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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)

Monday 13 July 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

Monday 13 July 2026

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, before we begin today, I would like to pay tribute to Ann Widdecombe, who died in tragic, deeply troubling circumstances last week. Ann was a formidable politician and a prominent figure in public life. She was the Member of Parliament for Maidstone for 27 years, holding a number of ministerial posts in the 1990s.

Ann was fierce and enjoyed robust political debate. Whether you agreed with her or not, she was principled, spoke her mind and was true to her beliefs, which were informed by her Christian faith. Ann was a close friend to David Amess, who was murdered in 2021, and both were fellow animal lovers. In the light of the ongoing police investigation, I urge Members to take care not to say anything in this House that might prejudice a future trial. I will set out more on that in advance of the Home Secretary's statement later. For now, we are thinking of Ann.

On a personal level, Casa Pizza in Kennington in Lambeth is where I spent a lot of time in the evening, sharing a pizza with the one and only Ann Widdecombe. She was a friend in many ways; politically, we may not have agreed, but she was without doubt a courageous, principled politician, and all of our thoughts are with her family and friends.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Domestic Abuse: Police Response

1. **Lorraine Beavers** (Blackpool North and Fleetwood) (Lab): What progress her Department has made on improving the police response to domestic abuse. [900958]

2. **Jonathan Davies** (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): What progress her Department has made on improving the police response to domestic abuse. [900959]

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): May I associate myself and my colleagues with your remarks about Ann Widdecombe, Mr Speaker? Ann was a Minister when I was doing my politics A-level, and she has been a firm part of our political life for the past three decades. May she rest in peace.

We are rolling out domestic abuse protection orders across England and Wales, and have trebled the number of forces with domestic abuse specialists in control rooms under Raneem's law. We have established the national centre for violence against women and girls and public protection to transform the response to VAWG.

Lorraine Beavers: Kiena Dawes was pushed into taking her own life by her abusive partner. Before she died, she said that he had killed her. With domestic abuse-related suicides on the rise and women in abusive relationships being more likely to take their own life than to be killed by their abuser, will the Minister commit to the Home Office working with victims and campaigners to ensure that the law fully reflects the role that domestic abuse plays in the deaths of people like Kiena?

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for raising such an important issue, and the answer, of course, is yes. We are funding research with all police forces to better capture information and inform our response. The Law Commission is reviewing homicide law, including the use of manslaughter offences where abuse may have driven someone to suicide. The former Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips), was working hard on this issue, and I know that the new Minister will be too.

Jonathan Davies: One in five people experience domestic violence in their lifetime—around one in four women, and one in six or seven men—but it is thought that only 20% of it is reported. It is also thought that there is significant under-reporting of the domestic violence experienced by men, due to social stigma. What steps is the Department taking to understand the scale of the problem and to drive action?

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. Too many victims, including men, do not feel able to report domestic abuse, and we must change that. We recognise that male victims face additional barriers, and that has been set out in a dedicated explanatory note alongside the VAWG strategy. The Home Office funds the Men's Advice Line to help male victims access support.

Manuela Perteghella (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): Intimate image abuse is increasingly being used to threaten, control and exploit women and girls after relationships break down, yet the police have no power to require the deletion of those images if they were obtained consensually. What steps is the Minister taking to close that gap and better protect victims?

Sarah Jones: The hon. Lady is right to raise that issue, and we are working hard on it. As she knows, a huge amount of work is going on with the Crime and Policing Act 2026, which has just been passed, and the violence against women and girls strategy. We will continue to do everything we can.

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): One of my Horsham constituents, a victim of abuse, has seen her abuser let off with a suspended sentence after the case took too long to go to trial. She now has to live with a debilitating illness caused by her abuse, while her abuser gets to carry on with his life. Court delays are bad in any case, but for victims of abuse, they can be an extra hardship. Does the Minister think that we need to think of some special provision for such cases?

Sarah Jones: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue of court delays. We have a whole strategy, led through the Ministry of Justice, to ensure that we speed up those court cases. He is right to highlight the particular impact for abuse cases. We are ramping up the support that we give to victims and making sure that we are helping people and trying to give them information about what is happening, even when there are delays. We will listen carefully to the points he raises.

Asylum Hotels

3. **Dr Zubir Ahmed** (Glasgow South West) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to close asylum hotels. [900960]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood): Before I answer the question, may I briefly say what is on the minds of many in this House and pay tribute to Ann Widdecombe? She was a true public servant, and I will shortly make a statement about Ann and the ongoing police investigation.

This Government committed to end the use of asylum hotels in this Parliament, and we are on track to deliver just that. We have brought the number of hotels down from 213 in July 2024 to fewer than 170 today, meaning that one in five hotels open at the election are now closed. We continue to move people into more basic accommodation, speed up caseworking and remove record numbers of people from this country.

Dr Ahmed: I commend my right hon. Friend for how she has gone about reducing the use of asylum hotels in this country, after the shocking legacy left behind by 14 years of the last Government. She will know that these hotels have unfortunately become a source of right-wing intimidation and violence, affecting community cohesion and creating tension. Can she reassure me that as families are moved out of these hotels, particularly in Scotland, they are put in accommodation that is appropriate not only for them, but for the communities in which they are housed?

Shabana Mahmood: I reassure my hon. Friend that we work closely with local authorities, accommodation providers and safeguarding partners to ensure that families and vulnerable individuals receive the support they need throughout any move, and that is true across the whole UK. We understand that hotels can impact community tensions, and although people have a right to protest peacefully, nobody has the right to intimidate communities or vulnerable families.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): Building on the last question, RAF Linton-on-Ouse, where up to 1,500 asylum seekers may be put, will have open gates, in a village of 600 adults. Close to the site is a primary school. In the light of the comments about community cohesion, will she now rule out RAF Linton-on-Ouse as an inappropriate site, because of the proximity to the primary school?

Shabana Mahmood: No decision has been taken, and all these factors, including other community assets, such as schools and community facilities, are taken into account as part of the decision making.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): I inherited three asylum hotels in Bournemouth, and I know that the Home Secretary is working through a complicated process to close those hotels. I have asked on 5 January, 9 February, 9 March and 8 June whether the Government have positive news about the closure of any of the asylum hotels in Bournemouth. I ask again today. Can she give an update, please?

Shabana Mahmood: I thank my hon. Friend for the tremendous campaigning he has done in this House on behalf of his constituents. There may be further good news to come, but this Government have a commitment to end the use of all asylum hotels by the end of the Parliament, and we are on track to do that.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for what she said about Ann, whom I first met more than 50 years ago. She was as formidable as an undergraduate as she became in later life as a mature politician.

I believe that nobody on the Labour Benches other than the present Home Secretary could do more to tackle the asylum problem than she is doing. Having said that, this strategy of moving people out of hotels and into camps, or dispersing them, can only ever work if other people are not coming in constantly to replace them, so what plans does she have for truly deterring people, so that they know that if they embark on a small boat, they will physically not be allowed to melt into British society in the future?

Shabana Mahmood: The right hon. Gentleman is correct: if we are to deal with this problem effectively, we must also reduce the inflow of people coming across the channel. As he will know, later today we will debate a Bill that includes measures designed to do just that, and since I have been Home Secretary I have announced wider policy changes designed to alter the calculations of those who are in the north of France seeking to get on to a boat to come to this country. I think that the right hon. Gentleman is signalling the Conservative party's previous policy, the Rwanda scheme. As he will know, we disagree with that as a deterrent, but we are working on every other measure to deter those people from making the journeys in the first place.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): Last year the National Audit Office reported that the cost of asylum accommodation contracts had more than tripled, from under £5 billion to more than £15 billion. Clearly they are bad value for money, bad for communities and bad for the asylum seekers themselves. The right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) has stated his ambition to activate the break clause in these contracts. Given that he is set to become Prime Minister next week, is the Home Secretary planning to rip up the agreements?

Shabana Mahmood: Those are contracts that we inherited, and they will be retendered under this Government to ensure that we drive value for money across them. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the cost of asylum accommodation and support has come down by more than £1 billion since this Government came to office, and we will continue to make progress in that regard.

Violence against Women and Girls

4. **James MacCleary** (Lewes) (LD): What steps her Department is taking to help tackle violence against women and girls. [900961]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood): We have made the landmark commitment to halve the levels of violence against women and girls in a decade, and already we are taking action. We will prevent children from taking, sharing and viewing nude imagery on their smartphones and tablets. We have invested £53 million to tackle the highest harm perpetrators. And we have protected more than 1,000 victims through domestic abuse and protection orders. Our ambition is clear, and there is much more work to be done.

James MacCleary: Sussex is in the grip of a crisis of violence against women and girls. In the county, only 3% of reported rape cases ever make it to trial, and of the few who ever get their day in court after distressing delays, just 53% see a conviction. That is 10% below the national average. It is therefore no surprise that so many women in the county have so little faith that their abusers will ever face justice.

Operation Soteria was launched in 2021 to overhaul the way in which rape and other serious sexual offences are investigated and prosecuted, but there appears to be little progress in Sussex. Can the Minister update the House on the progress of Operation Soteria, and set out what action she is taking to improve the investigation and prosecution of rape cases in Sussex?

Shabana Mahmood: I recognise that rape and other sexual offences can have a devastating impact on victims, as can the process leading up to an investigation and, hopefully, a charge—and those rates are far too low. I am happy to arrange a meeting for the hon. Gentleman with the Minister for Policing and Crime, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon West (Sarah Jones), to discuss the specific issues in Sussex, but all forces are implementing Operation Soteria, which is designed to help officers and prosecutors to build the strongest case possible through tools, training and guidance. I have, of course, also asked all the forces across the country to establish specialist rape and sexual offences teams by the end of this Parliament.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): In a number of cases in my constituency, male perpetrators of domestic abuse have used their partners' immigration status as a tool to control and abuse them. Those women feel unable to report crimes of any kind because they are worried about their own immigration status. What is the Home Office doing to protect women from that form of abuse?

Shabana Mahmood: No woman should be afraid of coming forward to report domestic abuse, regardless of their immigration status or, indeed, any other status here. Let me make it very clear that they should do so, unafraid of the impact that might have on their immigration status. We will support all victims of violence against women and girls, regardless of their status in this country.

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

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): May I associate myself with your comments, Mr Speaker, and those of the Home Secretary about Ann Widdecombe? She was a formidable human being, and someone about whom we are all thinking very much at this time.

This week, in the light of that news, the safety of politicians is something that we should all consider. The Home Secretary may be aware of the situation of a district councillor in Staffordshire Moorlands, Councillor Jill Salt, who has been the victim of sexualised artificial intelligence images. I do not agree with Councillor Salt on many matters, but on this I stand with her in total solidarity. Will the Home Secretary join me in condemning the comments of a Reform councillor, Dave Poole, who said that Councillor Salt needed to grow bigger balls in order to do the job?

Shabana Mahmood: Those comments are a disgrace, and I hope that all Members across the House, regardless of their party political persuasion, will take a unified stance on all instances of violence against women and girls, threats, abuse, the creation of explicit sexual images and, indeed, those who break the law. Let me say that message clearly from the Dispatch Box, and I hope it is shared across the House.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): A report by the National Audit Office in January 2025 said that there was a lack of buy-in from other Departments when it came to the previous violence against women and girls strategy. We know that if we are going to tackle violence against women in my constituency of Harlow and across the UK, we need to ensure that this is cross-party work and that Departments do not work in silos. What is the Home Secretary doing to ensure that that is the case?

Shabana Mahmood: Let me assure my hon. Friend that this is a cross-Government strategy and commitment. It has been led directly by the Prime Minister himself, who has got Government Departments together, knocked heads together and made sure that everybody is equally committed. I am sure that will not change, regardless of what may happen in the very near future. Let me assure my hon. Friend that this remains a cross-Government strategy, and I hope that it has support across parties as well.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to echo your tribute to a predecessor of mine, Ann Widdecombe. She was an exceptionally effective Member of Parliament, has been a really tough act to follow, and is very fondly remembered in the Weald. On behalf of my constituents, whom she served for decades—a role that she fulfilled with outstanding dedication—I would just like to say thank you. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Last week I met a group of victims and survivors of the most appalling sexual violence, like Angela. It is not her real name, but Angela was first raped by her stepfather at the age of eight. He then sold her to men for sex to pay off his gambling debts. He was sentenced to just 10 years in prison and, having served only six, is now

being let out early by the Government. My question to the Home Secretary is one that those women were asking: why did they endure the years of pain and danger that it took to have their abusers put in prison, only for this Government to let them out again after such a short time?

Shabana Mahmood: I recognise the strength of feeling and the experiences of all these victims and survivors of the most appalling abuse. I am pleased that justice was sought through the criminal justice system in this case, because too often victims do not come forward at all. The hon. Lady will know that the Ministry of Justice is focused on ensuring that we do not run out of prison places in this country. Over the 14 years of the Conservative Government, only 500 places were added to the whole of the prison estate. It is a crisis that I directly inherited when I came into government, and I know how precarious the number of prison places in this country has been. I hope she will agree that, for all victims and survivors, the most important thing is to make sure that we never run out of prison places in this country again.

High Streets Organised Crime Unit

5. **James Asser** (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the high streets organised crime unit. [900962]

7. **Patrick Hurley** (Southport) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the high streets organised crime unit. [900964]

9. **Matt Turmaine** (Watford) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the high streets organised crime unit. [900966]

15. **Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the high streets organised crime unit. [900972]

20. **Harpreet Uppal** (Huddersfield) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the high streets organised crime unit. [900977]

22. **Gill German** (Clwyd North) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the high streets organised crime unit. [900979]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood): Last year saw over 3,000 illegitimate premises raided and nearly 1,000 arrests, and I have provided £30 million of additional funding over the next three years to go even further. As a result, thousands more businesses will be raided, hundreds of people will be arrested and millions in cash will be seized as part of a permanent national crackdown.

James Asser: High street crime and shoplifting remain key concerns for my constituents, who have seen some pretty awful examples. My local police have had some successes, and they are running local initiatives on high streets that are starting to deliver results. Given that there will be other such examples around the country, will the Home Secretary make sure that, as well as the national initiatives, we are gathering together localised

initiatives and local successes, and sharing good practice, to make sure that we are bringing it all together as part of an attempt to clean up our high streets?

Shabana Mahmood: I pay tribute to the work that is happening in my hon. Friend's local area. I reassure him that we in the Home Office are working very closely with our colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as part of the Government's wider strategy for high streets. This is a criminality-focused crackdown to deal with some of those businesses that we know are front organisations for other criminal behaviour, but we will work closely with our colleagues, and I will ensure that all the good examples are used as a spur for others to take action too.

Patrick Hurley: The criminals on the high street move quickly, but the Government response has tended to be too slow over many years. When will the current pilots finish, how will success be judged, and when will all towns in Britain be able to say that they benefit from what works?

Shabana Mahmood: First, let me say to my hon. Friend that this is not a pilot; it is the real thing. I have made funding available to every force area in the country to take part in this national crackdown. In addition, I have provided enhanced funding to three hotspot areas where the need is greatest. I would say that success means more shops closed, more criminals arrested and more cash seized.

Matt Turmaine: I thank the Secretary of State for her answer. Residents in my constituency of Watford are concerned about crime on the high street, whether that is theft, antisocial drinking and drug use, or violence and hate crime. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is only thanks to this Labour Government that we are finally getting a grip and dealing with it?

Shabana Mahmood: We are certainly starting on that long road to making all our communities safe. We have made good progress so far in this Parliament, with knife crime and knife homicides down very significantly. There are of course 3,000 additional police officers and police community support officers in neighbourhood policing as well. We will make more progress as the Government roll out the measures in our Crime and Policing Act 2026, as well as the wider high streets strategy, which includes the crackdown I have announced, but is part of wider work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Gerald Jones: Many of my constituents want tougher action against the criminals who hide behind businesses such as rogue barber shops, vape shops and mini-marts, which are a blight on many high streets in my constituency. Can the Home Secretary update the House on what the Government are doing to tackle this type of offending, and get these dodgy shops closed once and for all?

