer Research UK alone is £900,000 a year, the equivalent of setting up two new cancer research labs every year. The fellowship scheme would also deliver more funding for salary and research costs for researchers by expanding the share of GDP going on research and development to 3.5%. That would unlock hundreds of millions of pounds a year for cancer research and billions more for our life sciences sector generally. We would deliver that through a decade-long programme of public investment in research and development.

I am moving towards my conclusion, Sir Alec, so I would like to tell the happy story of my constituent John, who has been the direct beneficiary of the early lung cancer screening programme. Without any obvious symptoms, in late January John received an invitation to participate in the Oxford University hospital early lung cancer detection screening programme, with an initial telephone appointment already planned for 10 February. Having established a sufficient risk score, a very low dose CT scan of the lungs was offered as part of the evaluation process just a week later. The scan revealed a nodule on John's lung that required further tests.

In March, referral was made to the respiratory early diagnosis service, with further tests and a PET-CT scan following shortly thereafter. On 20 March, the results were shared with John, following a multidisciplinary team discussion. A minimal solid component not suitable for biopsy had the appearance of adenocarcinoma and surgical referral was recommended. By the end of March, he had his pre-assessment appointment at John Radcliffe following an appointment with a thoracic surgeon at the Churchill hospital.

On 17 April, an operation to remove 30% of his left lung—a 5.5-hour operation—took place. He was discharged home two days later, with a multidisciplinary team discussion at the end of May. On 2 June, the out-patient appointment for John at the Churchill hospital confirmed the removal of a 22-millimetre adenocarcinoma, with no tumour spread. It was therefore a huge success for John, for which he is enormously grateful, going from detection to successful treatment in six months. He will now be subject to a scan in six months and follow-up for five years. John's story is a great example of the potential of this early cancer screening programme. We all hope that a further roll-out will be a success.

2.17 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): It is a pleasure to be here in an air-conditioned room while we continue this debate. It is poignant that it is so hot today, because we know how that can impact people with respiratory illnesses; we are probably talking about this issue at a very useful time.

I too thank the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) for securing this important debate. As has been said, lung cancer remains a leading cause of cancer death in the UK, but it is also one of the cancers where early detection can make the biggest difference. I know that at first hand from my first year as a junior doctor working on a respiratory ward. It was eye-opening and harrowing, but also sometimes successful. I urge anyone who has the chance to visit a respiratory ward to see how important it is—and I believe that would make a difference to smoking rates.

It is great that the hon. Member for Wokingham secured the debate, and great to see the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) secured the debate, because it is a good debate—it is a good day. This is really a success story. The Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover), rightly told us John's story; because of the screening that has been put in place, there will be plenty more Johns in the future, which is exactly what we want to hear. Often we talk about the problems, but this is a really good example of something positive that has come forward, and it all started under the previous Conservative Government.

The roll-out of community diagnostic centres has fundamentally changed how we diagnose disease. There are now more than 170 centres across England, expanding capacity and bringing scans closer to where people live. Nationally, they have delivered millions upon millions of additional tests and have helped to ease pressure on acute services, with the clear aim of diagnosing conditions such as cancer faster and improving patient outcomes.

Only this month I went to the first year anniversary of the opening of the CDC in Hinckley, a £24 million investment that has seen 59,000 patients through its door and is expanding. That means patients do not have to travel as far into Leicester or Nuneaton, and that they get their diagnoses more quickly and in a modern tech building. That is absolutely fantastic for my community, but I know that is replicated 170 times across the country. That matters because, when it comes to diseases like lung cancer, early diagnosis is everything. The sooner we can identify a problem, the sooner we can act, and crucially, the better the chances of survival.

There is a real success story to talk about. The NHS lung cancer screening programme has its roots in work started by the Conservative Government, building on more than a decade of UK research and pilot studies. Following successful trials and local pilots, NHS England launched the targeted lung health check programme in 2019, focusing on high-risk groups in areas with the worst outcomes. That approach, using mobile scanners and proactive interventions, proved effective in detecting cancer earlier and reaching underserved communities.

On the back of that success, and with a formal recommendation from the UK National Screening Committee in 2022, the Government announced a national roll-out in June 2023, committing to expand the screening

[Dr Luke Evans]

across England and ultimately to reach full coverage by 2030. Since then, the programme has transitioned from pilots to a full national screening service and now forms a central part of efforts to improve cancer survival. I am pleased to see that the Government are continuing on that trajectory.

Why does this matter? The NHS lung cancer screening programme is now delivering at scale and showing clear results. About 2.8 million people have been invited, with 1.5 million checks completed and close to 1 million scans carried out. Some 6,000 to 7,000 cancers have been detected, roughly three quarters of which have been identified at stage 1 or 2, the earlier stages, in comparison with fewer than 30% before the programme started. About 1.4% of the scans lead to a diagnosis, demonstrating a targeted and efficient approach, and uptake stands at about 60%. In short, the programme is not only reaching those most at risk, but consistently shifting diagnosis to an earlier, more treatable stage and saving lives at a national level.

As I say, we welcome the proposed expansion of the lung cancer screening programme, but it is vital that steps be taken to improve the uptake of screening and lung health checks. The fact that uptake stands at 60% means that 40% of those invited are not coming forward, and they are often the ones at highest risk. The question is why. Can the Minister set out what specific interventions the Government will introduce to increase uptake, particularly among the most deprived and hard-to-reach groups? To that end, can he confirm how the Government plan to deliver targets set in the national cancer plan, including the allocation of resources and funding for the lung cancer screening programme, over the next few years?

As my new Scottish Conservative colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Douglas Lumsden), may rightly point out, progress on lung cancer screening is uneven. England is now rolling out a full national programme; Wales has committed to an implementation, with the first invitations expected from 2027; Scotland remains at a pilot stage, with a national roll-out likely to be years away; and Northern Ireland is still in the early planning phases, without a programme in place. Given that variation, will the Minister set out what discussions are taking place across all four nations? Most importantly, what lessons are being learned from the English experience that can be actively shared to support a faster and more consistent delivery and roll-out across the UK?

More broadly, this issue speaks to the need for a coherent approach to respiratory disease. Under the last Conservative Government, there was a clear attempt to take a more joined-up approach to the country's biggest killers through a major condition strategy, which was announced in 2023. It explicitly placed chronic respiratory diseases, alongside cancer and cardiovascular disease, as one of six national priorities, recognising both its scale—it affects millions—and its contribution to avoidable ill health. A detailed framework, setting out a shift towards prevention, early diagnosis and management of those conditions, was published later that year. However, although the direction of travel was established and widely consulted on, the strategy never reached full publication or implementation, because there was a general election.

This Government have taken a different route, with modern service frameworks. They have committed to developing modern service frameworks for frailty, dementia, mental health and cardiovascular disease—just a few areas—so I ask the Minister directly: will the Government develop a modern service framework for respiratory disease? If not, how do they intend to drive the same level of improvement for a condition that affects millions and underpins outcomes in lung cancer?

We are all serious about improving cancer survival. Across this House, we all have that ambition, but we must match our ambition with delivery. Just like the 10-year plan, the delivery chapter is missing. I worry that the same could be argued for respiratory conditions. I just hope that I am proved wrong.

2.25 pm

The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wokingham (Clive Jones) on securing this important debate and on his continued and relentless advocacy for people affected by lung cancer. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon); to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover); and to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans), for their comprehensive and constructive contributions. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South (Mrs Hodgson), the lead Minister on this policy area.

There is a great deal of consensus across the House on this issue. We all want to see more lung cancers diagnosed earlier, more lives saved and fewer families affected by the devastating consequences of a late diagnosis. Lung cancer remains one of the greatest cancer challenges that we face. More than 42,000 people were diagnosed with lung cancer in England in 2023, and about 35,000 people lose their life to the disease across the United Kingdom each year.

Lung cancer is also one of the cancers most strongly associated with deprivation. People living in the most deprived communities experience higher rates of smoking, a higher incidence of lung cancer and poorer health outcomes. That is why tackling lung cancer is about not only improving cancer survival, but reducing some of the most persistent health inequalities in our society. For too long, outcomes for lung cancer have lagged behind those for many other cancers. The reason for that is well understood: too many people are diagnosed when their cancer is already at an advanced stage, limiting treatment options and reducing the likelihood of successful outcomes.

That is why early diagnosis is absolutely critical. When lung cancer is diagnosed at stage 1, five-year survival is over 60%. By stage 4, it falls to just over 4%. Those figures alone demonstrate why finding lung cancer earlier remains one of the most effective ways of improving survival. The Government fully recognise the importance of this challenge. Improving outcomes for lung cancer and other less survivable cancers will be critical to achieving the Government's ambitious objective that 75% of people diagnosed with cancer should survive for at least five years. That is why the national cancer plan places a strong focus on earlier diagnosis, reducing

inequalities and ensuring that people with less survivable cancers receive the attention and support that they deserve.

Jim Shannon: This debate is about lung cancer, but I noticed a story in the paper today about an increase of between 5% and 10% in the number of people who now have breast cancer. Does the Minister agree that that underlines the issue that while there are many advances in cancer, and we welcome all of them, there is still a long way to go?

Stephen Kinnock: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. There is a lot more work to be done, and it is a priority for the Government: it is right up there in the 10-year plan and the priorities. As he said in his excellent speech, we need to mobilise every one of the shifts—from analogue to digital, from hospital to community and from sickness to prevention—in the battle against cancer, because it is a formidable enemy and we need every single weapon we can deploy to defeat it.

We are determined to break the historical pattern of slow progress and finally give people with less survivable cancers the focus, urgency and outcomes that they deserve. That commitment is already being translated into action through the NHS lung cancer screening programme. The programme is designed to identify cancers at an earlier stage among those at highest risk, particularly people aged 55 to 74 with a history of smoking. Smoking remains responsible for about 72% of lung cancers, which is why a targeted approach is both clinically effective and evidence-based.

The results so far have been extremely encouraging: more than 1.8 million people have attended a lung health check through the programme, and more than 11,000 people have been diagnosed with lung cancer. Most importantly, 77% of cancers detected through the programme have been diagnosed at stage 1 or stage 2; outside the programme, the equivalent figure is about 30%. That means that thousands of people are receiving a diagnosis earlier, accessing treatment sooner and benefiting from significantly improved prospects for survival.

The programme is already demonstrating how earlier diagnosis can transform outcomes. Recent NHS England data shows a significant improvement in early-stage diagnosis in areas participating in the programme. That means more people are being diagnosed when treatment is most effective and when there is the greatest opportunity for curative intervention.