Shabana Mahmood: That is precisely what this new national crackdown is designed to do. The additional money will put more officers on the street to raid dodgy shops and other premises. We are also providing funding for trading standards and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs, because we know that this multi-layered problem

requires assistance from other professionals. Immigration enforcement will also receive additional funding as part of this crackdown. We are determined to make sure that our high streets are safe places for communities to use.

Mr Speaker: I call Harpreet Uppal—not here.

Gill German: Many seaside towns, like Rhyl and Colwyn Bay in my Clwyd North constituency, are working really hard to regenerate their high streets and attract investment. Can the Home Secretary confirm that the high streets organised crime unit will ensure that coastal towns facing issues with organised criminal activity receive the same support as larger urban centres?

Shabana Mahmood: Let me very clearly offer my hon. Friend that reassurance. The nationwide crackdown, which is led by the National Crime Agency, will involve enforcement activity across the country, including in coastal areas like hers. Enhanced funding is currently available for all police forces to bid for, via the National Crime Agency, and I would encourage her to make sure that her force is involved.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Why was the effectiveness of the high streets organised crime unit completely lacking when, two weeks ago, BBC journalist Sue Mitchell and her excellent team exposed the case of Mr Twana Jamal working in such a high street business right next door to my constituency office? Why has neither the Home Secretary nor any of her Ministers had the courtesy to respond to my correspondence asking for an urgent meeting on this nationally significant case involving a convicted human trafficker?

Shabana Mahmood: I am not aware of the hon. Gentleman's correspondence, but I will chase that up when I get back to the Department later this afternoon and ensure he receives an appropriate response. He will of course know that there is a live investigation at the moment, so I cannot comment on any of its details, and certainly not on the operational details, but I will make sure he is updated in an appropriate way, given that he is the local Member of Parliament.

Mr Lee Dillon (Newbury) (LD): High streets are already under pressure, as I have seen with our local fight to keep the Thatcham and Hungerford post offices open, and retail crime and antisocial behaviour make that pressure worse. Can the Secretary of State expand on how the high streets organised crime unit remit will extend to smaller market towns such as Hungerford, Thatcham and Newbury and villages such as Lambourn?

Shabana Mahmood: Let me assure the hon. Gentleman that this is a national crackdown led by the National Crime Agency. I have provided funding for all forces, regardless of the type of area they represent, and they can bid for the enhanced activity funding in their areas. I would encourage him to talk to his force about what it is doing to make sure that it gets its share of that money.

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): Bridgwater high street has many excellent independent businesses, such as Styles Menswear, Soda & Rye, and Alise and Louie, but there are also too many dodgy Turkish barbers and criminal enterprises selling illegal cigarettes. Will the

Home Secretary outline what additional funding she will give Avon and Somerset constabulary to get rid of this menace on our high streets?

Shabana Mahmood: I recognise the strength of feeling across the House and I feel it myself as a constituency Member of Parliament. When such premises open up, everyone in the local community knows that they are dodgy, that they are involved in all sorts of other criminality and that they are front businesses. That is why I have announced this crackdown, which will apply across the country. The NCA will take the lead, and I encourage the hon. Gentleman's force to think about how it might benefit from the funding that has been made available.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The high street organised crime unit is a welcome step to take illegal vapes off our high street, but organised crime gangs are then moving with impunity online, where enforcement is a lot less rigid. What is the Home Office doing to stop making it so easy to move from illegal trading on our high street to illegal trading online?

Shabana Mahmood: First, the hon. Lady raises an important point about online illegality. The Home Office has an interest in that, as do other Departments. We will continue to work with partners across Government to ensure we are doing everything we can to clamp down on the platforms that enable illegality. She will recognise that the physical presence of these many thousands of businesses across our country on our high streets has had a very damaging impact on local communities. In that context, it is right that this Home Office and this Government are focused very specifically on the physical locations of those businesses to make sure we are driving out the criminality and the antisocial behaviour that has left too many of our high streets no-go areas for local communities.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): Dodgy vape shops are a scourge on our high streets, but even more horrifying are some of the people who run them. Twana Jamal, convicted in France and described as the godfather of people trafficking, has reportedly been found running two vape shops in Leicestershire. Does the Home Secretary agree that that demonstrates the need for stronger powers to tackle rogue vape shops and organised crime? If so, why have the Government cut funding to regional organised crime units, and opposed stronger closure powers for the police and local councils.

Shabana Mahmood: The Government have not opposed stronger closure powers. In fact, the Government are currently consulting on a planned increase in closure orders, from six months to 12 months. We will be bringing forward legislative measures very shortly and are also looking at the separate regime in relation to closure notices, none of which was acted on when the hon. Gentleman and his party were in government.

Ukrainian Refugees

6. **Pippa Heylings** (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): If she will take steps to provide Ukrainian refugees with a route to permanent settlement. [900963]

16. Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): If she will take steps to provide Ukrainian refugees with a route to permanent settlement. [900973]

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (Alex Norris): The Government remain grateful to the British public for the generosity shown to Ukrainians who sought sanctuary in the UK. The Ukrainian scheme provides a substantial offer of support and demonstrates our commitment to the Ukrainian people. The Government have been clear from the outset that the offer of sanctuary is temporary, and that position has not changed. We continue to consider future arrangements for Ukrainians in the UK and will provide an update on longer term arrangements in due course.

Pippa Heylings: My Ukrainian constituent, Artem, is currently seeking to apply for a funded apprenticeship, having now been educated here in the UK. Despite his excellent credentials, he has been turned down for every single apprenticeship because his permission to remain expires in May 2027—despite the fact that under the current Ukrainian resettlement scheme he will be able to immediately apply for a 24-month extension. Does the Minister agree that this is both deeply unfair and a waste of talent and opportunity for young Ukrainian refugees who are seeking to rebuild their lives and contribute to our society?

Alex Norris: I am sad to hear about that case. The hon. Lady partially answers the question for me in the sense that the Government have ensured that Artem will be eligible for a 24-month extension period. That gives greater certainty not just to individuals about their future, but to employers and course leaders so that they can take a longer view in the light of the opportunities available to Ukrainians in the UK.

Wendy Chamberlain: I echo my hon. Friend's comments. If I may, I will approach this question from the other side. The lack of certainty is challenging for Ukrainians who are looking to return to Ukraine. My team are currently dealing with a situation where a family, who are looking to go back to Ukraine, are not being allowed to access their savings from their bank. Can we get support and guidance to help people who are thinking about going back?

Alex Norris: When people wish to move back, we want to support that in any way we can. The point about savings is a new one to me. If the hon. Lady was to write to me, we would help in whatever way we could.

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. There is some scepticism among the public about refugees, but despite the fact that twice as many people came to this country from Ukraine as crossed in small boats, there has been no public outcry and there is no public unrest. Does the Minister agree that this is because the British public recognise and welcome refugees who come here fairly, in a legal way, and with proper support? What conclusions are the Government drawing from that as they create their new scheme around safe routes?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend raises an important issue here. I know from my own community, where the immigration conversation is sometimes very difficult indeed,

that those who raise frustration at the lack of order and control in the system—as inherited from our predecessors—are the same people who leaned into the Ukrainian scheme, the Hong Kong British national overseas scheme, the Afghan resettlement scheme and the Syrian scheme. The message that I take from that is that when the British people see that systems are ordered, controlled and for those who need protection, and when we know who is coming, then they lean into it. That is the spirit of our reforms to the system, and I hope my hon. Friend, and all right hon. and hon. Members, will support us in that venture with the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

Animal Testing

8. Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the authorisation of 1,250,687 animals to be used in 90 projects over the next five years through licences granted between January to March 2026 under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [900965]

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): The figure in the question represents the maximum number of animals expected to be used under licences granted in early 2026 for up to five years for the purpose of benefiting humans, animals or the environment. Animal use may only be authorised where no suitable alternative exists. The Government remain committed to accelerating the replacement of animals in science wherever possible.

Lee Pitcher: The statistics published just last week show that 2.45 million scientific procedures involving animals were carried out in Great Britain in 2025. That represents a decrease of just 4% compared with 2024, but a 9% increase in experiments on dogs, and a 13% increase on those using monkeys. Does the Minister agree that greater urgency is needed to accelerate the phase-out of animal testing, and will she consider the merits of a clear, long-term plan, as set out in Herbie's law?

Sarah Jones: I agree that greater urgency is needed to accelerate the phase-out of animal testing, and I welcome the strategy that the Government published, which was backed by £75 million. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology has committed to publishing clear timelines for specific actions, and I look forward to seeing them.

Mental Health Support for Police Officers

10. Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): What steps her Department is taking to improve mental health support for police officers. [900967]

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): I take this opportunity to pay tribute to PC Jess Turnbull, who died in the line of duty aged just 18. I attended her funeral, along with other colleagues, on Friday. It is a reminder, if any were needed, of the price that we ask of our police officers. This Government are providing an extra £2.4 million to deliver the package of wellbeing measures set out in the police reform White Paper. That includes enhanced trauma support, improved occupational

health provision, and stronger leadership on wellbeing. Working with police partners, we will ensure that officers and staff can access the timely, effective support that is vital for our police workforce.

Edward Morello: A police officer constituent of mine reported a senior colleague for sexual assault. Separately, she was domestically abused and raped by a partner. Her domestic abuser was arrested, with bail conditions preventing contact, but in her trauma-induced state she continued to instigate contact and was subjected to a police misconduct proceeding. Despite experiencing severe trauma, including a suicide attempt, evidence about her mental health and welfare was not considered. She will never be a police officer again. What steps will the Minister take to ensure police forces adopt genuinely trauma-informed misconduct processes for officers who are victims of sexual assault, rape and domestic abuse?

Sarah Jones: I am sorry to hear about the situation of the hon. Gentleman's constituent, and I would be happy to talk to him about the case in more detail so that we can learn the lessons. We are looking at what happens during misconduct cases, and at the support that is given to officers. There is also a particular issue around the domestic abuse that is suffered by police officers, and we are trying to ensure, by working with women's organisations and others, that we get our response right.

Jonathan Hinder (Pendle and Clitheroe) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her answer to my written question confirming that the Home Office does not collect data on post-traumatic stress disorder in police officers. Does she agree that either the Home Office or police forces need to have that data, so that we can understand the scale of the problem and support our officers accordingly?

Sarah Jones: I agree that we need to be doing all that we can to record data. We are looking at data on suicide, for instance, as my hon. Friend knows, and ensuring that we have the right information there. We are expanding our psychological risk assessments from 50,000 to 150,000, which will hopefully also give us more information that we can use. I stand with my hon. Friend in wanting to support our officers in any way we can.

Seasonal Worker Visas

11. **Josh Fenton-Glynn** (Calder Valley) (Lab): When she plans to announce the number of seasonal worker visas available for 2027. [900968]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mike Tapp): This Government recognise the importance of a prompt announcement on visa numbers to enable the agriculture industry to plan and prepare. The Government are committed to supporting the UK horticulture sector, but it is important that the sector reduces its ongoing reliance on significant numbers of seasonal workers from overseas. We are engaging closely with the sector and other stakeholders, and will announce the number of seasonal worker visas available for 2027 shortly, in line with usual practice.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: I am currently taking part in the excellent National Farmers' Union food and farming fellowship. On a recent visit to a vegetable farm, I was

told that the numbers of seasonal worker visas are announced far too late in the farming cycle for farmers to be able to plan in advance. If we are to have domestic agriculture, we are going to need some seasonal workers. Will the Government look at working with the industry so that we can plan in advance and actually run our farms and agriculture sector properly?

Mike Tapp: I thank my hon. Friend for his important question. I will ensure that we work closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—we already do—in engaging with the sector to ensure that the announcement on numbers is timely, as it needs to be, so that farmers can plan.

British National Overseas Visa

12. **Peter Swallow** (Bracknell) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the British national overseas visa settlement route. [900969]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mike Tapp): We assess that the route has been a success. Since it launched, more than 170,000 Hongkongers have moved to the UK, and thousands have now been granted settlement. The Government remain steadfast in our support for the Hong Kong community in the UK and those who will arrive in the future.

Peter Swallow: The Hong Kong community in Bracknell Forest has welcomed the announcement of the continuation of the five-year settlement route for BNO visa holders, as well as the expansion to adult children. However, real concerns remain around changes to language and income requirements, as well as concerns that Hongkongers prosecuted by the Chinese state under the national security law are seeing delays to accessing indefinite leave to remain status. Will the Minister set out when my constituents will be given clarity on these really important issues? It is right that we stand by the Hong Kong community, given our long and historic ties.

Mike Tapp: We have consulted widely on earned settlement. We are considering the responses, and will bring forward reforms at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, those on the BNO route can continue to apply, and the service standard for those on that route continues to be six months. If there are any individual circumstances, my hon. Friend can grab me after this and we can go through them.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): Ann Widdecombe was a force of nature, and my heart goes out to all her friends and loved ones.

The BNO route has provided sanctuary for Hongkongers fleeing the autocracy of the Chinese Communist party. However, its effectiveness should not be measured in visas granted, but in whether people are actually safe here. BNOers live under CCP bounties, doxxing and surveillance. A year after the foreign influence registration scheme went live, not one person or company has registered as working or taking money from the Chinese state, and the Government still refuse to put the Chinese Communist party in the enhanced tier. Do the Government really believe that not a single organisation in the UK is

engaged in political influence on behalf of the Chinese Communist party, and if not, how many investigations have there been into those failing to disclose? The annual report on FIRS was due to be published by the end of June. Are the Government planning on sneaking it out during the summer recess to hide their failure to protect us and Hongkongers from the Chinese Communist party?

Mike Tapp: I thank the hon. Lady for her important point. It is essential that we keep those who are here safe. The Minister for Security is keeping this matter under review, and will write to her in due course.

Police Officer Numbers

13. **Sir John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): What estimate her Department has made of the number of police officers in September (a) 2024 and (b) 2025. [900970]

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): In England and Wales, there were 145,550 full-time equivalent police officers as of September 2025 and 146,868 police officers as of September 2024. This Government are focused on putting officers where the public expect to see them: back on the frontline, keeping our communities safe. We have already delivered more than 3,100 additional police officers and police community support officers into neighbourhood roles.

Sir John Whittingdale: The Minister has confirmed that under this Government the number of police officers has fallen. It is now proposed that in Essex they will become part of a regional force that will be more remote and less accountable to the people that they serve. How does that increase public confidence in policing?

Sarah Jones: As part of our measures to tackle antisemitism, this morning we have announced funding for an additional 500 police officers in areas where we need them most, which I am sure that Members across the House will welcome. The right hon. Gentleman asks about forces. As he will know, a review is currently being undertaken by Lord Bernard Hogan-Howe, who is looking at both local policing units and regional-level units, as well as the national police service, which we will be introducing.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I welcome the 48 new neighbourhood officers and police community support officers who have joined Cleveland police in the last year, but I want to see an overhaul of the national police funding formula to support the Cleveland area. The Policing Minister has committed to do that, but can she clarify the timeline for when we will see the formula changed and more officers back on our streets again?

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is right that the funding formula is completely outdated. It was not updated by the previous Government, and it is almost decades old. We are going to review it, and we are working on that now as part of the reform programme. As soon as we have an announcement, we will bring it forward.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): Under the last Government, police numbers reached a record high. Labour promised to increase police numbers, but instead we have seen them fall. As the Minister was forced to confirm, they are down 1,318 in the last year. Is the Minister doing anything to protect the number of officers in response policing so that when people ring 999 in their hour of need, they are not left waiting?

Sarah Jones: As the shadow Minister knows—and as we replay every question time—the previous Government cut the number of police officers by 20,000. They then recruited 20,000 and put 12,000 of them behind desks, which is not where the public want them to be. We have put 1,300 officers back on to our streets. By the end of this Parliament we will put 13,000 of them back on to our streets. Let me end with a statistic: under the last two years of the previous Government, shop theft rose by 60%, and it has just fallen by 1%. We are turning the tide on the terrible crime that the previous Government oversaw.

Topical Questions

T1. [900985] **Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood): This weekend an event in Suffolk was due to be attended by over 10,000 Muslims. Instead, it ended early, because the police became aware of a credible threat to the lives of those present. They acted with speed and skill, and I thank Suffolk police, Counter Terrorism Policing and the organisers for their swift and effective response. Thanks to their actions, those attending the UK Ijtimia in Barham were kept safe.

Twelve individuals have now been arrested as part of an investigation led by Counter Terrorism Policing, which described the incident as “extreme right-wing terrorism related”. This investigation is at an early stage, and we are giving them space to pursue their lines of inquiry. I know that the police will provide further updates.

We must all stand united against hatred. The actions of a minority do not represent who we are as a country, and we should never be defined by those who plot violence against their fellow countrymen and women.

Jerome Mayhew: Given the reports in the press of yet another U-turn being forced on the Government by revolting Back Benchers, does the Home Secretary still believe that the qualifying period for indefinite leave to remain should be increased from five years to 10 years?

Shabana Mahmood: It has been settled Government policy—since last summer, in fact—that the qualifying period will rise from five years to 10 years. The Government are consulting on what transitional arrangements may be needed, and we will come forward with settled policy later this year.

T2. [900986] **Connor Naismith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): During a coffee morning on the Sherborne estate in Crewe, I spoke with several residents who described persistent and distressing levels of antisocial behaviour in our community, including having eggs thrown at their properties. Can the Minister set out what steps are being taken to ensure that antisocial behaviour is dealt with robustly in places like the Sherborne estate?

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): I understand that my hon. Friend went door to door talking to people about these issues; I appreciate his efforts in doing that. Our Crime and Policing Act 2026 is delivering new and enhanced powers to tackle antisocial behaviour. Respect orders will bear down on relentless ASB offenders, and we have ensured that every police force in England and Wales has a dedicated ASB lead and a local action plan to crack down on these thugs.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Mr Speaker, I join you in paying tribute to Ann Widdecombe. She was a formidable campaigner who served with huge integrity. She will be missed. I know that the whole House supports the police in delivering justice for Ann.

Reports today suggest that the Home Secretary and the new Prime Minister plan to capitulate to some of their open-border MPs on the Government's own indefinite leave to remain plans. Previously, the Home Secretary was clear that the changes will apply to those in the country already. Will she now repeat that pledge, or is the new Prime Minister doing his first U-turn before he has even entered Downing Street?

Shabana Mahmood: That is rather desperate from the shadow Home Secretary. He knows that the position is exactly as was set out in the consultation, which was published by the Government. We consulted on transitional arrangements for those who are already in country, and it is settled policy that the qualifying period will rise from five to 10 years. The implementation of that is being consulted on, and we will have settled policy on that later this year.

Chris Philp: The Home Secretary was not as quite as clear as she was previously.

Vile rapist Shabir Ahmed must be deported back to Pakistan along with all eligible rape gang perpetrators. Separately, survivors like Fiona Goddard have said that they are terrified at the prospect of rape gang perpetrators being released early from prison in the coming weeks. First, will the Home Secretary bring forward emergency legislation to ensure that Ahmed can be deported? Secondly, will she urgently make the changes needed to ensure that no rapists will ever be eligible for the Government's expanded early release scheme?

Shabana Mahmood: First, the shadow Home Secretary knows that the issues in relation to Shabir Ahmed and his deportation from this country are exactly the same as those his Government faced when they were in power. There is both a legal challenge and a practical one. I will be dealing with the legal issues later today when we debate the Immigration and Asylum Bill. The Government's work on the practical hurdles to deportation continue between me and the Foreign Secretary and others in government.

On releases from prisons, it was the shadow Home Secretary's Government who allowed the situation in our prisons to get to a dangerous level. We all but ran out of prison places under his Government; under this Government, we will never run out of prison places again.

T3. [900987] **James Asser** (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): Recently, I witnessed an attempted phone snatch outside one of my stations by three masked youths on electric bikes; fortunately, they were unsuccessful, but residents raised this as major concern at a community neighbourhood safety forum. Will my hon. Friend outline what progress we are making against tackling phone theft? Does she agree that the phone companies should do much more to ensure that criminals cannot profit from phone snatching?

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Operation Reckoning is delivering the Met's largest ever enforcement response to phone theft. In the 12 months to May, phone theft in London fell by 18% on the previous year, and it pretty much halved in the west end, where we see most of that occur. He is right that phone companies need to do more. If phone theft does not continue to fall, we will take further action.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): The Culture Secretary has quit X and removed her Department from the platform, citing its descent into misinformation and abuse. Does the Home Secretary agree with her decision? What is the Home Office doing about the abuse and misinformation on X? Will the Home Office be leaving, too?

Sarah Jones: I think that everyone in this place is concerned about the rise of hatred and division online, not just on X but on other platforms. As a Government, led by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and other colleagues, we are looking at how we crack down on that and at how we create a society in which we try to unite people and not divide them. Members in this place have a strong role to play in that.

T4. [900988] **Paul Davies** (Colne Valley) (Lab): Pennine Domestic Abuse Partnership is a strong example of non-judgmental, trauma-informed support for victims of domestic abuse. For many women, it is the first point of contact; however, for others, the emergency services are the first to respond. Will the Minister clarify what steps can be taken to ensure that this non-judgmental, victim-centred approach is consistently reflected in the police's engagement with victims?

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend is right: a non-judgmental, victim-led approach is exactly what we need and that is what we are trying to drive through our response. We have established the National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls to improve the police response to violence against women and girls, and the new trauma-informed first-line public protection programme is piloting in five forces this summer, equipping frontline officers with the skills to manage investigations and support victims.

T5. [900989] **Dr Luke Evans** (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): The Home Secretary is boasting about the fact that hotel asylum seekers' numbers are being reduced, but of course, they are being moved into houses in multiple occupation and the Government will not produce the figures of how many are going into HMOs. This means that places such as Hinckley and Bosworth are getting

more HMOs. Will the Government commit to producing the data to show exactly where people are being moved from and to, so that we can see what is happening specifically around HMOs? That has not been released in the quarterly data, and I would be grateful for an answer.

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (Alex Norris): I am slightly saddened by the hon. Gentleman's question. He and I had a very good conversation about the nature of the supported population in his constituency, and he knows that we work very closely, under the policy of successive Governments, for full dispersal so that the challenge of supporting the supported population is shared more fairly. Where there have been local disproportionate issues, as in postcodes like his own, we have been able to make positive changes, and I would have hoped he would recognise that. On his original point about data, the May stats release shows a reduction in the hotel population of 35% and an increase—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman can do the questions, but he cannot do the answers as well. There was a reduction of 35% in the hotel population and an increase in the supported population of less than 1%. Even he can do those maths.

T6. [900990] **Dr Peter Prinsley** (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): On Friday I met members of Barnham parish council in my constituency and the headteacher of the adjacent primary school, Amy. They raised concerns about the proposed accommodation of large numbers of asylum seekers at RAF Barnham. They worry about community cohesion, particularly if large numbers of young men are to be transported into neighbouring towns and villages without access to supervised constructive activity. Will the Minister outline what material steps will be taken to address this problem?

Alex Norris: I would stress that, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said, no decision has been taken in respect of that site, and suitability assessments continue. We are engaging with the relevant local authorities, health partners, police forces and other partners to minimise the impact on local services and communities in exactly the way that my hon. Friend says.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I want to begin by thanking Madam Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Sussex Weald (Ms Ghani), for securing a meeting with the Minister, local MPs, councillors and residents of Crowborough, where the Minister heard for himself reports of illegal working, groups of young men drinking on the street and the smuggling of alcohol on to the site. If the Government are to force this camp on people, the very least they can do is ensure that people there play by the rules. Can the Minister introduce breath testing and make it clear to anyone drinking on the site that if they are found to fail those tests, their asylum claim will be immediately thrown out?

Alex Norris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question and his time, to Madam Deputy Speaker for her time and advocacy and indeed to the local councillors for their time. I was very concerned to hear the reports about those drinking off site. We are looking closely, as I have said to the hon. Gentleman, at ensuring that that does not happen. We already block merchant

codes on Aspen cards to prevent it. We are talking about a relatively small amount of money—£9.95 each week—but we do not want to see that spent on alcohol. The sites themselves are alcohol-free. I am not quite sure that breath testing is the way that we need to enforce this, but I nevertheless share his vigour to stop it.

T7. [900991] **Joe Powell** (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): I warmly welcome the Government's swift introduction of the National Security (State Threats) Act 2026, which received Royal Assent last week. The activities of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have caused huge concern across the country and in particular to my Iranian and Jewish communities. Can the Home Secretary update the House on when these new powers will begin to be used to protect our country from hostile, state-linked organisations and threats?

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Dame Angela Eagle): Today, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has laid statutory instruments to designate three bodies engaged in foreign power threat activity under the National Security (State Threats) Act 2026. They are the Islamic Movement of Companions of the Right, who have publicly claimed seven attacks at UK locations linked to Jewish and Israeli communities, and Persian language media; and Iran's IRGC; and Russia's GRU Volunteer Corps. Designation will make it an offence to support, assist or obtain benefits from any of these organisations.

David Reed (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): As the House will know, the Home Office does not routinely publish figures on the number of small boat arrivals who abscond or whose whereabouts subsequently becomes unknown. Given that the Department holds case records that would allow that to be calculated, will the Home Secretary commit to publishing that information periodically so that the House can properly scrutinise the scale of the problem?

Alex Norris: The hon. Gentleman will know that 70,000 people have been removed by this Government—41% up on the figure under our predecessors. He makes a good point about data, which has been the subject of our response to a recent report by the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration. We are looking at the issue closely because we want colleagues in this House and the public at large to have the best possible data to work from, so that we can have the most informed conversation possible.

T8. [900992] **Jonathan Hinder** (Pendle and Clitheroe) (Lab): The Police Federation is the only staff association that police officers can join to represent them, and yet the chief executive has paid himself £1.4 million over two years from members' subscriptions. Does the Minister agree that frontline police officers have lost confidence in the national leadership of the Police Federation and should be allowed to set up an alternative?

Sarah Jones: As my hon. Friend knows, the chief executive is no longer in post. We are clear that the pace of change is not fast enough. We have made it clear in the police reform White Paper that we will bring forward any reforms necessary to ensure that the interests of rank and file officers are properly, effectively and robustly represented. It is important to say that there are good

members of the Police Federation who are working across the country and doing brilliant work, including those who I met in Newcastle. We need to tread carefully, but he is right to raise this issue.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): My constituents in Meriden and Solihull East are greatly concerned about abuse of the European convention on human rights, including article 8. They deem cases like that of the Albanian criminal who was not deported because his son would not eat foreign chicken nuggets to be an insult. The Home Office's own analysis shows that abuse of the ECHR costs about £4.9 billion. I know that the Home Secretary wants to reform the ECHR, but does she accept that if this runs out of road, Britain should be allowed to forge its own way on human rights law, including by leaving the ECHR?

Alex Norris: The ECHR provides important protection both for ourselves and for those who are abroad. We have been clear that we inherited a system without order or control, and we are restoring that order and control to the system. Part of that involves the reform of article 8 of the ECHR, exactly as the hon. Gentleman says. If he has the vigour to support such action, he will not have to wait long—in fact, at 10 o'clock tonight he will have the chance to show it.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Migrants who come here to work in our national health service and in other crucial sectors are tremendously welcome and should be encouraged, but I have seen surprising cases in Chesterfield because of the number of familial applications that have accompanied the arrival of a single worker. Is it the Secretary of State's perspective that the family visa regime is working as intended, or does she think it is ripe for reform?

Alex Norris: I agree with my hon. Friend. He will know that we suspended family reunion, but as we set out in our White Paper over a year ago, we believe that reform of the family routes system more generally is overdue. We will be introducing a new family policy that creates a fairer and more consistent framework.

Chris Coghlan (Dorking and Horley) (LD): Three years ago, my 22-year-old constituent, Hannah Byrne, whose family are in the Gallery, died on the first night of her holiday in Corfu. Two British women left the scene without ever being interviewed by police. We know that the Greek authorities have submitted two requests to the Home Office for mutual legal assistance, but the family know little else. Will the Minister meet me and the family to help them get the closure and answers that they so desperately need?

Dame Angela Eagle: I extend my sincere condolences to the family following the tragic death of Hannah. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that in line with legal confidentiality obligations, I can neither confirm nor deny whether a request for mutual legal assistance has been made or received. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on an investigation in another jurisdiction. I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman, if that is what he wishes.

David Smith (North Northumberland) (Lab): Two months ago my constituent, farmer Ian McKie, was subjected to a burglary in which his workshop was

broken into and a quad bike was stolen. According to Mr McKie, such crime is happening more frequently and boldly in North Northumberland. What reassurance can the Minister give me about rural crime and the seriousness with which the Government are taking it?

Sarah Jones: I am sorry to hear that my hon. Friend's constituent has been a victim of crime. We are funding the rural crime unit and we are putting neighbourhood police back into every neighbourhood, including rural areas, so that every single person, wherever they live, will have a named, contactable officer who they can get in touch with. We are also doing what we can in legislation to stop this kind of crime, and I am happy to speak to my hon. Friend about that.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): There were truly shocking and appalling scenes in Glasgow last week, fuelled by misinformation about the accommodation of asylum seekers. People were harassed in their own homes and roads were blocked. When will the Government finally take on the spread of misinformation, and will they finally recognise the real threat posed by the right wing, which is ready to take advantage and exploit these situations?

Alex Norris: We recognise that threat—we monitor hundreds of protests a year. In a democracy, people have to be able to make their case, but that should never tip into harassment, abuse or the type of disruption that the hon. Gentleman talks about. Our job is first to fix the system, and I hope that he will support us today in that venture, but we are clear that we will not accept harassment, intimidation or any type of prejudice.

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): Over the last two years, I have led the charge in asking for our asylum hotel to be closed. Last week, the final family and individuals left the hotel. Thousands have joined me in calling on Britannia to finally refurbish the Metropole hotel, which is a massive eyesore on our golden mile. Will the Minister join me and thousands of residents in Blackpool in calling on Britannia to put its hand in its pocket and finally restore this crown jewel on our seafront?

Alex Norris: Like many right hon. and hon. Members, I have fond memories, in both childhood and adulthood, of Blackpool. I am glad to see the Metropole back on the journey to its proper purpose, because I know that it is a crucial part of the golden mile. I am not sure that it is within my ministerial remit to direct refurbishments of hotels. Nevertheless, I want it to be the best possible asset for my hon. Friend's community, and I have offered to come with him to help promote the local economy to ensure that it is.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Reform): I thank the Home Secretary and welcome the Government's decision to proscribe the IRGC. Many of us campaigned for this and, in fact, were sanctioned by Iran for doing so. Far too many of our previous Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries bought the fallacious argument that doing so would prevent diplomatic relations with Iran. Now that the Home Secretary has chosen to do this, how will she enforce it so that we quickly stamp out all the activities of this terrible organisation from our country and ensure that it never takes root again?