The hon. Member for Wokingham and others have spoken about the importance of a truly national programme. I agree that every eligible person should have the opportunity to benefit from lung cancer screening. That is why the Government are committing more than £650 million to complete the roll-out of lung cancer screening across England by 2030. Through the national cancer plan, we have committed to ensuring that every eligible person in England receives their first invitation for a check by 2030, helping thousands more people to benefit from earlier diagnosis and improved outcomes.

This investment reflects the Government's confidence in the programme and the evidence supporting it. By 2035, lung cancer screening is expected to diagnose up to 50,000 cancers and identify at least 23,000 cancers at an earlier stage, helping thousands more people to

receive potentially lifesaving treatment. This represents one of the most ambitious cancer screening programmes anywhere in the world.

Dr Luke Evans: I appreciate that this is not part of the Minister's brief. The speed of the programme's roll-out is fantastic, but there remains a concern that if 60% of people have taken it up, 40% have not done so, despite having had an offer that could have been given to someone else who wanted to go. Can the Department take that point away and work out what is being done to close that gap of more than a third? There is clearly a greater opportunity to get more people in and get them detected sooner.

Stephen Kinnock: The shadow Minister is right that promoting and maximising uptake is a crucial indicator of success for the programme. I thank him for giving me the opportunity to take that point away; I will discuss it with my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Gateshead South, and we will get back to him in writing as soon as possible.

Hon. Members have rightly raised the issue of inequalities. We know that lung cancer does not affect all communities equally: it remains one of the cancers most strongly associated with deprivation. People living in the most deprived communities experience significantly higher rates of smoking, a higher incidence of lung cancer and poorer health outcomes, which is why the lung cancer screening programme has prioritised roll-out in areas of greatest need.

By targeting communities at highest risk first, the programme is helping to reduce long-standing inequalities in cancer outcomes and ensuring that those who are most likely to benefit from earlier diagnosis are reached as a priority. Reducing inequalities is therefore central to our approach. The national cancer plan includes a strong focus on reducing variation in cancer outcomes and ensuring that patients benefit from earlier diagnosis, regardless of where they live, their background or their circumstances.

We are also conscious of the concerns that have been raised about access to services in rural and coastal communities. Through the continued expansion of diagnostic services, including community diagnostic centres, to which the shadow Minister rightly referred in his speech, we are bringing tests and scans closer to where people live and helping to improve access across the country.

Alongside screening, we continue to invest in diagnostic capacity, treatment services, research and innovation. We are exploring pilots for self-referral chest X-rays, which could help to streamline diagnostic pathways and make it easier for people with concerning symptoms to access investigations more quickly. We are also supporting the adoption of innovative technologies that can improve diagnosis, reduce waiting times and help clinicians to identify cancers earlier.

Alongside all our efforts to catch and treat cancer earlier, through our 10-year plan for England we have also committed to shift from sickness to prevention. We know that smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the UK. It claims around 80,000 lives a year, puts huge pressure on our NHS and costs taxpayers billions. It causes one in four of all cancer deaths in England, including from lung cancer, and kills up to

[Stephen Kinnock]

two thirds of long-term smokers. It costs health and care services £3 billion a year—resources that could be freed up to deliver millions more appointments, scans and operations. The cost of smoking to our economy is even greater, with £18.6 billion lost in productivity every year and with smokers a third more likely to be off work sick.

That is why the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 is the biggest public health intervention in a generation, breaking the cycle of addiction and disadvantage and putting us on track towards a smoke-free generation. Over the next 50 years, that smoke-free generation will save tens of thousands of lives and avoid up to 13,000 cases of lung cancer, stroke and heart disease.

Although survival rates for lung cancer have improved significantly over recent years, we recognise that there is still much more to do. The Government are determined to ensure that England becomes a world leader in cancer survival, and that patients benefit from earlier diagnosis and better outcomes, regardless of where they live.

I again thank the hon. Member for Wokingham for securing this vital debate, and I thank all the Members who have contributed. Through the continued roll-out of lung cancer screening, investment in diagnostic and treatment capacity, support for research and innovation, and the commitment set out in the national cancer plan, we are taking decisive action to diagnose more cancers earlier, improve survival and reduce the number of lives lost to lung cancer. Once again, I am grateful for the opportunity to set out the Government's position today.

2.36 pm

Clive Jones: I would just like to mention a few of the things that hon. Members have spoken about. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) was absolutely right to pay tribute to the Government for their work on lung cancer screening. That is an outstanding success, but screening still needs more support from the Government because, as he says, screening saves lives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) talked about lung cancer being horrific and deadly, and he spoke about his constituent John, who probably thought, when he got his diagnosis, "This is going to be horrific and deadly for me." Because of the lung cancer screening programme, it looks like he might have a few good years ahead of him, so that is really good. My hon. Friend also talked about the speed and quality of treatment, and how important it is that we are quick with our diagnoses, that we are quick with our treatment and that our cancer patients have the support of specialist nurses.

The hon. Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans) is absolutely right that early detection is crucial in lung cancer treatment, as he knows from being a junior doctor once upon a time. He is also right to say that the origin of the screening programme was under

the Conservatives in 2023, and he is right to join other Members in asking for lung screening to be spread out to all parts of the United Kingdom.

I thank the Minister for coming to the debate today and for answering an awful lot of the questions that we asked him. I know that he is here on behalf of the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Washington and Gateshead South (Mrs Hodgson), who is, I know, a real champion for improving cancer care in this country. I think it is great that the Government are committing £650 million for lung cancer screening in England to be spent by 2030, but what about Scotland and Northern Ireland? Is the Minister able to make a commitment that the Department will speak to the devolved Governments of Scotland and Northern Ireland to try to get them to implement what has been done so well in England, or does he need to speak to the Under-Secretary of State? We did not get a guarantee that lung cancer—

Stephen Kinnock: I just want to briefly put on the record that I will discuss that with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and we will write to the hon. Gentleman with an update on the work we are doing across the regional Governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Clive Jones: Thank you for your intervention, Minister, and your clarification. But you did not need to intervene because I am sure—

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here for quite a while now and knows that I am not responsible for anything. Please address the Minister through the Chair.

Clive Jones: I apologise, Sir Alec. The Minister did not need to intervene. I am sure he will take that message back to his colleague.

What we would like to see, which was not mentioned in the Minister's speech, is a guarantee that lung cancer screening funding will be ringfenced and used only for lung cancer screening. There was no comment on the changes in the integrated care boards and NHS England or on what safeguards are in place to ensure continuity of leadership, data management and programme oversight during the organisational changes. I am sure the Minister and other Ministers know that is a big concern for a lot of charities. There was no mention of expanding radiology. A lot of people who talk about cancer, including Members of Parliament and cancer charities, know that there has to be a big expansion of radiography sooner rather than later.

Finally, I would like to thank you for chairing the meeting, Sir Alec, and for pulling me up on my mistake. I shall endeavour to do better next time.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the national lung cancer screening programme.

2.43 pm

Sitting suspended.

Ports and Port Connectivity

[CHRISTINE JARDINE *in the Chair*]

3.10 pm

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered ports and port connectivity.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. As an island nation, our prosperity has always been closely linked to the strength of our ports. Towns have flourished where ports have thrived, and declined where harbours have silted up and trade has moved on. That is true of Falmouth, the port town that I represent.

Falmouth has a very distinctive story. It is a vibrant place that has always turned its face outwards to the sea. The packet ships carried trade and parcels all around the world from the late 1600s, but by the mid-19th century, the packet trade had collapsed, outpaced by steam ships. Yet Falmouth adapted, partly thanks to our geography, which has always been our strength. Positioned at the western end of the channel, Falmouth is home to the third deepest natural harbour in the world, and the deepest in western Europe. That strategic advantage has given our town enduring significance, not just commercially but militarily.

In 1942, HMS Campbeltown set sail from Falmouth to Saint-Nazaire, in an operation that destroyed the only dry dock on the Atlantic coast capable of servicing the German battleship *Tirpitz*. Today, Falmouth continues to play an important role in supporting our national defence, as do many ports, and it has the potential to do even more in future, including through supporting work at Devonport in Plymouth.

Naval and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels are regularly serviced in Falmouth docks. As I have said in the House before, Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships, which are so vital to our defence capability, frequently call at and live in Falmouth. I still recall watching RFA *Argus* depart in 2014 to deploy off Africa as a hospital ship during the Ebola epidemic. At the same time, the port has diversified. It now welcomes cruise liners, contributing to the local economy and tourism while maintaining its long-standing expertise in ship repair and refit for commercial vessels and defence. We also have an active harbour trust port and world-class firms that build super-yachts.

Crucially, Falmouth is also looking ahead. With its deep-water harbour and marine capabilities, it is extremely well placed to support the emerging floating offshore wind sector in the Celtic sea. A&P, now Balaena, is redeveloping the docks to service floating offshore wind turbines. We have a cluster of innovative marine engineering businesses in the surrounding areas, which are designing anchors, floating platforms and many other things to do with floating offshore wind that grew out of the mining industry.

Noah Law (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate. I wonder whether, like me, she would like to hear from the Minister today how the vision for ports that she outlined, which is so clearly tapping into opportunities in Cornwall across the critical minerals, renewable energy and many other industries, could link into our broader view for industrial strategy zones.

Jayne Kirkham: Obviously, I agree. Places such as Cornwall will be fundamental to growth in renewable energy, particularly with the critical minerals strategy. The industrial strategy zones will be so important to unlock that potential.

I am grateful to the many hon. Members from across the House who supported my application for this debate—representing ports from Newport to Immingham, Liverpool to Southampton and Port Talbot. It reflects a shared understanding across all our constituencies that supporting our ports and ensuring that they are well connected is vital to our national prosperity.

Last year, ports employment in Great Britain stood at over 31,000 people, while the wider shipping industry contributed an estimated £16 billion to the economy in 2023. However, the true importance of our ports goes far beyond those headline figures. They are critical assets supporting key national infrastructure, including energy security, defence and lifeline ferries. Ports handle 95% of the physical goods entering and leaving our country, underpinning our trade and resilience. Almost all the UK's automotive trade passes through them, along with half our food and feed. Even smaller ports play a key part in the supply chain, exporting recycled material to keep lorries off roads, and importing and exporting materials for construction.

Additionally, the impact of ports extends far beyond the quayside, reaching into the surrounding hinterlands, and acting as anchors for communities, businesses and industries across entire regions. That is crucial in coastal areas, which often suffer from high levels of deprivation. For every job directly created in a port, seven more are supported through the supply chain. The coastal-inland divide is a persistent challenge that port investment can help to address.

Recent research by More in Common, supported by the British Ports Association, has shown that coastal communities and especially the young people in them see that potential. There is a genuine strand of pride among residents in such communities, with four in 10 saying that their area has economic opportunities that are not being made the most of. Young people—over half of them—were likeliest to see that untapped potential. Sixty per cent of people say that their area could become an economic hub for manufacturing, shipping and clean energy. In that, they are even more positive than the nation as a whole, where 55% of people find that prospect realistic.