Shabana Mahmood: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution. The Government have passed new legislation to allow for the designation of the organisations that the Minister for Security referenced earlier, and that includes the IRGC. The designation tool means that it is now brought within the context of the National Security Act 2023, and I do expect that when our laws are broken, prosecutions will follow. He knows that we have had some success with National Security Act investigations; I expect that to continue.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): The scampi catching sector in Northern Ireland is currently reliant on foreign seasonal workers. To stay afloat, the sector needs about 66 visas to be valid for just seven months of the year. Will the Minister consider extending the seasonal worker visa route to the nephrops industry to give the catching sector the certainty it needs and protect processing jobs at Whitby Seafoods in my constituency?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mike Tapp): I thank my hon. Friend for her important question. I work closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and many sectors in agriculture to ensure that they can operate if they need access to foreign workers. Of course, we are looking to reduce the need for that, and I am happy to meet afterwards and talk more about the specific issue of scampi, which I love.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I thank the Asylum Minister for his professional courtesy in calling me on Friday to say that the asylum dispersal plans for Stoke Heath in my constituency have now been scrapped. I am grateful for that, and it is a great relief to many residents—it was a completely inappropriate location from the get-go. However, can I ask him to put on the

record whether the Government have any plans to put asylum seekers into Clive barracks at Tern Hill in Shropshire, which is currently home to the Royal Irish Regiment?

Alex Norris: I am grateful for that question and the spirit in which the right hon. Gentleman asked it. I recognise his advocacy in helping us to understand that it was the wrong thing in the wrong place, but I know that that is now followed by misinformation—it is not totally different from the contribution of the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart)—with people who are planning on creating division over asylum accommodation pointing at another site. To be clear to the right hon. Gentleman and his constituents, we have proposed three new sites and the extension of time at two others. Those decisions have not finally been made, but those named sites are the sites that are under consideration, not his.

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's explicit statement last month that he wants to see the Cladhan hotel, which was opened by the Conservatives, closed. When any hotel closes, will he confirm that the vast majority of those being moved out will have their accommodation needs met within existing capacity?

Alex Norris: I think and talk about the Cladhan hotel a lot, because we are resolute about closing that hotel, but I appreciate that my hon. Friend's constituents, and others, would not feel much better if they thought that those bed spaces were just being provided in the immediate area instead. Goal one for this Government is to reduce demand, and we are seeing positive trends in that regard. That is allowing us to close hotels, and it will allow us to close more in exactly that spirit, not merely by displacement into dispersed accommodation. As I said earlier, there is a 35% decrease in hotel accommodation, and an increase in dispersed accommodation of less than 1%.

Local Government Reorganisation

3.40 pm

Sir James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government if he will make a statement on local government reorganisation.

The Minister for Local Government and Homelessness (Alison McGovern): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. Nearly 21 million people in our country are served by complex two-tier structures that divide responsibilities, slow down decisions, duplicate costs and blur accountability. The Government's aims for local government reorganisation are clearer structures, stronger councils, quicker decisions, more homes and better services. We have set out the timetable and we are on track, which includes making announcements on the remaining areas this week. My officials have written to councils to confirm that the announcement will take place this week, and I am pleased at the progress made so far, with unitary councils announced for five areas and elections held in Surrey. Structural changes orders are being brought forward as planned, and we are on track for new councils to go live in April 2028.

Some £63 million of funding is available to support transition costs, which we are paying directly to councils, and each new council will receive at least £900,000. This is the first time that funding has been made available by central Government for that purpose, because we need to get the reforms right. Local government reorganisation offers an opportunity for our communities to give local leaders the funding, powers and capacity to grow their economies, build the homes their communities need, and create better public services, improving the lives of the people we serve. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to set that out.

Sir James Cleverly: We have all watched this film before. The Secretary of State, who once again scurries away to avoid scrutiny, tried to cancel local elections. He was caught putting his thumb on the scales and forced into an embarrassing climbdown that cost time and money, and undermined confidence in politics and local government. He is setting about the biggest reorganisation of local government in more than half a century, and doing so with no mandate for a change of this scale. Ministers now appear to be desperate to avoid scrutiny, by announcing these decisions on the final sitting day before the House rises for the summer recess—a pattern we have seen before.

The Minister insists that elections for the new shadow authorities will take place next year. We also heard that elections for county mayors would take place in May this year, but—spoiler alert—they did not happen. In many areas there are still no agreed authority boundaries, no ward boundaries and no legislative timetable. How are councils, candidates and electors supposed to prepare for elections without those key details? Why are Labour councillors allowed to redraw the boundaries of the very authorities that they hope to represent, before any independent review by the Local Government Boundary Commission? If the process is not about narrow party political advantage, why were Labour MPs and councillors briefed before this House? If the elections are to happen next year, the Government must bring forward the

necessary legislation before the House rises. I ask the Government to break with tradition, to be open and transparent, and to avoid diktat from the centre—or is it really the legacy of the Secretary of State to leave things in such a shambles?

Alison McGovern: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. He said I was desperate to avoid scrutiny—

Sir James Cleverly: I said “the Secretary of State”.

Alison McGovern: I am a Minister, too, and I can answer. I am sure that the Secretary of State would agree with me that I have answered a number of Westminster Hall debates on this subject, and we have also had debates upstairs on statutory instruments, as is absolutely right. Members of this House will have an opportunity to question the Government and put their views forward, as they already have done in Westminster Hall debates and on other occasions.

I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman missed what I said, which was that we will make announcements on the remaining areas this week. [*Interruption.*] The day will be decided by the usual channels; I will not presume to say what the usual channels and Mr Speaker will decide. If the right hon. Gentleman has a little patience, he can give me another go at this when I make the announcement very soon.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. There is no point in taking everybody. This urgent question is going to be brief, because we are going to do this again on Thursday, when we will have all the facts before us. If I had been told this earlier, this would not have happened. I call the Chair of the Select Committee.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Braintree (Sir James Cleverly) for securing this urgent question. Local government reform is complex, involving more than 200 councils that deliver services to millions of residents right across the country. My hon. Friend the Minister is very capable, but local government is raising real concerns. Is she aware of the comments of the new chair of the Local Government Association, Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, who said that the LGA had

“not previously taken a position on LGR”,
but that it is

“hearing from...councils...about real delivery concerns”?

We have looked at this issue on the Select Committee, and have raised concerns about standards in the housing sector, ability to deliver measures, such as those rightly in the Renters' Rights Act 2025, and enforcement. The LGA raised six concerns. It said that the reforms were trying to do too much, too quickly, with too little. That poses a real challenge when it comes to the vital council services that residents need. Will the Minister ensure that the LGA's concerns are heard across Government, and that reorganisation will never take resources away from the critical frontline services, including adult social care and children's social care, that so many of our residents rely on?

Alison McGovern: I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for her very important contribution. I meet regularly with the leadership of the LGA for all the reasons that she mentions. These reforms matter so much because councils do very important things. Both the child poverty strategy and the Milburn review made clear the cost of fragmented services to some of the most vulnerable children and young people in this country, so getting this right really matters. As I have said, we have already allocated £63 million to supporting councils, and I will have more to say on that very shortly.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Zöe Franklin (Guildford) (LD): We Liberal Democrats support genuine devolution, because decisions are better made closer to the communities they affect, yet this Labour Government's approach has been top-down Whitehall diktat from the very start. Councils have been undermined, residents have been barely consulted, and communities have been left in the dark about the future of local services, all while councils continue to face significant financial pressure.

With the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) expected to saunter into No. 10 within days, I am deeply concerned that Members of this House, councils and residents have no clarity about the approach to local government reorganisation that he will take, whether the parameters will change, and whether future local elections will be cancelled yet again. What discussions has the Minister had with the right hon. Member for Makerfield about his plans for reorganisation, and will she commit to no further local elections being cancelled?

Alison McGovern: The Liberal Democrat spokesperson asks me what conversations I have had with my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield; I am afraid that they have been mainly about Everton and Liverpool football club. [HON. MEMBERS: "Resign!"] Indeed.

The work of this Government to secure devolution and reshape local government, so that we can grow our economy, build homes and serve our constituents properly, has been thought through carefully and is proceeding in line with the timetable. I am sure that all of us in this House, whatever our views, want that to succeed.

Mr Speaker: I call Perran Moon. Oh, he is not standing now; he has changed his mind. Are you standing up?

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab) *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: No. Make your mind up!

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for her answers. She will know that local government reorganisation is one side of the coin, and devolution is the other. In places like Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, access to bus franchising, the adult skills agenda and spatial planning is the real victory that we look for. When the announcement comes this week on the new local authority boundaries, will she be able to give any insight on when decisions about strategic authorities will be made? When might there be the first elections for those, so that we can access the devolved powers that we desperately want?

Alison McGovern: I thank my hon. Friend for his important question, especially given the state of public transport in many parts of this country. I will take his question as a request that I include certain things in the statement later this week.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I draw the Minister's attention to a poll conducted and published by YouGov? It shows that local government reform in Essex is really unpopular. What is more, the more people are questioned about it, the more unpopular it becomes. Why do we not have a referendum in Essex to find out whether we really want local government reform, instead of it just being imposed by politicians who think that they know better?

Alison McGovern: Obviously, like all politicians, I pay close attention to opinion polls.

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for her listening ear throughout this process. I know that she will make a bigger statement on Thursday, but while she is giving these matters consideration, may I make a last-ditch attempt to convince her to keep Burnley and Blackburn very separate? Will she prioritise devolution in Lancashire, so that we can have a mayor and enjoy the things that cities enjoy, such as cheaper buses and business investment?

Alison McGovern: I thank my hon. Friend for his representations. I cannot respond directly to them, but as ever, I keep the views of Members of this House under close watch.

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): In four days' time, we will mark exactly two years since I first explained to Ministers how much the people of Staffordshire Moorlands do not want to be part of a greater Stoke local authority, do not want devolution forced on them, and want their say on who makes decisions about what happens there. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), may I implore the Minister for a referendum? We do not want this imposed on us in north Staffordshire; we want to have our say.

Alison McGovern: I am sorry to disappoint experienced and knowledgeable hon. and right hon. Members, but having referenda is not part of the local government reorganisation process. It is very important that we hit the milestones in the timetable that we have set out.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab/Co-op): In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, several options are being put forward for local government reform, which could benefit Peterborough greatly. Will the Minister reassure us that we will get the announcement, whatever it is, sooner rather than later, so that we can prepare? Did she hear Opposition Members say that Labour MPs have been briefed the details of what is to come? That allegation has been made against me, but I put on record that I have not been briefed, and no information has been leaked to me. That is a scurrilous rumour. Will the Minister put on the record that no MPs anywhere know the outcome or result yet?

Mr Speaker: Be careful that they do not accuse you of protesting too much.

Alison McGovern: It is fair to say that I am champing at the bit to make this statement, and I thank you, Mr Speaker, for your support in helping us to do that. My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Andrew Pakes) has made his point clear.

Mr Speaker: To be clear for the record, there have been a lot of accusations that people have been briefed. I can assure the House that I know of no briefing—not even to me, although I had hoped to have one.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): The Liberal Democrat administration on Hertfordshire county council has made huge strides forward in improving special educational needs and disabilities provision. We were delighted when the Government lifted the improvement notice, which had been imposed when the Conservatives were running the council. Just as families are starting to feel the benefit, we are really worried that local government reorganisation could disrupt the delivery of SEND and social care provision. What support will be given to ensure that those essential services for the most vulnerable people will not be disrupted by local government reorganisation?

Alison McGovern: I thank the hon. Lady for her important and serious point. I have been working very closely with my colleagues in the Department for Education on this issue. A big change process is under way, and I would be happy to speak to the hon. Lady further about it.

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's reassurance that an announcement will be made this week. Two proposals have been put forward for reorganisation in Warwickshire; like my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Oliver Ryan), I put on record my support for the two-Warwickshire proposal, because it most accurately reflects how people consider services. Would she say that that the only people who seem to support the one-Warwickshire solution are the Reform administration in Warwickshire, which has failed to improve the situation regarding potholes, buses, SEND or children's services, and that people in my constituency would therefore really welcome elections taking place in accordance with the schedule?

Alison McGovern: I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution. She will understand that until we have made the announcement, there is little I can say in response to her point, but I will just say that councils deliver very important public services. We are introducing the local outcomes framework so that we can see transparently what councils deliver and what they do not.

Lewis Cocking (Bloxhorne) (Con): The Minister and I have had many exchanges on this topic, and she knows that I am focused on securing the best outcome for my constituents. We know that reorganisation in Hertfordshire is coming, but the uncertainty is not helping my residents or local councillors, so can the Minister confirm whether an option for Hertfordshire will be included in her announcement on Thursday? Can she also confirm whether MPs will be informed before any public announcement is made?

Alison McGovern: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the many exchanges we have had. I know that he just wants the best for his constituents, as we all do. It might help the House if I explain the process we go through. We provide Members of Parliament in affected areas with a short briefing before the announcement is made. That is done for all Members of Parliament; it is what has happened to date, and what I anticipate will happen as and when I am able to make the statement. We will be able to talk more openly once that decision is in the public domain.

Sean Woodcock (Banbury) (Lab): Does the Minister believe, as I do, that if local government reorganisation is done correctly, it has the potential not just to reshape local government so that it is fit for the 21st century, but to help us secure much-needed economic growth?

Alison McGovern: I thank my hon. Friend for that really important point. This is not just about constitutional niceties or the importance of councils to government in this country, crucial though they are; it is about having the right-sized authority to grow our towns and cities, and to give young people and everybody else in this country the opportunities they deserve.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): In a week's time, we will have a new, unelected Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Makerfield. Can the Minister confirm whether the right hon. Member supports this local government reorganisation, or is he going to reorganise the reorganisation?

Alison McGovern: Last time I checked, my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield had, in fact, been elected.

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): The Minister will know the strength of feeling in Newcastle-under-Lyme in support of a Newcastle-only unitary. Will she confirm that Members of this House have not been told about any proposed boundaries or confirmed plans? The idea that some members of the LGA have been notified of some confirmed proposals before this House beggars belief. Also, what steps will the Minister take to ensure that local identity, civic heritage and a sense of community will be protected? In my view, we should support local communities like mine in establishing town councils to do just that.

Alison McGovern: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I have set out the process by which this House will be updated on the decisions, but if my hon. Friend has evidence of anything else that he is concerned about, he may well want to write to me to share that information directly.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): In recent weeks in West Worcestershire, I have met local police and the police and crime commissioner; the police and crime commissioner is being abolished, and the police are being reorganised. I have met the local health commissioners; they are being reorganised, and Healthwatch is being abolished. I have met district councillors; they are being abolished, and their ability to make determinations on planning applications has been taken away. Can the Minister explain how any of this throwing everything up in the air is actually going to help my constituents, particularly the most vulnerable?

Alison McGovern: The approach we are taking is to put power in the hands of people and communities so that they can take decisions for themselves, because all the evidence is that if people with skin in the game take the decisions, we get better decisions, growth and better public services.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): To add to the list of my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire and Bedworth (Rachel Taylor), people who support a single unitary for Warwickshire include me as the MP for Rugby and the political parties at Rugby borough council and at Warwickshire county council. As the Minister considers her statement on Wednesday, could she give a little bit more thought to two important stakeholder groups in the new local government reorganisation world? One group is MPs—what role are we going to have when so much more power and responsibility is devolved? The other group is towns; we need to make sure that they have as much representation as possible. I know she has considered those things, and I would love to hear a little more about it.

Alison McGovern: I suggest to my hon. Friend that once I have actually made the announcement, perhaps we can have a chat about those things. As somebody who has had mayoral devolution in my area for more than a decade now, and who represents the great town of Birkenhead—recently shortlisted for town of culture—I have a lot of thoughts about this issue, which I will happily share with him.

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): Torbay council is the most deprived local authority in the south-west of England. I would welcome the Minister's assurances that rearranging the deckchairs with this local reorganisation will not detract from regeneration, which is a core driver for that local authority. The new Prime Minister is set to move No. 10 a further two hours away from the west of England. How will he be supporting the south-west?