Ports cannot reach their potential if they are not well connected, yet at present, the responsibility for funding road and rail links often falls to port developers. That can act as a significant disincentive to investment and puts British gateways at a competitive disadvantage internationally.

Many of our busiest ports, including Dover and Harwich, rely heavily on road transport to move freight. That brings with it challenges in terms of congestion, bottlenecks and pressure on local infrastructure. Historically, three quarters of port freight has travelled by road, with only a small proportion of it moving by rail. That is why I really welcome the Railways Bill, which introduces a duty on the Secretary of State to promote rail freight and set a statutory growth target. That is crucial not only for decarbonising transport but for supporting

[Jayne Kirkham]

sustainable economic growth. A single freight train can remove up to 129 lorries from our roads, with clear benefits for the environment and local communities.

However, we are not yet making full use of that potential. As of February 2022, around 58 ports in Great Britain had a rail connection, but 20 of those connections were inactive. In Falmouth, there is a short stretch of track linking the docks station directly to the port, but it has not been used for 20 years. With the rebirth of the critical minerals industry in Cornwall—mainly in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Noah Law) and around—backed by a £50 million Government strategy, there will be big demand for freight transport, which could be met by rail.

That is why I have been campaigning to reopen that line and working with local partners to make that real. Restoring that rail connection would strengthen Cornwall's economy and benefit local people. We have funding for an initial feasibility study. However, a business case for a rail link would cost about £150,000, which is a massive outlay, especially when there are no obvious funding streams to provide support for that interim stage.

Noah Law: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way again and I wholeheartedly support the work taking place at the port of Falmouth to get the rail connection back for freight. I really hope that we can draw support from the Department for Transport in accelerating that to the next stage. However, does she agree that we also need to take a broader look at the vision for freight rail in Cornwall and wholeheartedly develop a strategy for it?

Jayne Kirkham: Yes, of course. There is so much more to do and so much that can be done, and we should have a co-ordinated strategy. That is so important for growth.

I want to say a bit about the Transport Committee. Although this is fairly old, its 2013 report described ports as “national assets” that were essential to economic wellbeing, and called for three things: priority to be given to removing infrastructure constraints on port development; road and rail improvements to ports to be publicly funded; and Government assistance for ports navigating complex local transport improvement arrangements. Those recommendations have not been implemented.

Port connectivity does not just refer to transport. Connectivity to the grid is an equally pressing challenge for ports across the UK. As the sector moves towards decarbonisation, there is a growing need to electrify operations. However, the UK's connections queue has grown tenfold in five years, leaving more than 700 GW of projects waiting for grid access. The National Energy System Operator says that it has a plan for connections reform that is designed to clear the backlog, and it has reprioritised projects, which is very welcome. However, NESO has also alerted Ofgem that it cannot meet connection deadlines for all the projects.

Many ports lack the grid capacity to support shore power, electric vehicle charging for ports and haulage fleets, as well as many other things. The BPA has warned that around 70% of UK ports are already at or near their capacity. Those national grid upgrades are

critical to ensuring that ports can continue to decarbonise. Falmouth, for example, has plug-in power for ships, but the power supply is limited to smaller ships by grid capacity.

The Government's modern industrial strategy recognises ports as a “foundational” industry that underpins growth across key sectors. That is important for the clean energy sector, which depends heavily on port capacity infrastructure and capability to deliver offshore wind, for example. That needs to translate into tangible policy and investment. In our 2024 manifesto, my party committed £1.8 billion to invest in port infrastructure. Targeted funding has been allocated to individual ports. For example, Port Talbot secured Government investment through the floating offshore wind manufacturing investment scheme. Up to £64 million went to Port Talbot in March this year, but delivery is not progressing at the pace or scale that we desperately need.

A recent report from the Great South West and Celtic Sea Power showed that while ports have ambitious project plans, too many schemes are struggling to get investment. In many cases, projects do not align with the requirements of private investors or public funding bodies such as the National Wealth Fund and Great British Energy. That is not because of a lack of policy ambition or capital, but because of a market failure arising from the mismatch between immediate capital investment decisions and uncertain long-term revenue streams.

David Chadwick (Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe) (LD): I am intervening because the hon. Lady mentioned Port Talbot. Last year, I met the Associated British Ports in Port Talbot. It raised concerns that the current rail link into the docks may not have the gauge needed for the large structures that will be brought in for assembly or to get freight out from the new freeport that will be created. Does she agree that the Minister should assess whether upgrades, or even a new rail link into the docks, will be needed so that rail infrastructure—or the lack of it—does not hold back this major opportunity for south Wales?

Jayne Kirkham: There is a real issue of clunkiness in the co-ordination between different Departments to speed up the progress of getting these ports into use. That is one example of how we could work together so much better to ensure that Port Talbot is up to full speed as quickly as possible, which it really needs to be.

The grant funding that is being deployed to support the offshore wind sector, such as the Crown Estate and the GBE supply chain accelerator funding, is focused on future users of infrastructure such as manufacturers and supply chains rather than ports. At present, the main dedicated support available to ports comes from the offshore wind growth fund, which is privately operated. That leaves a gap in public funding for the critical infrastructure needed to unlock projects. My port of Falmouth has very ambitious development plans to service—and potentially assemble—floating offshore wind, as well as on defence, commercial ship repair and cruises. It is a truly mixed port and a “no regrets” investment, but at a cost of about £120 million. It will be a struggle to fund that huge investment from shareholders alone.

There is also the issue of how ports are owned. Some, like Falmouth, are privately owned, while some, like Falmouth harbour commissioners, are trustee-owned.

Others, like Gorran Haven in my constituency, are charitable trusts, which often fall through the cracks of available funding. There is an argument—I am a Co-operative MP—that, as vital community assets, ports should be publicly or co-operatively owned, which I would like the Minister to consider.

How do we get money into ports? What should we do? First, a joined-up approach across Government Departments is necessary. The Minister here today is from the Department for Transport, but ports sit between multiple Departments, including the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Department for Business and Trade, the Ministry of Defence and, of course, the Treasury, where the money will come from. It sometimes feels difficult to know who to go to, and ports fall through the cracks.

Secondly, targeted funding for port infrastructure to support clean energy industries is essential. That would help to reduce up-front risk, improve return on investment and leverage private capital. For example, in the Celtic sea, Port Talbot has benefited from funding, and a new wind port will unlock an initial 4.5 GW of floating offshore wind.

The Government's investment in Port Talbot is also bolstered by Celtic freeport's newly released five-year plan, which sets out how Milford Haven and Port Talbot will be used to attract major investment to the region. The freeport will deploy its money and work with all those public financial institutions to bridge the capital gap, but investment in other ports in the region is needed to make the deployment of FLOW feasible.

A multi-port strategy in the Celtic sea would allow activity to be distributed across several specialised ports, minimising bottlenecks and providing flexibility. Different ports bring very different strengths—Falmouth and Plymouth are very different from Appledore and its shipbuilding—so a single port approach for FLOW in the Celtic sea just would not work. There is also regional disparity. Projects in the North sea have seen significantly more investment than those in the Celtic sea with investment from GB Energy, for example, and the North sea already has established supply chain and port capabilities.

Thirdly, we must address the question of revenue certainty. Ports require firm commitments from developers before they can justify and secure the capital for the infrastructure upgrades that, for example, floating offshore wind demands, yet developers cannot make those commitments without the revenue certainty that a contract for difference provides. It feels like the two sides are both waiting to see who moves first, like a game of chicken.

Compounding that is a fundamental timeline mismatch. Port upgrades take a long time—five years or more—whereas the lead time for a CfD process is much shorter. That results in a structural gap that leaves ports unable to be ready when projects need them, even when the commercial will exists on both sides.

Breaking that deadlock requires direct Government intervention in the form of revenue support or underwriting to de-risk that early investment. Without that action, we risk ceding our emerging floating offshore wind industry to competitors such as France, which has invested £900 million in its port of Brest.

By mobilising the National Wealth Fund, for example, to support strategic port infrastructure, the Government could absorb a meaningful share of the risk and give

ports the confidence to proceed ahead of CfD awards, rather than waiting until it is too late. Some examples of that support could include forward contracts, capacity leasing arrangements and state underwritten procurement mechanisms to address strategic infrastructure bottlenecks, either as an anchor tenant—where the state acts as an anchor tenant through defence or strategic demand—or as an enabler, using that procurement and underwriting to support the development of infrastructure.

Finally, we must prioritise connectivity in the round, which means investing in the road and rail links that serve our ports, recognising them as national assets deserving of strategic infrastructure funding. We should also recognise ports as critical national infrastructure and use special development orders to streamline planning and consenting for significant port infrastructure. There is an ongoing pilot project for the Falmouth docks expansion. There is a co-ordinated approach under the Marine Management Organisation, which is acting as a lead regulator in a fast-track licensing process, and that is working well. Prioritising connectivity also means accelerating grid connections, so that energy capacity keeps pace with the demands of decarbonisation, future fuels and the development of floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea.

Ports new, old and rediscovered are the gateway to the rest of the world and gateway to the economic future of our country, as well as our coastal towns. They can be unlocked, but it will take focus and co-ordination. I, for one, really want to untap the potential that those young people living in our coastal towns see so clearly—and that they need to grab hold of for their future.

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to speak, even in this heat, although jackets can be removed.

3.28 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I want to say a special thank you to the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) for highlighting this important topic.

The title of this debate is “Ports and Port Connectivity”, but from Northern Ireland's point of view, perhaps it should be “Ports and Port Non-connectivity”, and I will explain why. There is no port as such in my constituency, but we are on the outskirts of Belfast and the thriving agrifood sector in my constituency uses its port to ship all over the world. The Belfast port is incredibly important for my constituency and our agrifoods sector. We also have our harbours that bring in the fishing catches in Portavogie, although that is a different type of port.

As a representative of Northern Ireland, I am particularly concerned by the problems that the Windsor framework has created for those trading across our borders and between ports. I will explain what the difficulties are, and then perhaps the Minister can give us some answers. I welcome the Minister to his place and wish him well in this debate and in his job. I look forward to his answers to all my, hopefully, searching questions—well, even better answers would be better. I will also talk about Belfast port and some of the things that it is doing, because we should be greatly encouraged by some of the things that are happening there.