Alison McGovern: I am not sure that all the hon. Gentleman's questions were central to the subject of this statement, but he makes an important point, which is: what is the objective here? The objective is to grow our economy, so that we can deal with deprivation, particularly in seaside and coastal places, and have better quality public services to support people. That is the objective, and that is what I think we will achieve.

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): I join you, Mr Speaker, and other Lancastrian MPs waiting in apprehension for the announcement on Thursday. Blackpool has put forward its proposal for four unitary councils in Lancashire, based on us achieving the best possible outcomes for people in Blackpool after losing £1.8 billion under the previous Government. I know the Minister will not be able to comment on the decisions until Thursday, but can she outline the situation with Lancashire and the mayoral pathway? We are falling so far behind Greater Manchester and Merseyside. We desperately need that investment today, so can we ensure that the train on that track keeps going?

Alison McGovern: As a fellow north-west MP and fan of Blackpool, I say to my hon. Friend that he is absolutely right. We need to stick to the timetable and get on with this, so that we can invest in Lancashire, in Blackpool and in everywhere else.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I would like to think that if this Minister were Secretary of State, we would not be in a situation where 23,000 people were signing an online petition protesting against the carve-up of the New Forest in this local government reorganisation. Can she tell me: is there any truth in the report in *The Times* on 18 June that the Secretary of State had overruled professional advice from civil servants in three separate Departments to impose a gerrymandered solution on Essex county council?

Alison McGovern: I am sorry to say that I have not seen that report in *The Times*, but I would be very happy to write the right hon. Gentleman with a response to his question.

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm that Ministers will be considering representations from councillors and MPs on the interim warding arrangements? There is some concern in Basingstoke and across North Hampshire that urban areas could be disadvantaged by having a smaller number of councillors, as has been proposed.

Alison McGovern: Yes, we will consider representations from all stakeholders through this process.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Most areas that will have local elections next year know what their local authority boundaries will look like, but residents of West Sussex are still completely in the dark. Those in, specifically, Bersted and Pagham are worried about being put into a coastal authority that risks being bankrupt on day one. When the Minister comes to the House on Thursday, will she lay out how a deficit of, potentially, £45 million will be plugged, and will she also rule out using one authority to pay for the deficit of the other?

Alison McGovern: I take the hon. Lady's question as a kind of pre-alert for what she would like to know on Thursday. That is helpful, and I thank her for it. Let me make the general point that local government finances are very challenging, and when a council cannot make its finances work, all of us in the country pay the price in the end.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): As a former councillor on Chesterfield borough council—and given the excellent record that Labour has had there over the last 15 years—I think it will be a shame when the borough council ceases to exist and we move towards unitary authority status, but I have never met someone in a unitary authority who thought it would be better if we returned to a two-tier system, so I think that ultimately we are on the right route with this approach. Can my hon. Friend confirm that when she reaches her conclusions—of which none of us Labour Members representing Derbyshire are currently aware—she will be sticking strictly to the criteria that the Government originally laid out?

Alison McGovern: Yes, I can confirm that. Let me add, as somebody whose area was reorganised in 1974, that there is yet to be a campaign to undo the creation of the Wirral.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Is it true that a statement was made in private to Labour councillors and activists in Essex at the weekend? I know this for a fact, because I was told by one of the Labour members who were there, but will the Minister confirm that it is true? Is she also aware that a YouGov poll has shown that, by 56% to 24%, the people of Essex do not want Labour's plans for local government reform? Let us have a referendum.

Alison McGovern: I am now aware of the opinion poll because the right hon. Member mentioned it to me a few moments ago, for which I am grateful. He has mentioned a meeting, which I certainly did not attend. I am sure that if he forwards the details, the Department will be able to look at them, but I certainly was not present at any such meeting.

Steve Race (Exeter) (Lab): Two-tier government may have worked in the past, but it is not working today, and it is certainly not working for cities like Exeter. We have a two-tier waste authority, and Devon county council is cutting homelessness funding while we are experiencing an acute homelessness issue in Exeter itself; I could mention many other areas as well. Will the Minister confirm that we will be moving ahead with unitary local government across the country, including Devon and Exeter—I realise that she will not be able to comment on the specifics of any proposal—in order to ensure that cities like Exeter can grow economically, and that local government does serve local people?

Alison McGovern: As I mentioned earlier, there is evidence from the Milburn review of child poverty that fragmented services are very bad for vulnerable people living in poverty. There are other examples as well, and I have heard from my hon. Friend about his worries for his city. Dealing with that is the real purpose behind these reforms.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Before the hon. Lady makes her statement on Thursday, will she, when reflecting on the arrangement in Wiltshire that would embrace Wessex—although we have been told that that is not the Government's view—address the prevailing concern that the people of rural Wiltshire will be considerably worse off without having the opportunity to embrace that mayoral region, to the tune of £240 per head? In the context of the wider reduced funding for rural England, those people need reassurance from the Government that they understand the shortfall.

Alison McGovern: Let me see if I have understood the right hon. Gentleman's question. The fair funding review was put in place to reconnect funding with need. We think that we have done so in a way that meets the needs of nine tenths of councils now, which is much better than it was before. We take into account the additional costs of providing services for rural areas, but when it comes to poverty and deprivation, improvements in data now allow us to identify much more closely pockets of poverty that are surrounded by greater wealth. I hope that we will be able to do that much better for his constituents in the future.

Ian Sollom (St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire) (LD): The Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor is one of the Government's flagship regional growth priorities, with

a ministerial champion in Lord Vallance to ensure joined-up delivery, yet if reports that option D is being taken forward for Cambridgeshire are correct, the Government will be choosing a structure with no realistic path to viability, right at the start of that corridor. Will the Minister confirm what assessment has been made of option D's viability within the corridor, and whether Lord Vallance was consulted before the decision?

Alison McGovern: There is obviously a limit to what I can say, given that the decision will be reported to Parliament later in the week. Perhaps we can come back to this issue then, but I am very happy to say that I have met with Lord Vallance and work very closely with him.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): The Government's proposed carve-up of Hampshire ignores their preset criteria, has no mandate and splits up East Hampshire. The benefits, if there are any, will come way off in the future, whereas the costs and the disruption happen now. Does the Minister think that the advent of a new Prime Minister is a good moment to stop in its tracks something that would otherwise make his fiscal task harder?

Alison McGovern: I do not, because councils have worked extremely hard to follow the timetable that we have set out, and I think it would be a mistake to interrupt that. Councils' costs have spiked terribly in recent years because of central Government failure. We are putting that right.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): As the right hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) mentioned, there is a very wild rumour in Wessex that a Labour MP has undermined the four councils against the will of the councils, which have been democratically elected, and without discussing it with any of the MPs. Apparently, the Wessex combined authority, which was ready to go, is not happening. Is the Minister able to deny this rumour today, so that I can reassure my councils?

Alison McGovern: I could spend all my time at this Dispatch Box confirming or denying rumours, but I think I would be here until Thursday if I did that. I am sure that we will have further interactions when I make the statement shortly.

David Reed (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): In Devon, local government reorganisation is taking up a great deal of bandwidth and detracting from what councils should be doing. My constituents want to know whether the announcement on Thursday will hold beyond the week. The Minister has avoided this question from multiple Members today: does the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham)—the future Prime Minister—agree with the proposed timelines and delivery for local government reorganisation in Devon?

Alison McGovern: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I am not here to answer questions on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham). We have set out a clear timetable for local government reorganisation, and we should all stick to it, because that is the best way to help councils to get on with their jobs.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): My residents in Bicester and Woodstock are deeply concerned by rumours that the Cherwell and West Oxfordshire district councils will be hollowed out in order to create a Greater Oxford combined authority at the behest of Labour councillors in that city. I know that the Minister will not respond directly to that point, so I ask her to respond to this: in Oxfordshire, is it true, as she just said to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins), that the original criteria set out by the Government will be followed? Is it true, as she has said in response to the hon. Member for Banbury (Sean Woodcock), that growth will be a priority in the decisions made by the Government?

Alison McGovern: As the hon. Member has indicated, we have set out a process and are sticking to it.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): Nobody asked for this, and the lack of a mandate has been compounded by councils like Rutland county council refusing to engage with any opposition councillors. I want to make it clear that the responses of the Lib Dem-run Rutland county council do not represent the views of Rutlanders or indeed the entire council; that in Leicestershire, we do not want the Leicester city land grab; and that rural Lincolnshire and Stamford do not want to be run by urban Lincoln. Will the Minister consider delaying the process to make sure that all councils have engaged with all councillors? They might be telling her that they are doing so, but they are certainly not.

Alison McGovern: The hon. Lady has made her points very clear and they are on the record. The one thing that I do not want to do is delay, because the longer this takes, the less our ability to get on with the problems that councils face in looking after our children and our older people and in growing our economy.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): There are a number of options on the table for Kent, and no matter which one the Minister chooses, we will need to do some tidying up of ward and division boundaries, because there are vast disparities between the number of electors and some of the current county council boundaries. Will that be announced alongside the option chosen on Thursday, and if not, when will that information be given?

Alison McGovern: I will take away that point and endeavour to give the hon. Gentleman that information as soon as we can.

Business of the House

4.15 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Alan Campbell): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a short statement to provide an update on this week's business. The business for tomorrow is now:

TUESDAY 14 JULY—Remaining stages of the Public Office (Accountability) Bill, followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill.

Members who are considering tabling amendments to the Public Office (Accountability) Bill should consult the Public Bill Office as soon as possible. The Government will ensure that the text of our new amendments is made available to members in the Vote Office straightaway.

The business for the remainder of the week is unchanged:

WEDNESDAY 15 JULY—Opposition day, third allotted day. Debate on a motion in the name of the official Opposition, subject to be announced, followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to national security.

THURSDAY 16 JULY—The Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

The House will rise for the summer recess at the conclusion of business on Thursday 16 July and return on Tuesday 1 September. I will make a further business statement on Thursday.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Leader of the House.

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): I cannot come to the Dispatch Box without registering my sadness, and I am sure that of everyone across this House, at the dreadful news about Ann Widdecombe. I am sure that we will talk about this later, but I just wanted to start with that.

The Leader of the House is a good and honourable man, and he will be deeply embarrassed by this fiasco of a procedure today. It is a gross breach of parliamentary protocol and timing to bring a Bill, let alone a Bill of this sensitivity and magnitude, to the House on this very abbreviated notice. Of course, there is concern across the House about the victims of the Hillsborough disaster and their families, but these matters must be properly debated in due season. To do so, with new amendments that have not even yet been published, on no notice and without the ability of Members to amend those amendments or to comment until now, is a further breach.

Why has this happened? It is because the outgoing Prime Minister is desperate to preserve what he sees as a legacy. It is a tragedy that he should be so focused solely on his own political future, such as it is, and I think it is a pity that he has taken this opportunity to sideswipe the incoming Prime Minister, a man who arrives with no scrutiny and no accountability to this House.

I want to raise a few key points. Of course, it is understood that this legislation was being discussed in the Intelligence and Security Committee. It is also understood that this legislation and its implications were being discussed with our Five Eyes allies, with our armed forces, and with the USA in particular. I know that this abbreviation of protocol will attract the attention of the Lords when it arrives in their House.

Why has this Bill been brought forward now, on such an expedited basis? What has changed, and what of substance has caused the Government to want to abbreviate the consideration of these very delicate matters on such a timetable? Have our international partners been consulted on this change in procedure? Have the agencies been consulted? Above all, why, after seven months of grieving families being concerned about its passage, is the Bill suddenly now—as it may appear, with little or no change—being brought before this House?

Sir Alan Campbell: I agree with the shadow Leader of the House about the tragedy of Ann Widdecombe and I echo his words.

I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman's description of the run-up to this change of business and the fact that the Bill will come before us tomorrow. This is an important Bill and we have been signalling for some time that it is coming—as he knows, because we have had a dialogue about it. But only today have I been able to confirm it, as this has been the earliest opportunity, Mr Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman talks about amendments. A number of amendments to the Bill have been laid for a long time. The Government have brought forward further amendments and they are in the Vote Office. I regret that there is not a greater length of time for colleagues to scrutinise them, but they are available and I am sure there will be a way of facilitating a full debate tomorrow.

There has been no abbreviation of the process—it is a sitting programme motion, as was agreed by the House after Second Reading. I want to assure the House that, as will no doubt come out in the debate, the agencies and the families have been central to the process, and that is why we have taken time to get it right. That is why it has been delayed, but it is an important Bill that colleagues on both sides of the House will want to see before the summer recess. That is what we are facilitating.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Leader of the House for updating us on tomorrow's business, and for the fact that this really important Bill is coming back to the House, but it does raise questions about the Representation of the People Bill, which has been delayed. This is a big Bill that includes key major reforms: enfranchising so many young people when trust in politics is at an all-time low; and provisions on tightening financial

donations—it is fair to say that donations have been in the news for the past few weeks. Will he please ensure that the Bill will come back swiftly after the summer recess?

Sir Alan Campbell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the Representation of the People Bill is an important Bill. I will announce in due course when it will return to this House, but it will be returning to this House.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Bromborough) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for taking this action. I appreciate that these are not ideal circumstances, but much about the passage of the Bill has been less than ideal. Does he share my hope that tomorrow's debate will be about the substance of the Bill and the important amendments, rather than the process?

Sir Alan Campbell: I share my hon. Friend's hope. This is an important Bill and an important matter. It is, of course, about the victims of Hillsborough and their families, and the campaign that they have needed to wage for far too long, but it is also of profound importance to public service and how we do business in our country. That is why the Bill is of such importance.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House confirm that, given that the other place is sitting next week, there is nothing to stop him tabling a business statement to enable this House to sit next week? Given the enormity of the events happening in the Government next week, does he not think that would be a good idea?

Mr Speaker: Such a move would also require the agreement of the House and, from colleagues' faces, I am not sure it is quite ready.

Sir Alan Campbell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just announced the recess dates. There are no plans to change the dates on which the House is sitting. As you have alluded to, Mr Speaker, recess dates are agreed by the House in advance to give colleagues certainty about parliamentary business. Just to reassure the House, the work of the Government will continue through the recess.

Death of Ann Widdecombe

Mr Speaker: Before we come to the statement, I must advise the House that the case relating to Ann Widdecombe's death is not yet sub judice, as charges have not been brought. However, a live criminal investigation is ongoing and Members should take care not to say anything in this House that might prejudice a future trial. I therefore urge Members to avoid speculating on the guilt or innocence of any person, the identity of the person who has been arrested, or the motive for the attack. Members may wish to discuss the general arrangements for the security and safety of politicians and other connected matters, but they should avoid discussing the detail of individual Members' security arrangements.

4.24 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the death of Ann Widdecombe. It is with great sadness that I say those words. My thoughts today are with her family, her friends and all those who loved her.

Ann Widdecombe dedicated her life to politics and public service. She was a fixture of our political life for nearly 40 years. She brought conviction to our politics, grounded in her profound Catholic faith. She was forthright in her opinions and argued courageously for the things she believed in. But, perhaps most of all, she brought an inimitable style to politics. She was forthright and fearless. As Lord Howard of Lympne can attest, she had a memorable turn of phrase. And she was joyful: she thought seriously about ideas but did not take herself too seriously, and that allowed her to reach beyond this place and charm the country at large. She was one of those rare politicians who was bigger than politics.

There have been so many moving tributes in the past few days, reflecting Ann's impact both within this place and beyond politics. But I think her outlook on life is best summed up by Ann herself. Sitting on Graham Norton's sofa, she said:

"We get one go this side of eternity—one go. Life is not a dress rehearsal. You take opportunities that you like, and you go for it."

Ann took her opportunities. She was the proud MP for Maidstone for 23 years—a champion of her constituents. She served the country in government, as Minister for employment and then Minister for prisons. She took politics out of these ancient walls and became a bona fide TV star. Her contribution to our politics and national life will never be forgotten.

On Wednesday, Ann Widdecombe was murdered in her home. The circumstances of her death are extremely distressing. Counter Terrorism Policing has now taken the lead in the investigation. As Laurence Taylor, the head of national Counter Terrorism Policing has said:

"We now have new information and evidence that means Counter Terrorism Policing is leading the investigation... We are pursuing multiple lines of inquiry to establish the motivation for this attack."

The police now have a suspect in custody: a 28-year-old white British man. I can confirm to the House that this man was not known to Prevent. The police have cautioned against speculating about the case. That is the right

thing to do for Ann's family and friends. It is also vital that the police are given the space they need to carry out their work.

For now, what matters most is supporting the investigation, so that we can see justice delivered for Ann and all who loved her. I urge anyone, with any information at all, to come forward immediately.

I know this raises questions about the security of those in public life. I will not be the only one in the Chamber also thinking of two other beloved Members of this House:

Jo Cox and Sir David Amess. Politics is a calling for those of us here, but it should not be a dangerous one. It is incumbent on the House and the Government to work together to protect those who choose to serve. The Home Office and the police work closely with the Parliamentary Security Department to provide practical advice and support directly to MPs. But we must always be vigilant and respond to changing threats.

Security measures are kept under constant review to ensure that MPs can carry out their duties safely. The police intend to issue guidance to MPs soon, and they will be contacting parliamentarians in their constituencies to offer support. I also recently commissioned the former Lord Chancellor, Sir Robert Buckland, to review the lessons from Sir David Amess's murder, including into required improvements to security for MPs working in their constituencies.

I recognise the particular concern that the Reform UK party will feel today, and of course Nigel Farage, the party's leader. I am happy to offer a meeting for Mr Farage with the chair of RAVEC—the Royal and VIP Executive Committee—the independent body within the Home Office that manages the security of those in public life. I will also be looking at what security guidance can be provided to former Members of Parliament, which I hope to work with you on, Mr Speaker, as well as to those who serve a party outside of this place.

Today is a dark day in our political life, but we must also use it as an opportunity to celebrate Ann Widdecombe's memory. She was a unique figure in our politics: a distinctive and devoted public servant, the likes of whom we will rarely, if ever, see again. Ann had a profound faith. Her journey in this life has ended too soon, but may she now rest in eternal peace. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

4.29 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for advance sight of her statement. I start by offering my deepest condolences to Ann's family and friends. She will be terribly missed.

Ann sat as the Conservative MP for Maidstone for nearly a quarter of a century, and in the European Parliament for the Brexit party. She served in government and in opposition, including as shadow Home Secretary. She always fearlessly spoke her mind. She did not worry about whether her opinion would be popular or fashionable; she always said exactly what she believed and exactly what she thought. Her integrity and her fortitude were unmatched.

I first met Ann 29 years ago at a university debate, where we were speaking on opposite sides. I was a callow 21-year-old student; she had just left government and was at the height of her powers. I remember starting my speech by asking her to treat me more gently than she had recently treated Michael Howard. Needless to say, I was put very firmly in my place.

Ann was also a much-loved celebrity, with memorable appearances on “Celebrity Big Brother” and “Strictly Come Dancing”, where she was whirled around by Anton Du Beke. We will all remember Ann fondly as a public figure who was always formidable, always charming and always entertaining.

As we discuss this appalling murder, we should heed the words of Devon and Cornwall Assistant Chief Constable Matt Longman, who said over the weekend:

“We are aware of online and public speculation, particularly with regards to motive... I urge people not to share or engage with that speculation. It’s unhelpful”

and distressing to Ann’s friends and family, and is particularly harmful to the police’s investigation. Criminal barrister Dennis Kavanagh has also pointed out that speculation makes the police’s job harder and, in some cases, could even prejudice a trial. I urge everyone debating this issue to keep that in mind.

It has just been confirmed by the Home Secretary that counter-terrorism police are now leading the murder investigation. In order to help to avoid that speculation, can the Home Secretary properly share any further information about this matter without prejudicing the investigation? I thank the police for releasing the information they have so far, including about the identity of the suspect. It is always important to release as much information as possible in the interests of transparency and to avoid misinformation filling the void, as Jonathan Hall KC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, has said previously.

I will turn now to threats against those in public life. Any threats against MPs, who have been democratically elected to represent their constituents, or against others in public life, should be taken extremely seriously. In the past 10 years, two MPs—Jo Cox and Sir David Amess—have been murdered, and now a former MP has been murdered, too. The threat is clearly real. I remember when, in 2017, terrorist Khalid Masood drove a car into pedestrians along Westminster bridge, injuring more than 50 people, four of them fatally, and then ran into New Palace Yard—just yards from where we sit in this Chamber—where he fatally stabbed PC Keith Palmer. That was also an attack on democracy itself.

Mr Speaker, I would like to thank you personally for all the work you are doing to protect MPs and those in public life. As the Speaker of the House of Commons, I know that you have made the safety and protection of those in public life your highest priority, and I would like to thank you for that. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

We must redouble our efforts to ensure that public political figures—both those who are MPs and those, like Ann, who are not—always receive the proportionate protection that they need. I would be grateful if the Home Secretary could confirm that she will review all the arrangements with that objective in mind.

I believe that, in this country, we should be able to debate each other robustly on important issues, but that we should also speak to each other in a way that is civil

and respectful. Of course, nothing excuses violent attacks on public figures, but we should all also set an example of civility and calm, and not inflame matters.

We need people to step up and become MPs and to speak in the public square. Debate and disagreement are what make our country great. Ann Widdecombe exemplified that every minute of her life, and I pay tribute to her. I know that we will all remember Ann forever.

Shabana Mahmood: I thank the shadow Home Secretary for his remarks and memories of Ann Widdecombe and for his questions. He asked about the new information that has come to light and the progress on the Counter Terrorism Policing investigation. A statement has been put out by Counter Terrorism Policing. I believe it has been published online, but I will make sure that it is placed in the Library of the House as well. The main points to draw out from it are, as I said in my statement, the fact that new information and evidence means that Counter Terrorism Policing is now leading the investigation and pursuing multiple lines of inquiry in order to establish the motivation behind the attack. As soon as more information is available that can be shared without compromising any future trial, it will be shared.

We take very seriously, as does Counter Terrorism Policing, the learnings from the summer of 2024. We definitely want to heed the call of Jonathan Hall KC and others about the timely release of information without compromising the ability to bring someone to justice, which is the main aim when such a horror of an attack happens.

I would like to echo the shadow Home Secretary’s remarks to you, Mr Speaker, and thank you personally for all your efforts to maintain the safety and security of parliamentarians. I know that it is something that you personally worry about and take a deep interest in.

Given the fast-moving nature of this investigation, I do not want to say anything here that will prejudice the direction of travel. However, this murder raises a question about the security arrangements for not only sitting Members of Parliament but those who have left this place but nevertheless retain a public profile as a result of their political party membership or their political activities. Also, given the range of new political parties that are contesting the political and democratic space, there are questions about those who are not represented at all here in the House of Commons. To reassure you, Mr Speaker, I will look at those arrangements very closely and seek to work with you directly. My officials will engage with parties across the House and those outside of it to make sure that whatever changes are made are done so in a manner that covers the multiple range of threats that we see.

There has been a step change in the security of parliamentarians over the last few years, but I think that that is a reflection of the multi-layered threats that our democracy faces and that active individuals in that democracy face. This is not something that we can ever take for granted or believe to be settled; it is something that we have to review continually, which we do. New questions have been raised, and I will make it my personal business to answer them. I will update the House in due course.

Mr Speaker: I call the Mother of the House.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Ind): The Home Secretary will be aware of how important it is to make sure that Members of this House get the protection and defence that they need. At one point, I got as much abuse and as many threats of violence as all the other women MPs put together, so it is important that we take this issue seriously. We should recognise—I can speak to this, because of my years in the House—that the situation has gotten much, much worse with the rise of online activity. We need to find a way to make online companies more accountable for the abuse and threats of violence that they allow on their platforms. We need to make them aware of the importance of protecting Members of Parliament.

Shabana Mahmood: Given the sheer range of threats that have been made to the Mother of the House personally, it is a testament to her personal bravery that she has continued to be an active parliamentarian, but it should not take such levels of bravery just to be able to represent the people of your constituency. She is right that we must always ensure that our security arrangements can keep pace with the changing nature of threats. Let me assure the Mother of the House that the Government will do that. We work closely with the Parliamentary Security Department to ensure that that is the case so that all Members can make their contributions just as effectively and for just as long as she has.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): The news about Ann Widdecombe is shocking and deeply distressing. My thoughts are with her family, including her nephew, the Rev. Roger Widdecombe—my constituent—and his wife Hannah, who lead the congregation at St Paul's church in Cheltenham. Her death is all the more tragic given what we now know about the upsetting and disturbing circumstances.

Ann Widdecombe was a conviction politician, and also an entertainer. Many did not agree with her views—including me, particularly when she was briefly my Member of the European Parliament—but the style in which she put those views was compelling and captured the attention of the nation, just as her dance moves did. They were deeply held beliefs. She was a passionate public servant who was never afraid to challenge those in power—might I briefly speculate, a strong liberal inclination to challenge power from a strong Conservative politician?

I pay tribute to the police for their rapid response in this case. I also pay tribute to you, Mr Speaker, for the way in which your office gives security support to MPs. It is important that we can do our jobs without fear, intimidation or worse. It is horrifying that three politicians have been murdered in this country in the past decade. Clearly, there is more work to be done.

Might the Government support some amendments to the upcoming Representation of the People Bill to impose a duty on the Electoral Commission to provide more guidance on safety for politicians? Will the Home Office consider supporting measures so that politicians' safety can be improved?

Finally, some alarming allegations were made on the weekend by the Reform home affairs spokesperson Zia Yusuf. If they are true, they are extremely concerning—

but, given his record, many of us have doubts. I am certain that the Government and the House authorities, including you, Mr Speaker, are taking seriously the duty of care to Members from all parties in the House. For the sake of the record, perhaps the Home Secretary can confirm that that remains the case.

Shabana Mahmood: I thank the hon. Member for his contribution. He raised three specific issues. I am happy to discuss amendments to the Representation of the People Bill with him. He knows that the Home Office is not the lead Department on that Bill, but I am happy to have a discussion about any additional legislative measures that might be needed. Of course, the Electoral Commission has its own work to do, and it might be better for duties to be placed elsewhere, but, as I said, I will happily discuss that with him.

Equally, on whether any further obligations or changes of policy in respect of the Home Office, or indeed the Parliamentary Security Department, are necessary, I am happy to engage with the hon. Member and other Members across the House.

I do not wish to speak for you, Mr Speaker, but I think that all of us who are Members can attest to the fact that we are treated equally in this place by the Speaker and for the purposes of the Parliamentary Security Department when it comes to our safety on the estate and in our constituencies. That position is shared by the Government.

There is equal treatment for all in work that we do on security for Members of Parliament. Specific work is undertaken by RAVEC—the executive committee for the protection of royalty and public figures—which is the independent body in the Home Office that looks at security arrangements for some of those in public life. That work is also fiercely independent. It has been the subject of legal proceedings previously, and I have always maintained the independence of that process, which is based on risk assessment and risk management.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Just for the record, the security of every Member of Parliament is equal to me, and I assure you that there is no difference between Members. When things are brought to my attention, I do not put out there what is happening and what has been done, because we do not discuss security. But I reassure everybody that when something is mentioned to me, it is passed on to the security people to deal with. I am sorry that some people, unfortunately, do not think that I do that.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I join the Home Secretary in paying my respects and condolences to the family of Ann Widdecombe. We might not have agreed politically, but I always greatly admired and respected her outspokenness, her fearlessness and her ability not to take herself too seriously. She was one of a kind, of the like that, frankly, we do not make any more. I think we can all agree on that. I hope that, at moments like this, we can come together across the House to talk about these issues with one voice. May I also place on record my thanks to you, Mr Speaker, for your leadership, in all that you have done over many years, in making sure we are all kept safe and secure?

Does the Home Secretary agree, though, that this is about not just our security and our safety but reducing the level of threat? Debate in this country is now highly politicised, highly polarised and highly personalised, which is bringing more and more threats on to all of us. Does she agree that we must do more to tackle, with urgency, the online algorithms and business models that heighten polarisation and hate towards those in public life?

Shabana Mahmood: My right hon. Friend is right to say that the climate in which we are operating in our national politics is unlike any that most of us have seen. Those of us who have been around for a while can see the big change that has occurred over the last decade or so. We must do more, as a Government and as a society, to know exactly what the boundaries are between passionate, contested, fierce debate of the kind that Ann Widdecombe herself engaged in, and behaviour that spills into threats and harassment of the kind that is designed to drive people out of public life. Getting that balance right is absolutely crucial. It is clear that there is more work for the Government to do, and there is more work to do across society, which includes social media platforms taking greater responsibility for the kinds of behaviours that are promoted on their platforms. I assure my right hon. Friend that I will be discussing with colleagues across Government how to ensure we are responding to all those challenges.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): Like many on this side of the House, I have very fond memories of Ann. She made the effort to travel to Staffordshire Moorlands—not many people do; we are quite isolated—[*Interruption.*] Yes, they come to Alton Towers—the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jodge) is quite right. But Ann came to Consall Hall Gardens, as it was then, to do a fundraising dinner for me, and she delivered a tour de force, which I suspect the then Prime Minister, now the noble Lord Cameron, might not have entirely approved of. My association was totally enraptured, however, and thought it was the most wonderful event. It is still fondly remembered in the association, not least because Ann told me I had to take off my heels because it would not be appropriate to stand too tall next to her in the photographs.

May I also thank Staffordshire police for contacting me this weekend and making a visit to my home to review my security arrangements? I know that police forces across the country will be doing that and I am grateful to them for taking that time. May I ask the Home Secretary to comment on what might happen in the longer term around the Prevent duty? She will know that the Home Affairs Committee produced a report on new forms of radicalisation and extremism, with some recommendations that, we hope, might help law enforcement and others to find those who have a tendency towards violence. Will the Home Secretary consider that in the longer term?

Shabana Mahmood: The right hon. Lady makes an important point on the consequences for the Prevent duty of the changing nature of the threat. It is essential that we retain a deradicalisation programme that is

focused on ideology, but as she and those who are experts in these matters know, the range of threats and the links between ideology, mixed ideology, occasional ideology, mental health and other issues ask a bigger question about how the Prevent strategy will work in the future and how we deal with the threats that fall outside of that through wider and other societal programmes. I will look at the recommendations, which I will discuss with her Committee when I appear before it, I hope, very soon.

Mr Speaker: I call John Slinger, a member of the Speaker's Conference on the security of candidates, MPs and elections.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): I send my deepest sympathies and condolences to the friends and family of Ann Widdecombe, and I extend that to her former colleagues from the Conservative party and Reform UK, for whom I know this must be a very difficult and sad time. Mr Speaker, you chose the security of MPs, candidates and elections to be the subject of the Speaker's Conference this Parliament. We have done good work in the Speaker's Conference, but there is much more to be done, as I am sure we can all agree. Will the Home Secretary confirm that she will work closely with you, Mr Speaker, the parliamentary security department and all others who care about protecting our democracy from the threats that sadly are growing?

Shabana Mahmood: I absolutely give that assurance to my hon. Friend. I will pick up discussions with Mr Speaker and others on how we think about security for those who are no longer Members of this place, and the specific new circumstances that are raised by Ann Widdecombe's murder. I am happy to work across parties, across this House and with the Speaker's Conference.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): We are all reeling with shock, sadness and anguish at the loss of our Ann, and also the manner in which she has been taken from us. She was a colossus in public and political life—a legend, adored and loved by millions and millions of people, including my own late mother, who spoke very warmly of Ann.