[Jim Shannon]

The Windsor framework continues to create friction at ports used for trading between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Businesses report increased costs, administrative burdens or blunders, disruption to supply chains, delays and expanded inspections. Just last year, Logistics UK's head of trade and devolved policy, Nichola Mallon, who is a former MLA at the Assembly and a lady of great knowledge, outlined that there is

"a lack of awareness over the practicalities of the Framework, and also a reluctance among some GB businesses"

to trade goods in Northern Ireland due to the extra requirements. We have almost unique difficulties. There was a statement about steel tariffs in the Chamber earlier, and I asked the Minister for Trade a question on a similar issue. He said that he had umpteen pages on the Windsor framework and was well aware of the issue—perhaps the Minister who is here can get us some of the way through the process.

Brexit created the challenge of how to maintain the integrity of both the UK internal market and the EU single market, given the unique position of the Northern Ireland borders. The aim of the Windsor framework was to ensure smooth trade between ports. There was much expectation, but we certainly did not get the Brexit that the rest of the United Kingdom got; we got one that is tied up in bureaucracy.

To some extent, the aim of smooth trade was oversold and created a misperception that the challenges faced by Northern Ireland over the Northern Ireland protocol could be removed—but that has not been the case. There continue to be significant new processes, and business owners continue to report frustration with the significant restrictions placed on them that drain their time, effort and money. When it comes to the ports and connectivity, we are not having the same connectivity as everybody else.

There is a significant basis for concern that Northern Ireland businesses may be placed at a competitive disadvantage with GB-based retailers in their own market. There is substantial evidence to prove that there is an issue, and I know that the Minister will be aware of some of that. I appreciate him acknowledging some of the problems.

Northern Ireland firms report higher costs on imports from GB, and there is frustration about the difficulties that third-country firms have faced when trying to sell to Northern Ireland. Those issues with smooth trading are disproportionately affecting small businesses in Northern Ireland, with many companies criticising the assistance available to them from Government. Again, if it is easy to make it simpler to trade, we should try very hard to do that.

More must be done to support vulnerable enterprises, 58% of which state that, almost 10 years on from Brexit, they are facing moderate to significant challenges in trading—10 years later and things have not improved. My goodness, that is quite unbelievable. Of businesses surveyed, 34% say they have simply ceased trading to Northern Ireland, rather than meet the demands of the framework. The paperwork is so laborious, complex and repetitive that it puts people off.

That clearly demonstrates that market access from Northern Ireland is compromised. Small business owners within Northern Ireland have been forced to adapt, and

those retailing shorter shelf life products are now largely limited to trading within Northern Ireland, simply because it is not possible to do otherwise with short-life products. Other small businesses face increased export charges, which is another issue that they need to address. Some even report having to travel to England themselves as hauliers—as some of my constituents in Newtownards do every fortnight or every month—because hauliers are now reluctant to deliver due to the paperwork required.

There remains a need to restore Northern Ireland's full place within the UK's internal market, as it continues to be subject to certain EU rules while GB is not. It is essential that Northern Irish stakeholders play a meaningful role in improving trading problems to ensure trading operates effectively. The first issue that I have laid out is the protocol; it might have been a bit laborious, but it is complicated and I want to have it on the record.

There is still hope, however, as I, along with my right hon. Friends the Members for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) and for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), found in the recent announcement outlining Belfast harbour's ambitious 25-year masterplan. It includes a £1.3 billion investment to expand port capacity, support the green energy transition and regenerate the waterfront. The port handles roughly 70% of Northern Ireland seaborne trade and is scaling up to meet the rising demand and the capacity restraints elsewhere.

Northern Ireland is fortunate to have a large number of cruise ships; I have been informed that the figure is between 140 and 150. Cruise ships must be bigger than I thought they were, but if these figures are correct, some 350,000 people come off those cruise ships—I suppose they are absolutely massive. They bring tourism and spending to my Strangford constituency, which is not too far from Belfast. Tourists go to the National Trust-run Mount Stewart, the Greyabbey Cistercian monastery and Harrisons, my neighbourhood café-restaurant, which is just between Greyabbey and Kircubbin. That is a spin-off of being near Belfast.

I am coming to an end; I get the indication that might be a good idea. There is a real drive to enable Northern Ireland to be the hub it is designed to be. I welcome Belfast harbour's ambition and belief. It is the turn of this House to have some ambition as well—to believe in the people of Northern Ireland and renegotiate with the EU to remove the needless restrictions and allow us all to prosper. Now is the time to make that difference.

I respectfully and honestly ask the Minister—because that is my way of doing things—to step in. We are going to have a change of Prime Minister, but we do not know whether there will be a change of Minister. I wish the Minister well and ask that he endeavours to help us in Northern Ireland to overcome some of our issues.

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): Although only a few hon. Members want to speak, I wonder if we could limit speeches to around five minutes to get everybody in.

3.37 pm

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. As many people will have already heard, East Thanet is surrounded on three sides by sea. From Ramsgate, we can see France on a clear day, but our port stands idle and neglected,

despite its noble history as the home of the Navy during the Napoleonic wars. More recently, people will remember the hovercraft and the Sally Line ferries taking them to France for day trips. That is emblematic of some of the problems that we have with our ports in our island nation.

Ports connect us and defend us; they are places where we trade, where we welcome visitors and where we choose who stays. Our nation's wealth has been built on ports as gateways to the world. We are the country that we are as a result of our ports and the people who built and worked in them. Yet for too long, we have overlooked them and the communities that sustained them, even as they remain vital to our economy. Many regional ports, including Ramsgate, operate well below capacity. If we are serious about levelling up and ensuring that the whole nation benefits from growth, we must look to how we bring trade and investment to ports that have been left behind.

In Ramsgate, Vattenfall employs 300 people to operate and maintain the wind farm, and there are plans for a green skills hub. Opportunities are there to be developed, yet the port is effectively shut, even though Ostend wants it to open for trade; Dover is already at capacity and would benefit from the growth of Ramsgate; and the lower Thames crossing, which the Government are fully committed to, will enable traffic and freight to move from my part of south-east England to the rest of the country.

We need to restore our connection to Europe for both trade and passengers, creating jobs and increasing our connections to the world. Overall, we need to be honest about what kind of impact Brexit has had on the ports in our country. In 2023, UK port traffic had decreased by nearly 13% compared with 2019. However, the EU still remains a significant partner, accounting for 48% of our goods exports and 54% of our imports in 2024. There are opportunities there to strengthen our relationship with Europe through investment in our ports. Ports are not only about freight; they connect us to our neighbours and support a thriving visitor economy. Some 18.1 million international passengers pass through UK ports every year—around 5,000 people daily. Cruise tourism alone injects £170 million directly into coastal communities, with Southampton's cruise economy supporting £1 billion in wider economic impact.

I want to recognise three things that this Government have done to support our ports. First, they have brought forward a consultation on a revised national policy statement for ports, recognising that the planning framework needs to support future port development better. Secondly, they have used the National Wealth Fund and Great British Energy to back industrial and energy investment that depends on port infrastructure. Thirdly, they have begun to recognise more clearly that ports will be central to cleaner shipping and freight and the energy transition. Part of that is to do with the excellent work of this Minister and the Minister for Industry.

However, there are limits to the effectiveness of those measures. Investment is still at risk of being concentrated in the largest schemes and strongest ports, leaving many coastal communities without access to green economy benefits. The National Wealth Fund is capped, and the scale of need across our port infrastructure is much greater. Ramsgate needs only £20 million to be able to

reopen with the support of private investors, yet the National Wealth Fund will not look at a project with a value of less than £50 million.

The Government still need to do more to link their port strategy to the overall coastal economic regeneration strategy so that the benefits are felt not only in national growth figures, but in the communities that keep our ports going. I have suggestions for three further steps that the Government could take without additional spending.

First, part of that coastal economic strategy should require a coastal economic area to be established within 5 km of the coast everywhere across the country. That way we could strategically invest in those coastal communities according to the industrial strategy. Regardless of everything else that they have, they have one thing in common: they are near the sea. Therefore we can see exactly how helpful and useful those ports are in terms of international and national infrastructure.

Secondly, we should mandate a capacity audit of all UK ports. We need to have transparent, published data about which ports are operating at full capacity and which are underused. Only then can we start to allocate resources and planning permissions strategically.

Finally, we need to review the allocation of the National Wealth Fund and require the industrial strategy to include a ports chapter. Critical minerals, green energy and defence supply chains all depend on ports. The Government need to be explicit about how ports fit into each sectoral strategy, ensuring that investment decisions are properly joined up. As my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) pointed out, we need to streamline planning and regulatory processes for port development. Delays and inconsistency in the planning system hold back investment. A dedicated fast track for port infrastructure within existing frameworks would accelerate delivery.

Ramsgate is actually owned by Thanet district council. It is publicly owned and there is a strong case for the public ownership of nationally significant infrastructure, such as ports, especially for an island nation. Yet, because of the way that we invest in our ports, it is struggling to make the most of its growth potential.

Ports are not relics of our past; they are a foundation for our future. For too long, we have taken them for granted. I urge the Government to give ports the strategic attention that they deserve—not just with warm words, but with action that reaches every port community in this country, including and especially Ramsgate.

Christine Jardine (in the Chair): I am sorry, but to get everyone in I will have to move on to the Front Benchers at 4 pm. Could you please stick to a formal time limit of four minutes each?

3.44 pm

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Jardine. I congratulate the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) on securing this important debate. As the Member representing Immingham, the UK's largest port by tonnage, and whose constituency includes part of Grimsby—although not the dock estate—I know at first hand that ports are the lifeblood of our coastal communities and the driving force of our national economy.

[*Martin Vickers*]

Immingham and the Humber ports are owned by Associated British Ports and have freeport status. On his visit a few weeks ago, I know the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Holden), was impressed by its size and the part it plays in the local economy.

Around 85% by weight of international freight traded with the UK moves by sea. Nowhere is that reality more evident than in the Humber, the UK's No. 1 gateway for trade by volume, handling around 17% of all UK port traffic, facilitating over £60 billion of trade and supporting 90,000 regional jobs. However, the national figures show a worrying trend: between January and March 2026, total freight tonnage through major ports decreased by 3%. If we want to justify and unlock further investment in port connectivity, we must see stronger economic growth.

The constraint on our growth is not a lack of private capital or market demand. ABP has invested £1 billion across the UK over the last five years, and has billions more ready to deploy. Significant private investment is happening at scale right now in my constituency: in Immingham, the new £200 million Immingham eastern ro-ro terminal is under construction and, at nearby Stallingborough, the 227-acre Helm development is being built out.

The pace and scale of those developments depend entirely on connectivity. While road links are vital—Stallingborough is a brilliant case study of how early local authority road investment successfully unlocked private capital—our future system-wide growth relies on energy and rail infrastructure. First, energy connectivity is critical. Delays in grid capacity and connection timings are harming investment across the UK. Green energy, hydrogen and carbon capture projects cannot proceed without timely access to power. I hope the Minister can outline what steps are being taken to accelerate progress on that.