Ann was a remarkable lady. She had an incredible work ethic: she would think nothing of going the length and breadth of the country to speak at rallies. She was an incredible orator, who always spoke without notes—absolutely remarkable. The Home Secretary touched on Ann's philosophy of life: she viewed life as not being a dress rehearsal—you grasp every opportunity and you go for it, as far as possible.

In relation to her political career in this House, I checked earlier and in 23 years Ann made over 8,000 contributions in this place, including some remarkably witty interventions. When an hon. Member said that she should disappear with her broomstick, she immediately replied that she had her broomstick and she would cast a spell over him. That was her nature. Likewise, her media career was also remarkable: she was an agony aunt on two programmes, a most deserving semi-finalist in "Strictly Come Dancing" and appeared on "Celebrity Big Brother". She was an incredible panto performer, who was adored by so many.

[Richard Tice]

Ann's conviction, her passion and her advocacy for free speech were to be commended. I had the honour of working with her for the past seven years. Despite being a foot taller than her, I somehow always found myself looking up to her. When she phoned, I always stood up on my toes: incoming—beware! That was Ann. We will miss her dearly. Also, the Scottish whisky industry has lost a very discerning customer. Maybe there could be a limited edition of Widders whisky, where the tasting notes may reflect unique, unforgettable flavours, a fiery, spicy series of tones, but a blend to be treasured to eternity? May she rest in peace.

Will the Home Secretary ensure that the counter-terrorism unit keeps us updated as regularly as possible? We all want our police forces to do brilliantly, but when considering motivation when giving us early updates, would it be wise to keep things open ended, as opposed to ruling out motives too quickly that may then end up being ruled back in?

Shabana Mahmood: The hon. Gentleman has made a very moving and affecting tribute to Ann Widdecombe. On Widders whisky, as a teetotal Muslim, I would never be able to partake of such a drink, but if there were a non-alcoholic version available I would happily imbibe.

We will ensure that, as and when it is possible to share more information about the circumstances of the murder and the motivation, that is done in the appropriate way. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that at no point has anything been taken off the table in terms of the investigation. It is a live investigation and it is not unusual that in a fast-paced investigation, more information comes to light that changes the nature or the character of what the police are dealing with. I am reassured that Devon and Cornwall police have been working closely with Counter Terrorism Policing, and as soon as the additional information was made available, Counter Terrorism Policing took over, as is appropriate and the right thing to do.

Catherine Fookes (Monmouthshire) (Lab): I share the sentiments that have already been expressed and send my deepest condolences to the family and friends of Ann Widdecombe. Of course, security is a huge issue to all of us in this Chamber, and I am sure that I was not the only one this weekend who went about my business in the constituency looking over my shoulder more than I normally would. It is terrible that this is the third Member of Parliament or ex-Member of Parliament to have been murdered—it should not be like this. While I thank Mr Speaker for everything he is doing, and I have already heard from my Operation Bridger contact this morning, who I was delighted to have heard from, about my security and if everything is okay, it does seem that security fobs and security in our houses are not enough. What more can the Home Secretary do to work with the Parliamentary Security Department and with Mr Speaker to ensure that our security is not undermined?

Shabana Mahmood: We would not, of course, ever comment on the specific nature of the arrangements made for the security of Members of Parliament, either here on the estate or in their homes or constituencies. However, let me assure my hon. Friend that a number of

measures are taken. For local policing, as well as working with the Parliamentary Security Department, there is an offer for all Members of Parliament, and there are specific risk assessments when there is something of concern relating to a particular individual. Let me reassure her that I think those arrangements are comprehensive; however, we should always ask ourselves whether they are enough and whether they are responding to the changing nature of threats or the spike in threat activity that we sometimes see. I assure her that I will of course be working closely with the Parliamentary Security Department and policing more broadly to ensure that these arrangements are as tight, robust and comprehensive as they need to be.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the House that the fact that I have to chair a meeting in a few minutes' time prevents me from staying, as I would wish to do, to the end of the statement?

When I went up as an undergraduate to Oxford in late 1970 and joined the university Conservative association, there were two outstanding figures a year ahead of me in that august body: one was Ann Widdecombe and the other was Nicolas Turner. A few years later, in February 1980, Ann Widdecombe and I shared a taxi to the funeral of Nicolas Turner, who had heroically sacrificed his life in an attempt to rescue his young daughter Alice—it was a double funeral—who had been swept into the sea by a freak wave. Ann was always there when her friends needed support and, on a lighter note, she was always there ready to bring her friends back down to earth.

When Ann was elected in 1987 for the first time, and I happened to be moving flats, I gifted her a relatively new washing machine that was now surplus to my requirements. For several years after she became an MP, she used to invite me once a year, almost like clockwork, to have lunch with her in this place. I naturally assumed that it was that she wished to imbibe the wisdom of my political advice. It was only by accident when I suggested that to her and how flattered I was that she revealed the truth, saying, "Oh no, Julian—this is rent for the washing machine!"

Mr Speaker will certainly remember that in 2008 to 2009, this House spent a lot of time taking steps to ensure that MPs' home addresses did not, in future, have to be revealed either in answer to freedom of information requests or on ballot papers and notices of nomination. It therefore comes as a bit of a shock to me to read in one of the reports today that Ann had—it may turn out to be complete coincidence—featured in her home on a programme on television extensively only six days before she died. The report said that the name of the home had been obscured, but software is available so that if someone puts up a picture of a place, particularly if they know the general area, it will identify the address. Let me please appeal to Members and ex-Members from whatever political party: do not throw away the gains we made, and whatever else you do, keep your home addresses as private as you possibly can.

Shabana Mahmood: The right hon. Gentleman makes wise points about the safety of MPs' home addresses, and in my work alongside Mr Speaker on lessons to be learned from the circumstances of Ann's murder, I will ensure that we consider the privacy and security of home addresses.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I join the many heartfelt tributes paid to Ann Widdecombe by Members across the House. I did not know her personally, but before I came to this place there were many names I always came across, and hers was definitely one of them. May her gentle soul rest in peace.

Earlier this afternoon, I spoke to a group of students who were completing work experience and shadowing. One young girl asked me, "What are the downsides, and what do you not like about this role?" To be honest, it pained me to be honest and to say, "The death threats, and the abuse you get just because you are doing something you love and enjoy," and we must be honest about the real-life threats faced by parliamentarians across the House, just for doing the job they enjoy.

Will the Home Secretary confirm that it is good that counter-terrorism police are leading the investigation, and that they have all the necessary resources they need to carry out a full and thorough investigation? They will be dealing with many competing demands in our ever unstable world. Will she also look at the area mentioned by the Mother of House, namely misinformation that is spread online? I will declare an interest as I sit on the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission and we have looked at that area.

I add my tributes and thanks to Mr Speaker for his work on that Committee and the Speaker's Conference. Whenever I have raised issues, the parliamentary liaison and investigation team have taken them seriously, which I thank them for, and it is important that we do not deter people from standing for public office.

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is right that we must ensure that people are not either driven out of politics or put off entering political life at all. It is incumbent on us all to work together to ensure that whenever we are asked about the downsides of public life, we are able to give a positive view, because that is the truth, rather than where we are today.

I assure my hon. Friend that Counter Terrorism Policing has the resources it needs. I had an extensive discussion and briefing from the head of national Counter Terrorism Policing, and I will be kept updated on its progress. If it needs any more from us at the Home Office, we stand ready to offer greater assistance, but I am assured that at the moment it has everything it needs.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Friday was a funny day. I heard the news very early in the morning that Ann had died, and I was utterly surprised about that because she had seemed perfectly fit the last time I saw her, so I gave my condolences and spoke about it on the radio. Sadly, later that day, just after lunch, I discovered that it was not just sad but a tragedy—a tragedy that a phenomenal woman, and a former Member of this House, should have been murdered in her own home for reasons we know not what.

The news allowed me to think back to this woman who was a force of nature. She was impossible to argue with, because she never accepted that she was losing the argument, until finally she was able to turn it 180 degrees and make you feel guilty that you had even dared to argue with her. A particular memory is that during the Maastricht debates, when, I have to confess, I and one

or two others here were deeply rebellious, Ann lectured me from the Dispatch Box—she was in government—about how I should support the Maastricht treaty and the European Union, which rather worried me. It is rather ironic that she went over to Reform. I thought to myself, "Now there's somebody who takes collective responsibility more seriously than she even had to." It was rather remarkable.

Ann was a remarkable woman in many, many ways. I got to know her during shadow Cabinet, when we would debate and argue. She argued as robustly in shadow Cabinet as she did across the Dispatch Box. Whether you were Labour or Conservative, if you disagreed with her, you were the enemy—you got used to it. It was phenomenal, because she was so certain about the way that she was.

Ann embodied something else: the passion that is necessary for us in this Chamber to make our arguments without the fear of any other person doing something to us. Another thing she embodied, and completely demonstrated, was our unique responsibility to our constituents and the nature of the personal contact we make with them, which I do not think is replicated almost anywhere else. We go into their homes. I do not ask for security when I go into someone's home. We go to see them if they are too ill to come and see us. We all do that, and we do not want to lose it. We do not want the epitaph of her terrible murder to be that we withdrew from the nature of who we are and what makes this place so great.

We need to reiterate, and the Government and the Home Secretary need to specify, to all the social media companies that they must do something to close down the visceral, violent language that some people use in attacking others personally, as they did over Ann's murder, which shocked me. We must get on top of that, because it is the root of violence and death. It is not only Ann who was murdered. It is not only Jo Cox and my good friend David Amess who were murdered. As the rack of shields in the Chamber shows, terrorists have murdered many in our party. If we want to stop that, we have to be bold and we have to be clear. We will not accept being shut down, stopped from performing our duties or silenced in any way, because that is what Ann would have approved of.

Shabana Mahmood: The right hon. Gentleman makes some powerful points. He is absolutely right: it is not just sad; now that we know more about the circumstances of this murder, it is a tragedy. More will obviously come to light in the fullness of time.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that, as a society and as a Government, we all have to do much more to hold social media companies to account for what is said and done through their platforms. Some progress has been made, but it feels like it takes a long time to get legislation through, and it is many years before any of it can be implemented. This is a fast-moving environment. We need to get the balance right: there is fierce and contested debate, and then there is behaviour that turns into threats, visceral abuse and harassment. It is incumbent on all of us to work together across the House to achieve the necessary balance and the necessary regulation of social media.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Bromborough) (Lab): I join the Home Secretary and other Members in sending condolences to the family of Ann Widdecombe. May she rest in peace.

I have concerns not just about Members of this place, but about our party members, councillors and council candidates. Every week, volunteers go knocking on doors in my constituency; most of the responses we get are absolutely fine, but there is an increasing trend towards violence and aggression on the doorstep. These people are giving up their time to engage in the political process, and they should not be met with violence and intimidation. We need to do far more to tackle the causes of this division and aggression.

I absolutely agree with what Members have said about social media companies and the algorithms that peddle hate, but we also need to look at what we can do. I have tabled some amendments to the Representation of the People Bill to deal with misleading information online and to provide for a statutory code of conduct to prevent abuse and intimidation in campaigns. I am concerned that intimidation on the doorstep is putting off the next generation of Members of this place. We need a wholesale review and real action to protect everyone who does their bit in democratic life.

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend makes some really important points. Just as joke candidates are a feature of British democracy, so is knocking on doors at election time and talking to people up and down the country. All of us have a responsibility and a duty to ensure that the unique features of British democracy are protected at all times. That has been the work of the defending democracy taskforce, which was led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley North (Dan Jarvis), the former Security Minister and now the Defence Secretary, and has been taken over by the new Security Minister. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Bromborough (Justin Madders) that we will do everything we can to protect the norms by which our democracy is felt across the country and to ensure that the ways in which we all take part in it are protected.

My hon. Friend mentioned potential amendments to the Representation of the People Bill, as have other Members. The Home Office is not the lead Department for the Bill, but I undertake to discuss this issue with colleagues in Government and ensure that we respond on specific amendments, or at least on a body of work, to ensure that any additional amendments made to the Bill are capable of reflecting the nature of the challenge we face.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): The news about Ann Widdecombe is truly shocking, and it is compounded by the way in which she met her death. The thoughts of the Scottish National party are with her friends and family today. As has been said, Ann was a larger-than-life political figure, liked by people right across this House for her wicked sense of humour and her straight talking. I remember when I inadvertently strayed into a private Conservative event, only to be met by Ann sending me packing. For somebody of her stature, she was a very effective bouncer.

There is great interest in this tragic death beyond those with an obvious interest in politics, and there will be temptation to speculate about her death, including

among those with more malevolent intent on social media. Will the Home Secretary do everything she can to ensure that the information passed on about this particular case is correct? Will she do everything possible to counter bad bits of misinformation?

Shabana Mahmood: It is incredibly important that nobody indulges in speculation of any kind, and we should collectively call out those who do. People should exercise caution before they comment on this case—that is the right way to behave for those who wish to see justice done. We should all want the proper functioning of our criminal justice system, which requires careful handling of information. Wherever possible, we will step in to correct misinformation, as the police have done, but occasionally in these sorts of cases the police are constrained in what they can put out into the public domain, because they wish to protect proceedings that may follow. We all have to be vigilant and careful, and send out the right message from this House about our expectations.

Helena Dollimore (Hastings and Rye) (Lab/Co-op): I join Members across the House in giving my deepest condolences to the friends and family of Ann Widdecombe. I never had the privilege of meeting her, but I certainly remember growing up and seeing her on the TV and thinking what an outspoken, strong woman she was and how she would not take no for an answer. I pay tribute to her.

I do not want to speculate on the case or on what happened, but I place on record my concern about the fact that we see very frequently the media either photograph or broadcast identifiable details of Members' or former Members' homes. That is happening repeatedly to Members across this House, including members of the Cabinet, members of the shadow Cabinet and former Members. We have heard today about the risks that come with that. The former Member for Surrey Heath mentioned in a podcast fairly recently that the man who killed Sir David Amess had visited his home, using details that he had identified from the media. That is how serious this issue is.

I know that the Speaker's Conference has looked at this issue. Given the risks that exist and the new tools such as reverse image searching, which makes it easier to look at a media image and find out where a house is on Google Maps, will the Home Secretary urgently look at this issue with her colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the media regulators Ofcom and the Independent Press Standards Organisation?

Shabana Mahmood: I assure my hon. Friend that that is one of the issues I will pick up, as I said in answer to a question from an Opposition Member a little earlier in this statement. I shall discuss this matter with colleagues on a cross-party basis, and I will speak with Mr Speaker and the House authorities about what more we can do in respect of specific details relating to the homes of Members and former Members of Parliament.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement, and her tribute to Ann—it was extremely moving, if I may say so. Can I also point out the unfortunate statistical fact that a Member of Parliament is more likely to meet a

violent death than a member of His Majesty's armed forces or a member of the British police forces? I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to assure Mr Speaker that none of us doubts his personal commitment to our security, but this remains a very relevant problem. None of us wants our homes to be turned into fortresses, but maybe more people need to be encouraged to, for example, put security gates on the front of their houses, and to have security cameras recording what is going on, rather than just relying on the Ring bell that happens to be on their front door.

Can I also pay my own tribute to Ann? Much has already been said. I shared 18 years of her parliamentary life, alongside my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith). There were disagreements about Maastricht, and about women candidates—my goodness, she loathed me trying to promote women candidates in the Conservative party. I maintain that she was wrong about that, but she was right about many things. Her maiden speech, about the Trident nuclear deterrent, was made at a time when the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats were a bit wobbly on that subject. What an emblem of her patriotism, and her fervour for strength and clarity of purpose!

I served in the shadow Cabinet with Ann when the Government were introducing the Human Rights Act 1998 and pressing for close adherence to the European convention on human rights. She was the one member of the shadow Cabinet who said, "We should oppose this"; members of our shadow Cabinet were saying that we should relish joining the ECHR. Her prescience has often invited derision from others, but she was right on that score. We in the Conservative party are learning the lessons that she left behind during her life; maybe other parties will learn them, too.