Secondly, we must address transport links—particularly since, with the new rail Bill, the Government make much of the fact that they will be taking direct control. Rail freight handles about 10% of port throughput nationally. While Immingham connects directly into national supply chains, rail constraints are limiting our ultimate geographic advantage. We must improve capacity, gauge clearance and network resilience across the northern networks if we are to increase economic growth in our port areas. It is critical to increase rail freight capacity serving ports alongside improving road links. Turning to the highway network, the M180 becomes the A180 at Barnetby, and the last few miles into Immingham are overcrowded and rely on an ancient concrete road, which causes great problems for both traffic and the local community.

I will have to move on quickly, Ms Jardine, and skip a couple of pages of my speech, but I note that hon. Members are passionate about their coastal communities. We must do all we can to ensure that the economic growth that they can deliver is indeed delivered. Only with investment from both the private and public sectors can that be achieved.

3.48 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): It is a delight to see you in the Chair, Ms Jardine. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) on bringing this debate to this Chamber.

I will talk about the port of Liverpool, which is actually mostly in my constituency of Bootle, and set out its importance. I am not able to see Northern Ireland from Liverpool, but I am able to see Wales every day, so there is some Celtic connection there. The total annual tonnage from Liverpool port is 31 million, about 10% of annual shipping freight in England. Liverpool city region's maritime sector directly employs about 10,900 people. The port of Liverpool itself employs about 1,400, and its wider supply chain employs 48,000, so it is an important economic asset to our community. It is also a strategic and national asset. Improving its rail links and connectivity is important, and it has an impact on regional growth.

Grid capacity and decarbonisation have to be developed in the context of an appropriate planning framework. Liverpool port deals with bulk timber, bulk liquids, bulk cargo and general cargo and with 720,000 passengers a year. It is a huge economic asset to our area and has encouraged growth in our economy for many years.

The impact on local communities is, of course, crucial, and when we expand or develop ports, we must take that into account. In my local community there is a road that goes from the M57-M58 down to the docks. Thankfully, the Government decided not to put through the Rimrose Valley road, which was going to cost £350 million. I have fought for years for rail investment, because that is the key. I am really pleased that the Railways Bill has a target of 75% rail freight growth by 2050. That will enable us to unlock other markets, and of course it will provide public and private investment in connectivity; it is important that the two work closely together.

Local communities have to be part of the development of the programme. The A5036 has a junction that has the best part of 2,300 heavy good vehicles going past in both directions—something like five HGVs a minute. The Government are trying to mitigate the impact of road traffic on communities—it is a heavily populated community—so I call on them to ensure that National Highways provides the money to build a new bridge across that road, since the previous one is broken. I will persist in asking for that. We want port development, with thousands of jobs linked to it and a massive amount of development, but we must also look after our communities.

3.52 pm

Darren Paffey (Southampton Itchen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) for securing a debate on this important issue. Ports handle 95% of Britain's physical trade; sea freight accounts for the majority of the UK's international freight but, as we have heard, the grid and road and rail infrastructure outside the port gates are too often treated as an afterthought. If the Government are serious about economic growth, decarbonisation and national resilience—as I believe they are—we need to see changes in how we approach this.

The port of Southampton, in my constituency, demonstrates why. It is Europe's leading cruise turnaround port and the UK's second-largest container terminal. Three million passengers come through each year, and it is an important gateway for vehicles, manufactured

goods and international trade, dealing with more than £71 billion of value every year. It supports 45,000 jobs nationwide, and anchors a wider Solent maritime cluster, worth £10.6 billion. I know this debate is not a competition for the best port in the country, but Southampton would make a very strong case.

In spite of all the strengths and benefits I have just listed, Southampton is not just a stereotypical rich south-eastern seat. Too many communities around the port experience severe deprivation and limited opportunity. Some recent More in Common research found that 58% of 18 to 34-year-olds coming into the workforce in coastal communities are considering moving away, most of them citing a lack of jobs. The investment we are asking for is not just about expanding ports for the sake of it; it is about redistributing that value back into the communities that generate it. That investment locally can be a catalyst for national growth. Southampton has been leading on this: we delivered the UK's first commercial-scale cruise ship-to-shore power facility. That cut 5,000 tonnes of carbon and has generated £150 million in gross value added benefits in 2024 alone.

Private investment in and around the port is moving ahead, but the constraint is often the public infrastructure outside its gates. I struggle with the fact that we have two ship-to-shore plug-in points, but we can use only one of them. If we plug the second one in, the lights in Southampton go out. If the one UK port that is already leading on shore power cannot fully utilise that potential for another decade—we have been told that the grid expansion will not come until 2036—how much later will the rest of Britain be? In the meantime, our European competitors will spend years investing in their infrastructure, getting greener shipping services and stealing a march on their competitors. There is an urgency to this.

The case for road and rail investment is just as strong. DP World's modal shift programme has increased proportion of containers leaving Southampton by rail from 21% to more than 30% in just three years. That is 200,000 lorry journeys off the roads, saving 45,000 tonnes of carbon. Again, we just need the scale to continue.

I will close with three specific asks for the Minister. I am grateful for his engagement with me and the sector recently. First, can we bring forward the grid supply point upgrade at Southampton? A 2036 timeline is not compatible with our 2030 shore power obligations or our sector's decarbonisation ambitions. Secondly, can we commit to ringfencing the maritime emissions trading scheme revenues for port and maritime decarbonisation infrastructure? Finally, can we get Great British Railways and National Highways to treat freight pass and port connectivity as first-order planning priorities? Let us match our ambition with urgency and a plan.

3.57 pm

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Jardine. No doubt, given what I am about to say, everybody will wish I was confined to four or five minutes rather than 10, but there we go.

I commend the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) for securing a debate on this vital topic. We have seen so many parts of the country represented in the debate, demonstrating that the UK is

a proud maritime country with a strong history in global trade, and that maritime is critical to our future. She talked about that maritime history and the key role of ports and our coast for defence, offshore wind and the wider economic impact.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked about the benefits of the cruise ship sector to his constituency and the impact of the Windsor framework and Brexit on trade. The hon. Member for East Thanet (Ms Billington) talked about the sad demise of Ramsgate as a port, and the importance of coastal regeneration and a wider coastal economic strategy. The hon. Member for Brigg and Immingham (Martin Vickers) rightly talked about the critical role that Immingham port plays in so many freight imports, particularly bulk cargo, and how we need to invest in gauge clearance and rail freight. I will be saying a lot more on that.

The hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) talked about the critical importance of engaging local communities and doing what we can to reduce the impact of the vast number of lorries that serve our ports on local roads. Finally, the hon. Member for Southampton Itchen (Darren Paffey) belatedly started a contest for best port in the country, but alas, we would have to rerun the debate to find out which would win.

Our ports are central to economic growth. They are our domestic industry's gateway to the global trade network. Ports contribute billions annually to our economy and support thousands of jobs across coastal communities both directly and indirectly. Our ports should be viewed as hubs: the entry point into an effective, joined-up transport system spanning out across the country. They should be supporting British business, not hindering it.

The United Kingdom has 51 major ports. Our port ecosystem handled 423 million tonnes in 2024. Around 86% of our international freight by weight is transported by sea, but still, 70% of freight to and from our ports moves by road, compared with around 10% by rail and 20% by coastal shipping. Roads carry over 300 million tonnes of port freight nationally.

The national policy statement for ports provides the planning framework for major infrastructure projects, and the revised 2025 NPS set out aims to support expansion of port capacity, streamline planning decisions, align with decarbonisation and energy goals and integrate with national transport planning. The Transport Committee's scrutiny of the NPS found aspects of it unclear or incomplete, particularly its intention to streamline planning decisions for major port developments. The Committee recommended that ports be designed as critical national priority infrastructure, which would help to speed up planning decisions. It also found the NPS to be weak on port connectivity, with insufficient emphasis on rail freight and integration with wider transport networks—a key theme of this debate.

Too often, the onward connectivity from ports around our country is not up to scratch, as the rail line or, more often than not, the road directly linking ports is the weak link in the system. A key barrier to getting more freight on rail is the ongoing lack of electrification. That is not particularly for decarbonisation reasons but simply because freight hauled by an electric locomotive accelerates much faster, which can help to accommodate freight trains amid passenger trains far more easily.

[Olly Glover]

There are many examples of short bits of railway that could be electrified to realise some of those benefits. The three miles of the London Gateway branch that are not electrified are one of the best examples. Many freight operators run freight trains using diesel locomotives for hundreds of miles underneath electrified lines simply because those three miles are not electrified. DP World has offered to pay half of the estimated £20 million cost of electrifying those three miles.

There has been a scepticism in this Government and previous Governments about railway electrification because previous schemes have gone over budget. But Sir Andrew Haines, former chief executive of Network Rail and current chairman of DFT Operator, gave testimony to the Transport Committee that the best way to bring electrification costs down is by committing to a rolling programme so that the supply chain gains maturity. What better way to kick off that rolling programme than with a commitment to doing the three miles of London Gateway? The three miles have relatively little in the way of bridges and tunnels; it is a great opportunity for the supply chain to get started. Who knows? Perhaps the Minister, in his speech, will give that commitment to spend £10 million, matching DP World's £10 million, make a great name for himself and start a railway electrification revolution in this country that would also benefit Felixstowe, Immingham, Southampton, Middlesbrough, Seaforth container terminal and many other ports. I look forward to hearing that in his speech.

If we want to support business and boost the stagnant economic growth that plagues the country, we must invest not only in our ports but in the roads, railways and networks that connect them to the rest of the country. The private sector is willing to do that: I have outlined DP World's offer but another good example is GB Railfreight, which has invested £150 million in bi-mode—meaning they can run on diesel or electric—Class 99 locomotives. GB Railfreight has said to me that it would like to run those locomotives on electric power far more than it will be able to when they enter service this summer because of the lack of electrification of our network.

Our approach to this issue contrasts very unfavourably with that of other countries. The Netherlands built the Betuweroute—a dedicated freight-only railway serving the port of Rotterdam—both to boost rail freight capacity and to take freight trains off the existing network, enabling the Netherlands to run its very high frequency passenger services.

Another big benefit of moving freight off the roads is that it reduces the need to invest in some very expensive and disruptive road schemes. The A34 through my constituency, in Oxfordshire, is becoming more and more congested. There are lots of reasons for that but high lorry volumes are a significant factor, notwithstanding the good progress—highlighted by the hon. Member for Southampton Itchen—that DP World has made in getting more traffic from Southampton off the road and on to rail.

Of course, transport is not the only thing holding back our ports. We all saw images of miles of lorries queuing outside Dover. Earlier this year, transport businesses were still describing the ongoing “pure hell”

of Brexit paperwork in evidence to the Business and Trade Committee. We need to cut the Brexit bureaucracy and red tape to enable our port sector to really thrive. The Public Accounts Committee found a

“Clear increase in costs, paperwork and border delays”

for UK businesses after Brexit. The National Audit Office similarly concluded that businesses face

“additional costs and administrative burdens”

due to new border processes. At least £4.7 billion has been spent implementing border arrangements, and around 39 million customs declarations have been required annually, adding significant friction. UK ports handled around 10% less cargo in 2024 compared with 2019, the last full year before Brexit. That decline has been attributed to Brexit and wider economic factors.

We need to make importing and exporting more efficient, cutting the time and money wasted at ports on unnecessary forms, checks and mountains of paperwork. To do that, we need closer ties with Europe. That is why the Liberal Democrats are calling for a bold new partnership with the European Union, including joining the single market and customs union. That would tear down barriers for businesses and boost trade with Britain's biggest market.

Labour may have hemmed itself in with its current red lines on Europe, and who knows what the new Prime Minister—whoever that may be—will do, but we believe we have a significant part of the answer to resolving the country's stagnant growth. Our ports would be free again to fulfil their potential, removing the bureaucracy and getting Britain trading again. It would also reverse the disastrous series of policy blunders that have put a boot on the necks of businesses, including the rise in employer national insurance contributions.

Our ports should be not the Brexit bottlenecks they are today, but the engines at the heart of economic growth, as so many hon. Members have eloquently articulated. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments.

4.6 pm

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Ms Jardine, and I thank you for allowing male Members to remove their jackets—although that was before you saw the shirt the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) is wearing. I thank the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) for proposing the debate, which is particularly relevant for those of us who represent coastal communities across the country or are near coastal communities. Tilbury and London Gateway are both within very short driving distance for many of my constituents in Basildon and Billericay, and both employ hundreds of them.

Across the country, we all rely on ports such as Immingham, which I visited recently with my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Immingham (Martin Vickers), and Felixstowe, which I have also visited in recent months. It was great to hear the hon. Members for East Thanet (Ms Billington) and for Southampton Itchen (Darren Paffey) refer to the port of Southampton, one of our larger ports, which supports tens of thousands of jobs, provides around £2.5 billion a year to the national economy and is a major hub for British cruise ships.

Ports can be important economic indicators, as we saw in the recent Office for National Statistics statistical bulletin, which showed a concerning decrease in ships visiting major UK ports. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Immingham mentioned, total freight tonnage was down 3% in the three months at the start of the year compared with the year before. It is concerning, and rather illustrative of the Government's struggles to grow the economy, to see tonnage falling in that fashion. It is not tonnage alone; last October, the Port of Aberdeen chief executive officer said that oil and gas activity at the port was down 10% at that point in 2025, and a staggering 25% on the previous summer, despite offshore activity typically peaking due to projects and maintenance work.

Sadly, the economic vandalism of the Energy Secretary is destroying our oil industry and has had a knock-on effect. That demonstrates why we need to think about this issue more broadly than just in relation to ports. Ports do not merely play a critical role in their local economies, although they do that; they are indicators of our broader economy. They are of national and indeed international importance. This debate illuminates how ports are connected to other parts of the economy. What we can do to help them prosper, for both freight and passengers, is of utmost importance.

As an island nation with 95% of our physical imports and exports passing through them, our ports have always been fundamental to our everyday lives and to our global success. As the 2018 review of port connectivity noted, port connectivity at its most basic level is about the equality of access to and from ports via predominantly land-based transport networks. Yet in everyday terms, that could encompass a range of issues that have significant consequences, as hon. Members in all parts of the Chamber have mentioned, including issues around specific road and rail schemes, with impacts extending from electricity generation all the way to the food on our shelves.

That very interconnectedness with our economy and the everyday lives of our people shows why, in Britain's past, present and future, ports have and will play such a key role in improving the flow of goods and people through our country. Our national history highlights a country that has always understood the need to improve its infrastructure and make it easier to connect our ports with the rest of the country. Much more remains to be done.

In considering what that means, the first port of call must be ensuring the effective use of our roads. As the UK Major Ports group has said, our major ports see more than 60% of the freight they handle moved in and out via road haulage. Similarly, the BPA noted that in 2019, road haulage was around 70% of the major throughput of ports. These substantial figures demonstrate the need to reduce bottlenecks and to maintain road quality around our ports. That is why the conversation about ports and port communities is inextricably tied to our national resilience.

Where the Government are making improvements, such as those at the lower Thames crossing, or the A666 and M27 upgrades started under the last Government, they should obviously be welcomed. They will directly enhance the ability of passengers and hauliers to access our port network. However, I also issue a challenge to the Government to do more to improve the experience

and reduce the costs, wherever possible, for those who seek to connect to our ports, as hon. Members have already mentioned today.

We must also ensure that we work closely with our international partners. There are real concerns about the upcoming school holidays. Clearly there is a need for discussions with the French about the entry and exit system. We are in the preposterous position where a facility in Dover has been built, but it cannot be activated until the technology is working for the kiosks there—which are specifically the responsibility, as the Minister knows, of the French police. I hope that the Government will be clear that more accountability is needed. The president of Airports Council International Europe has said that politicians should

“stop pretending...that EES is working just fine. It is not.”

That is true at both our airports and our ports.

Furthermore, the Government can improve the connectedness of ports as much as they like—but when they introduce policies such as the emissions trading scheme, which saddles people in areas like the Isle of Wight with greater costs, it is inevitable that connectivity will be hurt as well. That is why we will always judge the Government by what they are doing to help or hinder our ports and port connectivity, not merely by their rhetoric.

However, as Members across the Chamber have already noted, roads and the impact of the costs imposed are not the only factors affecting the connectivity of our ports. Several, including the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), were right to note the significance of rail. Take Felixstowe, near my constituency, where 58 trains arrive or depart each day across three dedicated rail terminals, serving 15 international destinations and moving more containers by rail than at any other port in Britain. That enormous logistical exercise demonstrates the importance of supporting our rail freight sector.

I will not relitigate the substantial debate in Committee on the Railways Bill, given that there were 509 separate mentions of rail freight in Committee alone. Nevertheless, it is worth acknowledging that many Conservative Members, and indeed many Members from parties across the House, are concerned about the protections in that legislation.

My colleagues and I are concerned that Great British Railways retains too much power to run roughshod over private business, particularly given the concerns about rail freight, which rightly has a target to grow. To see improved connectivity at ports, we need the Government to support those private companies in growing their services. In addition, the Government must be open to projects that increase rail freight capacity, such as those at Ely and Horley junctions. I also agree with the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage about London Gateway.

Ultimately, it is crucial to remember that our ports have repeatedly been hubs of innovation. The containerisation of the 20th century transformed our ability to transfer goods across the world, and ports have often been a driving force behind increased road and rail capacity in other parts of the country as well.

However, improving port connectivity can only be achieved with an absolute focus on increasing economic growth—a phrase the current Government often use, but do not as often practise. We are seeing changes in the Government; the hon. Member for Strangford

[Mr Richard Holden]

(Jim Shannon) mentioned a possible move for the Minister here today, although I hope that that is not the case, particularly for the Minister himself. Regardless, I hope that the Government will consider how they can achieve growth in our ports and support them in helping to grow the UK economy.

4.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Keir Mather): It is a pleasure, Mrs Jardine, to serve under your chairship. I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) on securing this incredibly important and prescient debate. As an island nation, our prosperity has always depended on our ability to trade, connect and compete with the rest of the world, and that is as true today as it has ever been. True also is the importance of the ports sector across the length and breadth of our United Kingdom, and the contributions by MPs from across the Chamber today have reflected that.

I turn briefly to some of the comments that have been made today. My hon. Friend pointed to the importance of the symbiotic relationship between the grey hulls of the Royal Navy and civil maritime in this country. She said that we need to raise all boats in developing our maritime policy, and that I need to work hard with my MOD colleagues to do so. She also spoke of the proud history of Falmouth port and the exciting future in floating offshore wind, which I know she is challenging for, and also the next generation, who share the deep sense of civic pride in our port communities and are among the most ambitious about enhancing that status and projecting it into the future.

My hon. Friend also spoke of the importance of industrial strategy zones that provide a catalyst for economic growth, a point also reflected by my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Noah Law). I also note the point my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth made about funding for the business case for the rail improvement project she speaks about. I would be grateful if she wrote to me to set out the detail of that again, and we will pick it up and see what more we can do to support her in her work.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised the importance of port connectivity, not just to Northern Ireland, Belfast and his constituency, but to the entire Union of the United Kingdom and the economic bonds that exist within it. I am very pleased to say that I have accepted an invitation to visit Belfast port for myself to see those operations at first hand, and I am encouraged to hear that it is engaging in the master planning process and has such an exciting programme of expansion. On the Windsor framework, the UK Government are working hard to reset the relationship with our European partners. That will bring simplified trade procedures and reduced friction at ports, but he is right to hold us to account on that important issue for businesses in his constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Thanet (Ms Billington) showed how planning reform, decarb initiatives and national growth do not need to happen to the exclusion of one another; they must go hand in hand to deliver for communities like those she represents.

She is right to be ambitious about reviving the prospect for the port of Ramsgate. I just visited Portsmouth, another municipal port that shows how that system can work incredibly well to drive growth. I thank her for having similar ambitions for her constituency.

I am excited to visit the port of Immingham very soon to see the investment it is bringing forward. The hon. Member for Brigg and Immingham (Martin Vickers) will know that, as I am a Hull lad, his seat is very familiar to me. He and other hon. Members raised the important plan for the grid connection process. I can confirm that I am working closely with colleagues in DESNZ, and also within Ofgem and NESO, to make sure that we clear out projects from the pipeline that are not shovel-ready and cannot be scaled at pace, so that our ports get the grid connections they deserve. That will also be a major focus of the forthcoming maritime growth strategy that we hope to bring out later this year.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Immingham also raised the importance of rail connectivity, a point echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd). I am glad that they have focused on the fact that we can unlock efficiency and air quality improvements for local communities, as well as enhancing our port infrastructure; that is an incredibly powerful point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton Itchen (Darren Paffey) also raised a point that we do not reflect on enough: beyond the quayside, even in some of the most successful ports in the United Kingdom, stark inequalities can exist in coastal communities. There are inequalities in access to opportunity and to the fantastic roles we have in the maritime sector, but there are also major issues to do with economic inequality. It is this Government's driving mission to address that. We want to make sure that ports such as Southampton continue to grow and offer fantastic services through the cruise sector. Part of that is about making sure that we get the grid connections right, but it is also about making sure that people who live in coastal communities benefit from the enormous opportunities that improved port connections can bring.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover), encourages me to make spending commitments from this Dispatch Box. I am afraid that I will have to disappoint him today, but I am very interested in his point about rail freight connectivity from London Gateway and those three miles. That is more clearly within the remit of Lord Hendy in the other place—but, if the hon. Member wrote to me about it, I would be very interested to engage with him further from a maritime perspective.

The shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Holden), was characteristically strong in his advocacy for the port of Tilbury, which I had the real pleasure of visiting recently. I take his points about the implementation of EES very seriously. We continue to work with our EU partners and EU member states to encourage pragmatism whenever queues build, to reduce the impact for UK travellers and operators. I assure him that I am working very closely with my counterparts in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Home Office to ensure that we deal with those problems as they arise.

The impact of our ports should not be underestimated. Around 85% of the goods that cross UK borders pass through them. The fundamentals of everyday life—the food

we eat, the clothes we wear and the energy we rely on—all arrive by sea. Ports are also major employers for our coastal communities, supporting around 30,000 direct jobs. With the latest figures showing an annual contribution of over £2 billion, they are also catalysts for local, regional and national growth, although a key theme that has arisen from this debate is our obligation to ensure that the proceeds of that growth are spread more equitably among the coastal communities that Members represent.

Last year, ports were recognised as a foundational industry in the Government's industrial strategy. That was in no small part down to the swathes of investment that UK ports are already making, with £6 billion committed across the country since 2020. The Government are working hard to match that appetite for growth. I have heard some of the limitations of the National Wealth Fund in terms of the investability of propositions before the organisation. However, £5.8 billion is being directed towards five priority sectors, backing projects that face the greatest barriers to finance. Earlier this month, the fund announced £200 million for ports, the largest single investment it has made in the sector to date. Last year, the Government announced a further £448 million for the UK SHORE—Shipping Office for Reducing Emissions—programme, helping innovators across maritime to develop sustainable technology, including improving grid connections at UK ports.

We know that investment alone is not enough; a modern and effective planning system will also be essential to the future success of our ports. That is why we will soon publish the revised national policy statement for ports, providing greater certainty to those proposing new developments. I put on the record my thanks to the Transport Committee for its robust scrutiny of the statement, which we have done our level best to include in our additions and updates. We are also working closely with regulators to streamline the planning and consenting process, including tackling the backlog of harbour order applications. A new prioritisation framework will ensure that time-critical applications can be identified and processed more quickly, preventing any unnecessary delays.

For ports to reach their full potential, they must work seamlessly with our road and rail networks. Congestion and capacity issues, whether at the port gate or miles away, can have a huge impact on supply chains. From the lower Thames crossing in the south to the trans-Pennine route upgrade in the north, the Government are pouring billions into improving port connectivity. In March, we announced over £27 billion through the third road investment strategy, including a new performance metric to reduce delays on gateway routes. At the same time, GBR will work to improve rail access, supporting our ambition for a 75% increase in rail freight by 2050 alongside the duty in the Railways Bill to promote rail freight.

As we invest in growth and connectivity, we must also ensure that the sector is ready to meet its climate commitments. The maritime decarbonisation strategy doubles down on our mission to build a greener future, setting clear targets and guiding principles to help us to get there. Last year, we ran a call for evidence to understand ports' current and future energy needs; over the coming months, we will publish a summary of those responses and set out our next steps.

For centuries, ports have supported the movement of people, goods and ideas. They have helped to build the foundations of our national prosperity. Today, they continue to drive growth, support jobs and create opportunities in all four corners of the United Kingdom. Supporting the continued success of our ports is one of the Government's top priorities, and we will keep working with and listening to industry as we shape the right policy environment for them to thrive. I once again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth for securing this debate, and I thank all hon. Members who made such considered contributions.

4.23 pm

Jayne Kirkham: I thank you, Ms Jardine, for chairing today, and I thank the Members who have come from all edges of the country and spoken so beautifully about their ports.

Some themes have come out, and I thank the Minister for addressing pretty much all of them. The first is rail. The rail freight growth target is welcome, and we need to make sure it happens. It is also important to speed up those grid connections. We are all looking at about 10 years for connecting our ports to the grid, which is simply not good enough. Then there is planning, with ports being national infrastructure. I see planning moves even in my own port in Falmouth, and those are good innovations.

My main plea is to look at how we unlock investment in our ports. We need to talk about the flexibility of public investment from the National Wealth Fund, how we build confidence in our ports, and the revenue that may be incoming from new green energy businesses and industries to unlock private investment and allow it to flood in. It is there—it wants to do it; it just needs the confidence.

I thank all hon. Members for coming today. I hope that by the next election, our ports will all be up to speed, with things flowing in and out.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered ports and port connectivity.

4.25 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 25 June 2026

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Steel Trade Measure

The Minister for Trade (Chris Bryant): The Government are today announcing the final details of the new steel trade measure coming into effect on 1 July 2026, a cornerstone policy of the UK's steel strategy, and a further example of delivery on our modern industrial strategy, which charts a strategic course that allows business to make long-term decisions and focus on creating wealth and prosperity.

Steel overcapacity continues to distort markets, drive down prices and threaten the viability of our already fragile domestic steelmaking sector. UK steel production has more than halved in the last decade. Other countries are acting, including the US, Canada and the EU, with the EU's measure also coming into force on 1 July 2026. This Government cannot, and will not, jeopardise domestic steelmaking given its importance to critical national infrastructure and defence. We must act now to secure its future.

Since our 19 March announcement, we have listened to stakeholders across the steel supply chain, including producers and downstream users, and have adjusted the steel trade measure's product scope and quota volumes. We have also engaged closely with the EU and agreed an approach that reflects the UK and EU's highly interconnected supply chains. This will provide stability for UK-EU steel trade from 1 July, while we continue to work together to strengthen UK-EU steel trade longer term.

We recognise that this will create changes to trade flows including with some of our closest trading partners. We want to reassure them that the UK remains committed to our international obligations and to constructive engagement on our steel measure. We recognise that this is a challenging time for steel industries globally, and that is why we will continue to prioritise working with partners to tackle overcapacity.

From 1 July 2026, we will now limit tariff-free steel imports and reduce overall quota volumes by 51% compared to the steel safeguard, protecting domestic producers while maintaining continuity of supply for downstream users, including the automotive, construction and defence sectors. The overall quota volume will be 3.2 metric tonnes, an increase of 21% compared to our previously published provisional volumes. We have also removed 11 product codes, where new information confirmed there was no UK production, and added two codes where there is evidence of production. Detailed information on quotas will be published on gov.uk.

Where quotas are filled, imports above these levels will face a 50% tariff. The measure will apply only to products that can be made in the UK. In a limited number of cases, technical constraints mean that product codes cannot be cleanly separated, with some codes covering both UK-produced and non-UK-produced grades and sizes of products. In these instances, quotas

have been designed to allow sufficient imports, ensuring continued availability for UK users without imposing unnecessary additional costs.

We will continue to engage closely with industry across the supply chain. We will actively monitor implementation of the measure to ensure it operates as intended, and we will continue to engage with businesses. We will also review the measure after 12 months to ensure it remains effective and that the balance is right for industry. To ease potential short-term impacts, a transitional arrangement will apply whereby goods under contract before 14 March 2026 and imported between 1 July and 30 September 2026 will not face the 50% tariff or count towards quota volumes in the first quarter. We have provided technical guidance on these arrangements and on quota administration, including how unused quota volumes will "roll over" across quarters within the same quota year.

Specific arrangements will be in place to ensure that steel can flow to Northern Ireland. The Government will continue to provide guidance and support traders moving goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland through the trader support service and work closely with the EU to ensure these arrangements operate effectively in practice.

In parallel, the UK has launched an article XXVIII process at the World Trade Organisation to permanently raise the maximum most favoured nation steel tariffs that we can apply to steel imports. We will shortly confirm members' rights and expect to begin negotiations in the autumn. This process is separate to the new steel trade measure and will create the necessary policy space to ensure the sector has sufficient tariff protection in the long term.

This Government are acting now to secure the future of the UK steel industry. We are determined that steel will remain at the heart of Britain's future.

[HCWS146]

CABINET OFFICE

Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme: Amendments

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): Today I am laying an amendment to the principal civil service pension scheme under section 1 of the Superannuation Act 1972, which will come into force on 1 July 2026.

The primary focus of the amendments is to correct historical inequalities relating to the provision of adult survivor pensions in respect of same-sex marriages and civil partnerships. There are also additional technical changes to clarify the scheme rules and to align them with other relevant legislation.

As a result of the then Government's response to two legal judgments—*Walker v. Innospec* and *Goodwin v. the Secretary of State for Education*—all public service pension schemes must provide pensions for surviving same-sex spouses and civil partners, as well as widowers of female scheme members, that are no less favourable than would be provided to the widow of a male member in similar circumstances. This change will only affect benefits in respect of service before 6 April 1988 as all other survivor benefit provision is fully equalised.

The implementation of these changes will not impact progress under the administration recovery plan, which has been agreed with Capita.

[HCWS151]

Public Sector Fraud Authority: Civil Penalty Code of Practice

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Satvir Kaur): I would like to update the House that today the Government have published the Public Sector Fraud Authority's civil penalties code of practice, associated with the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Act 2025, as stipulated by Section 63 of the Act.

The Act introduced a new civil penalties regime for fraud against the public sector. The code provides further detail about how the PSFA civil penalty powers in the Act will be used, including how the PSFA's authorised officers will operate and make decisions relating to their powers to issue civil penalties.

The code also includes information on the use and application of information sharing and gathering powers and debt recovery powers as set out in part 1 of the Act, in so far as it is relevant to the use and imposition of penalties. Additional information on these powers will be set out in guidance published separately.

There are a number of pertinent statutory safeguards detailed in the code, including the right to receive a clear notice, the opportunity to make formal representations, the provision for an internal review by a senior authorised officer, and the right of appeal to an independent tribunal. In addition, an independent reviewer will be appointed to conduct reviews of the PSFA's powers, including civil penalty powers.

I am grateful to all those who took the time to contribute their views on the code when we ran a consultation between 8 December 2025 and 27 February 2026 seeking feedback. The feedback provided was detailed, considered and constructive, and the code has been strengthened as a result of this engagement.

Today's action helps ensure that our public services are protected against fraudsters. I have every confidence that the code provides a solid and effective foundation to ensure the safe and proportionate use of the PSFA's new powers.

[HCWS152]

EDUCATION

Higher Education: Student Outcomes

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Josh MacAlister): Our higher education sector has a world-leading reputation. The evidence shows that most graduates are significantly better off as a result of undertaking higher education, but we are determined to ensure that everyone can be confident of a good experience and strong outcomes from their investment in higher education.

We came into Government with a manifesto commitment to raising teaching standards in higher education. The post-16 education and skills White Paper last autumn placed quality at the heart of our vision for the sector.

We acted quickly to support financial sustainability for providers through the tuition fee increase. We are improving support for access and participation, re-introducing maintenance grants and supporting better pathways through the system. However, there is more work to be done to ensure consistent high quality across the sector. Too many courses are not delivering the outcomes students deserve.

New analysis published today by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that 25% of students do not see a positive return from their studies, with negative returns concentrated in certain subjects. I have today written to all higher education providers to outline further reforms to tackle the issues exposed by today's IFS analysis and elsewhere, so that we can help all students benefit from everything our higher education system has to offer.

We will legislate to limit the growth of some courses that lead to poor earnings returns at some providers, when parliamentary time allows. This will not be a blanket cap on student numbers, but a focused measure to support the sector to prioritise provision where it delivers good value for students and the taxpayer. We will engage a wide range of stakeholders to inform the development of these options.

We also expect providers to include clear information about destinations and outcomes on their own websites, so that students can make choices that work for them. We are working with the Office for Students, UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) and sector partners to make it easier for students to access the information available on Discover Uni, in time for the next cohort of students to consider their options in spring 2027.

Alongside this, our "Pathways to Priority Occupations" report, also published today, will support students to make informed choices about their courses. We are exploring how artificial intelligence can further strengthen the information available to them.

Finally, there must be robust standards to protect students and taxpayers from abuse. We intend to consult in the autumn on new minimum English language requirements for student finance, to provide greater confidence that recipients are able to benefit from their course. We will design this carefully, in collaboration with the higher education sector.

Together, these actions will help ensure that all students can benefit from the opportunities that higher education provides.

[HCWS150]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Nuclear Decommissioning Authority: Hinkley Point B

The Minister for Energy (Michael Shanks): My hon. Friend Lord Vallance of Balham, Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation, has today made the following statement:

I am today laying a designation direction, which has been given to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority in respect of the Hinkley Point B nuclear site. The direction reaffirms NDA's responsibility for the cleaning up and decommissioning of the site, triggering their powers under the Energy Act 2004.

The direction has been given with the consent of EDF Energy Nuclear Generation Limited and Nuclear Restoration Services, in accordance with sections 3 and 5 of the Energy Act 2004.

This is a significant moment for nuclear decommissioning as the direction marks the second nuclear site of the advanced gas-cooled reactor fleet that will transfer to Government for decommissioning.

[HCWS149]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Government Estate Nature Plan

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): Tomorrow, during London Climate Action Week, I am publishing the first ever Government estate nature plan, which sets out a new, smarter way of using Government land to support nature recovery, climate adaptation and the resilience of public services.

Bringing together action across more than 577,000 hectares—roughly 4% of England’s land—the Government estate nature plan moves from fragmented, site-by-site efforts to a more co-ordinated, whole-estate approach, strengthening resilience and helping protect critical public services from climate impacts. This is a new way of seeing public land—not as scattered parcels, but as a living system that can restore nature, strengthen resilience and support the services that people rely on. As the largest landowner in the country, the Government will lead by example, showing how nature can be restored at scale while supporting essential public services.

For the first time, the Government will apply the principles of the land use framework to their own estate, managing land more strategically to deliver for nature alongside core public services.

The plan is supported by £4.1 million of funding for a series of pilot “lighthouse” projects across the estate. These projects on operational land, including defence training areas, transport corridors and prison estates, will demonstrate how nature recovery can enhance the resilience and delivery of public services. Evidence from these pilots will inform future, larger-scale delivery.

Recent independent analysis indicates that the Government estate has the potential to generate ecosystem services with an estimated value of up to £67 billion where natural assets are maintained in good condition.

This new plan is the first of its kind globally. By managing land more strategically across the Government estate and working with partners, it will support the delivery of Environment Act targets on biodiversity, water quality and woodland cover, and ensure progress to the UK’s commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030. A digital map of the Government estate will be published by April 2027 to support transparency and improve spatial planning.

The Government estate nature plan sits alongside a wider set of plans published by the National Estate for Nature, a coalition of 26 major landowners who together manage around 10% of England’s land. Members include Government Departments and public bodies, as well as organisations such as the National Trust, the Crown Estate, the Duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall, the Church Commissioners and the RSPB.

Together, partners have set out how they will manage their landholdings to restore and enhance priority habitats, and contribute to national targets. These include commitments such as increasing woodland cover, restoring peatlands, and expanding nature-friendly farming practices.

[HCWS147]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Department for Work and Pensions Workplace Transformation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Andrew Western): Today the Department announced plans to consolidate some service and support centres as part of the continued transformation of DWP’s office estate across England, Scotland and Wales. This sits alongside wider activity to modernise how services are delivered in the future, including the future operating model of the job and careers service, but these sites do not see customers face to face.

As the Department’s estate continues to evolve, it will become smaller, better and greener, thereby supporting the Government’s priorities of delivering long-term savings for the taxpayer and high-quality public services through more affordable, sustainable and inclusive workplaces. This involves investing in existing buildings to improve working environments, as well as acquiring new premises in some areas.

Since 2021, the number of service and support centres has reduced from 127 to 74, delivering net recurrent cashflow savings of £72.2 million between 2022-23 to 2024-25, with significant further savings expected in future years. Despite this progress, DWP still operates one of the largest leasehold estates in Government. With hybrid working now well established, capacity across the estate exceeds requirements, and the estate is underutilised by around a third. That is why, earlier today, the Department informed colleagues of its plans to make changes at these nine service and support centres, and to relocate colleagues and services to alternative sites nearby, where this is possible:

- Blackpool Peel Park
- Derby Holborn House
- Glasgow Northgate
- Halifax Dean Clough Mills
- Hyde Beech House
- Liverpool Belle Vale
- Motherwell Johnstone House
- Sunderland Wear View House
- Torquay Cotswold House

DWP remains committed to maintaining a national footprint, including a presence in some of the most deprived areas of the country. Creating fewer but larger offices also supports the Government’s Places for Growth agenda, with the Department continuing to move roles out of London, so that the civil service better reflects the communities it serves.

These changes are not driven by a plan to reduce headcount. We are committed to treating all affected colleagues with fairness and respect, giving them sufficient notice of any changes to where they work. Most will be offered a move in their current role to a nearby location,

where this is reasonable. Where relocation is not possible, redeployment within DWP or across other Government Departments will be the priority.

These announcements will affect each location differently. I have written to every MP with an affected site in their constituency to explain what this means for their area, and have invited them to meet me to discuss it further. We commit to doing the same for any future announcements.

[HCWS153]

State Pension Age Communications and Complaints Handling

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Torsten Bell): In January 2026 the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced the

Government's new response to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's report into the way that changes to the state pension age were communicated to women born in the 1950s. This included a commitment to deliver an action plan to learn lessons from the ombudsman's investigation. Today this action plan has been published on gov.uk.

I will also place a copy of the action plan in the Libraries of the House.

The action plan sets out key steps for state pension age communications and complaints handling, recognising the importance of building a continuous learning approach.

I am grateful to the ombudsman who has provided support to develop the action plan. As we have set out in the plan, we will work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders on future state pension age communications.

[HCWS148]

Written Corrections

Thursday 25 June 2026

Ministerial Correction

CABINET OFFICE

Infected Blood Compensation Scheme

The following extract is from the debate on the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme on 14 April 2026.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The consultation also invited respondents to raise any other concerns they had about the design of the scheme. One of the most compelling things we heard was that the scheme does not sufficiently recognise the profound impact of infection during childhood. We have heard the community clearly on that, so we will make a further change to the compensation

scheme to address it: we will introduce a 50% increase to the core autonomy award for people who were infected at age 18 or under.

[*Official Report*, 14 April 2026; Vol. 783, c. 701.]

Written correction submitted by the Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office, the right hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds):

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The consultation also invited respondents to raise any other concerns they had about the design of the scheme. One of the most compelling things we heard was that the scheme does not sufficiently recognise the profound impact of infection during childhood. We have heard the community clearly on that, so we will make a further change to the compensation scheme to address it: we will introduce a 50% increase to the core autonomy award for people who were infected **when they were under 18.**

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 25 June 2026

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CABINET OFFICE	477	CABINET OFFICE—continued	
Civil Service Jobs: Relocation.....	485	National Resilience Planning.....	486
Civil Service Pension Scheme	477	Natural Disasters: Community Resilience	480
Civil Service Pension Scheme: Insourcing.....	482	Public Procurement: SMEs.....	483
Lord Mandelson Humble Address: Government		Public Procurement: UK Businesses.....	488
Response.....	487	Topical Questions	489
National Resilience	481	UK-EU Relations	478

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 25 June 2026

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS AND TRADE	25WS	ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	28WS
Steel Trade Measure	25WS	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority: Hinkley	
		Point B.....	28WS
CABINET OFFICE	26WS	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	29WS
Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme:		Government Estate Nature Plan.....	29WS
Amendments.....	26WS		
Public Sector Fraud Authority: Civil Penalty		WORK AND PENSIONS	30WS
Code of Practice.....	27WS	Department for Work and Pensions Workplace	
		Transformation	30WS
EDUCATION	27WS	State Pension Age Communications and	
Higher Education: Student Outcomes	27WS	Complaints Handling	31WS

WRITTEN CORRECTION

Thursday 25 June 2026

	<i>Col. No.</i>
CABINET OFFICE	1WC
Infected Blood Compensation Scheme	1WC

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CONTENTS

Thursday 25 June 2026

Oral Answers to Questions [see index inside back page] [Col. 477]
Minister for the Cabinet Office

Sudan [Col. 499]
Answer to urgent question—(Chris Elmore)

Points of Order [Col. 510]

Business of the House [Col. 511]
Statement—(Leader of the House)

Steel Trade Measure [Col. 532]
Statement—(Chris Bryant)

Draft Conversion Practices Bill [Col. 545]
Statement—(Olivia Bailey)

Connect to Work Programme [Col. 558]
Select Committee Statement—(Debbie Abrahams)

Backbench Business

Windrush Day [Col. 562]
Motion—(Helen Hayes)—agreed to

Neuropsychiatric Conditions: PANS and PANDAS [Col. 577]
Motion—(Wendy Chamberlain)—agreed to

Houses in Multiple Occupation [Col. 594]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Home Ownership Affordability [Col. 215WH]
Select Committee Statement—(Mr Will Forster)
National Lung Cancer Screening Programme [Col. 221WH]
Ports and Port Connectivity [Col. 235]
General debates

Written Statements [Col. 25WS]

Written Correction [Col. 1WC]
Ministerial correction