Shabana Mahmood: That was also a very moving tribute to someone of whom the hon. Gentleman was clearly very fond, and with whom he worked closely. He has dared to say that she was wrong; perhaps if we listen carefully, we can hear her saying something quite forceful in response.

I take the security of all Members of Parliament very seriously, as I know Mr Speaker does. Considering what has happened to Ann Widdecombe, we must now live up to our responsibilities to former Members of Parliament as well, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will take my duties in that regard very seriously. I do not want it to be the case that people are more likely to die a violent death if they are Members of this great House. This great House has great public servants in it from all over the country and from every party, and the public service of all Members of this House is something without which our country cannot do. It is incumbent on us all to protect that, for this generation and for generations to come.

Alan Gemmell (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): My thoughts and condolences are with the family and friends of Ann Widdecombe, and with colleagues on the Conservative Benches who worked closely with her. It is hard not to see the murder of an ex-MP as an attempted attack on this place and our way of life, but we must not let it have a chilling effect on those who want to stand for public office.

I thank Mr Speaker for the time he took with new-intake MPs in 2024, giving us his hints and tips, and really focusing on security. I also thank the Home Secretary for looking at the safety of ex-MPs and the risks that they face. I am in almost daily contact with one of my predecessors, and I am sure that will come up in our next phone call. I can tell the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) that I have a call with representatives of the Scotch Whisky Association scheduled for this afternoon; I think they want to talk about the free trade agreement, but I will happily talk about Widders' whisky. Does the Home Secretary agree that we must do all we can to ensure that people are not put off standing for public office, particularly by online hate and the increasing violence that we see on the doorstep and in our society?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; we must all do more. I assure him that the Government will work closely with Mr Speaker and the Parliamentary Security Department to make sure that we are doing everything we can, but as I have said in answer to other questions, I think we as a society have to take a stronger position on the right boundary between contested debate and unacceptable behaviour and abuse online. We have more work to do in that space.

Dr Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): On behalf of the Green party, I would like to say how shocked, saddened and horrified I am by Ann Widdecombe's horrific death—her brutal murder—and my sincere condolences go to her friends and family and all who knew her and loved her, including colleagues in this House. I welcome the points that the Home Secretary has made about reviewing security arrangements for those in public life, including former MPs and those outside this House. I very much agree with her about the responsibility that we all have, across this House and beyond, to avoid speculation, so that the police can hold their vital investigation and bring the culprit to justice. She has recognised the calls that have been made from across this House today for further action to tackle the proliferation of polarisation and hatred online. May I press her to set a timescale for taking that further action, to protect not only the safety and security of all those in public life, but the fundamentals of our democracy?

Shabana Mahmood: I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution and question, and assure her that I will be picking up a discussion with my colleagues across Government about how we do more on social media platforms and the behaviours that are promoted there, which we know are having a damaging impact on our democracy, as well as the safety and security of people involved in politics in different ways, including activists and elected representatives. Specifically, I will be discussing this matter with colleagues in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, as well as others. I will ensure that the House is updated soon after the summer recess.

Al Carns (Birmingham Selly Oak) (Lab): I echo the thoughtful and meaningful comments that Members from across the House have made today. I did not know Ann Widdecombe, but I definitely knew what she stood for: public service. She was a unique character and an amazing public servant, with many years of sacrifice. How have we ended up in a position where individuals

[*Al Carns*]

who put so much time and effort into public service are at risk? One of the reasons is that when we were young, we would walk into a library, and the librarian was apolitical; she or he would allow us to read whatever we wanted, within a set boundary. Now, that librarian is no longer apolitical; it is an algorithm, and that algorithm is bought by anyone from American tech bros to Russia and China. This is not four or five different threats; it is one consistent threat, which is swaying the minds of large chunks of populations across the globe. Can the Home Secretary give me some detail on how we are clamping down on some of that adversarial, nefarious activity and making online activity much safer?

Shabana Mahmood: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. He will know that colleagues in DSIT are working carefully on the Online Safety Act 2023 and its further implementation, learning lessons from how it is being applied and thinking carefully about what might need to be done. It is clear that we need a much stronger and better policed boundary between what is acceptable in a democracy and behaviour that is challenging the very foundations of our democracy. I have undertaken to have that discussion with colleagues across government, and I will make sure that the House is updated on the programme of work that the Government intend to take forward. We must make sure that all our arrangements are as robust as possible, and that it is we, the people of this country, who decide the inheritance that we wish to leave for our children, not algorithms operated by a very small number of men who live abroad.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I thank both Front-Bench spokespeople for their touching tributes to Ann. For the benefit of those outside this House, I place on record that we all know the absolute personal commitment of Mr Speaker and all the Deputy Speakers to the security of all Members and their families. Can we thank him and the rest of the team for that? We must not comment on the investigation, but can we at least wish the police Godspeed in bringing whoever was responsible for this utterly heinous act fully to book?

We now have another fallen comrade; there was Jo Cox, Sir David Amess, and now Ann. Years ago, we lost others to republican terrorism, too. This is a challenge for all of us, and for our loved ones. As I said after Sir David was murdered, I believe that the social media companies also have a responsibility in this regard. We always needed a thick skin to come into politics; now we need the hide of a rhino. The social media companies could do something to calm down the level of hate to which hon. Members and their families are exposed online, and I look to the Home Secretary in the hope that something positive can be done.

Ann Widdecombe was unmissable. She was a one-woman nuclear deterrent, whether she was debating in the House of Commons or arriving on “Strictly” by zipwire. I saw her only about three weeks ago at a breakfast meeting, and she was in fine fettle that morning. I knew her through Sir David. They were great friends; they arrived here in a similar era, in the 1980s, and they had a strong bond via the Catholic faith. They got on extremely well. I appeared in a number of photographs with both Sir David and Ann down the years, but for some reason, I was never asked to remove my shoes.

I have one brief anecdote. In 2010, having obviously upset someone in authority, I was made the Government accommodation Whip, and it was my responsibility to hand out offices. Anyone who has ever done that job will tell you that it is not easy. Ann, who had retired from the House, had a very attractive office overlooking Parliament Square, which was on my list as one that I knew would be in high demand. When I went along to check it out, I found Sir David already neatly ensconced in the office, and when I asked him how this had come about, he told me that he was claiming squatter’s rights, and that, moreover, he had been bequeathed the office by Ann as a personal gift. When I sought to remonstrate, he told me that if I did not like that decision, I could take it up with her personally—at which point I decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and withdrew.

Ann was remarkable. You could not argue with her; well, you could try, but you never got very far. She was the type of character whom people deeply respected, because she was absolutely consistent in her view, whether you agreed with her or not. We have lost a distinguished and incredibly remarkable colleague in the most awful of circumstances, but Ann Widdecombe would tell us to keep calm and carry on, and I believe that that is exactly what we should do.

Shabana Mahmood: That was a very moving and funny set of memories from the right hon. Gentleman—very affecting. “Keep calm and carry on” are definitely words to live by, and we could all do with taking that lesson on board. Let me also echo the right hon. Gentleman’s best wishes for the police as they continue this investigation: Godspeed.

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Reform): Ann’s tragic murder has shocked the nation. Dear Ann was the personification of political courage, patriotic tradition and the importance of faith. I got to know her when I was Home Secretary, through her immense support for the Amess family when we unveiled his plaque—a poignant reminder of the threat facing our democracy today. The nation has lost an exemplary public servant and a force of nature in Ann.

People are free to disagree with Ann’s views, but some of the online comment that we have seen in the aftermath has been frankly disgusting. It has come from so-called reputable journalists, including those working at Sky News and *The Mail on Sunday*, and we have read some conspiracy theories in *The Times*; and today we have heard a Labour Member of Parliament apologise for her intemperate comments. Does the Home Secretary agree that that kind of language only serves to worsen the problem with which we are dealing, rather than being part of the solution? Will she join me in urging calm in the media, and among those on the left? They should afford Ann some dignity in death, and show some respect to their opponents, instead of whipping up hatred.

Shabana Mahmood: I have not seen all the comments that the right hon. and learned Lady refers to, but I have seen some of them, and they were deplorable and completely unacceptable. I know that an apology has been made in relation to comments that were made, I believe, on Sky News. I know that others have reacted with horror and anger at comments that were designed

to denigrate Ann's political views, and to deny her dignity in death. I share the right hon. and learned Lady's absolute revulsion at such behaviour towards an elderly woman who has lost her life in very distressing and deeply tragic circumstances. It has no place in our politics or our national life, and I know that all Members of the House will agree with that. I urge everyone, wherever they may sit on the political spectrum, to exercise calm and careful judgment before hitting the send button on social media messages. A little time for reflection is often the best thing in these circumstances.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I thank Mr Speaker in his absence, and indeed all the Deputy Speakers, for everything that the Speaker's Office and the Parliamentary Security Department do to keep all Members, of all political parties, safe. I thank the Home Secretary and the deputy leader of Reform, the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice), for their warm tributes. As a west midlands MP, I also put on the record my thanks to the fantastic people at Counter Terrorism Policing West Midlands and in West Mercia police's special branch, who do a fantastic job. I have been in the House for 21 years, but it has only been in the last two or three years that I have had to take serious and substantive security advice. That is an unwelcome development, and we all need to work together to tackle it.

Reference has been made to technology companies. Should we expect technology companies to act, given that some of their owners do not even believe in democracy? They want to undo democracy in order that they have ultimate power. That is not a conspiracy theory; it is on the record, because some of them have stated that. In defence of the mainstream media—particularly the so-called deadwood press, with whom I have had disagreements over the years—they have to regulate, with very limited resources, the comments that people put under stories. Why will tech companies not do so as well? For too long the mainstream media in this country have taken most of the blame, but the tech companies, which have more resources, should be doing more.

On a lighter note, I want to give a couple of stories from Ann's life. We spent five years together as Members of Parliament, but I knew her before entering the House. I have two stories. First, I remember when there was a move to stop the first ever appointment of a Catholic as the British ambassador to the Holy See. Ann, David Amess, myself and others worked to overturn that. To paraphrase a *Times* diarist, I was the only Anglican in the village, and a middle-wicket Anglican at that—a very poor one. I wasn't literally poor—well, actually, it was both. *[Laughter.]* As the only Anglican in the village, I felt that it was completely wrong that there was discrimination against Catholics being appointed to the Vatican. Thankfully, the decision was overturned, and Tony Blair and others allowed the appointment to happen. Francis Campbell was appointed the first Catholic ambassador to the Holy See and did a fantastic job.

I have a second story. Having seen David Austin—the founder of David Austin Roses, who has now passed—at the 2009 Chelsea flower show with the former Deputy Speaker Nigel Evans, we were coming back in a taxi when we heard that Michael Martin had resigned as Speaker. We both thought that Ann would be a great Deputy Speaker, but there was a problem: in 2007, she had announced that she was going to step down at the

following election. We met with her and said, “Ann, we think you'd be a great Speaker. Would you do it?” She said, “Yes. What have I got to do?” We said, “Well, you've got to go and speak to all the different parties in Committee Room 14. Everybody's stuffed in there, as usual, and you've got to do a pitch.” I said to her, “But whatever you do, don't say you're running for Speaker and then say you're standing down in 2010.” As we all know, Ann was very wise. She completely dismissed that advice, stood up and said, “I'm running for Speaker, but I will stand down in one or two years' time.” Of course, she did not have any success.

I will conclude by saying that Ann was a lady of conviction, clarity, compassion, integrity and authenticity—a lexicon of virtue. Of course, she was recognised by His Holiness the Pope with a papal damehood—a DSG—but unfortunately she was, I think unfairly, never recognised in this country in the same way. I hope that is something that, in her honour and memory, could be considered.

Shabana Mahmood: The right hon. Gentleman has shared with the House some lovely memories of his dear friend. As he was making his contribution, I thought I would follow what he said about Counter Terrorism Policing, and place on the record my gratitude for our counter-terrorism police across the country. We have a world-leading counter-terror policing operation in this country. We are very lucky to have them, and they do a great job keeping all of us safe. I know I speak on behalf of the whole House when I place those remarks on the record.

The right hon. Gentleman is right, and many Members have made the point today about the unaccountability of social media platforms for their algorithms and for the type of content they host on their platforms. The Government have already done some work in this area, but I am sure we will have to go further. As I have committed before, I will make sure the House is updated in due course.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I speak on behalf of my party, Plaid Cymru. I think all of us will remember where we were when we heard the news that once again somebody—in this case, a former Member of Parliament—who lives the same lives as ourselves had died in such a hideous, shocking way with the murder. Of course, the work of the police and the justice system that must now come first and foremost.

I was with North Wales police in training many of their officers on Operation Bridger only on Friday afternoon, just before this happened. I do commend the police, but also I think we really need to know how difficult it is for them, because Operation Bridger has to go down to the frontline and those on the frontline need to be alert to that. I must also mention the importance of Operation Ford for Senedd Members in Wales and other national Parliaments elsewhere, and also for councillors.

The ability of elected representatives—all of us—to do our job by being available to meet constituents and speak directly to them is precious, and we need to be alert to keeping that. The trust that goes with being able to meet people is precious, so does the Home Secretary agree that we are not just talking about protection for ourselves for this year or for a few years to come, but that what we are endeavouring to do here is safeguard the values of democratic debate over violence?

Shabana Mahmood: I think the right hon. Lady is absolutely right. When I was first elected in 2010, I used to run an open, first-come-first-served advice surgery, but that is no longer possible, and I have had to change that in the last few years. I still offer advice surgeries, but on terms that are very different from when I first became a Member of Parliament. That is a huge change, and it is entirely as a result of what happened to Jo Cox and Sir David Amess. It is a tragedy because it does change the way we relate to our constituents.

It is a very precious thing, and we must protect that connection between Members of Parliament and those they represent, and between councillors and those they represent as well. That is the work that the Government and the Parliamentary Security Department, Mr Speaker and all his team here in the House are determined to see through to make sure that, even if there are some changes in the way we relate to our constituents, we are still able to do so on terms that we would all recognise as good old British democracy at its best.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Reform): There are no words to express the sadness we feel about the passing of Ann Widdecombe, but the sadness, unfortunately, is turning to anger—anger at not just the social media companies, but all of us in this place and the politicians, and some of the language that we use in this place. Reform UK MPs have been labelled as racists, Nazis and bigots by people serving in this place, and that undoubtedly increases the risk of attacks on politicians on this side of the House. Is the Home Secretary aware of any increased risk to Reform UK MPs?

Shabana Mahmood: It is important that all Members of the House are careful and calm in the way we describe other Members of this House and the work done by other Members in this House. We have to imagine how we would feel if we were on the receiving end of that, and try to treat others the way we wish to be treated ourselves.

I certainly want to make sure that I say from this Dispatch Box, for myself and for the Government, that any abuse or harassment by Members of Parliament of other Members of Parliament is unacceptable. We should all moderate our language. We have to get the right balance in this place between fierce and contested political debate, which happens on both the right and the left of the spectrum, and also make sure we do not slip into behaviours that increase threat to any of our colleagues. It is sometimes a difficult balance to strike in the heat of the moment or in the heat of a very polarised debate, but we still have a responsibility to show our best selves at work, as it were. I would always caution all Members, “Before you say anything quickly, just take a minute to reflect, and then think about what you’re about to say.”

On specific threats, let me say to the hon. Gentleman that no, I am not aware of any. He knows that I would not ever comment on threats, or the arrangements in place for any Member or others in public life, only because to comment starts to affect the integrity of the overall system, but I will make sure that the leader of Reform UK is offered a meeting with the independent chair of RAVEC to discuss specific issues relating to risk assessment. If there are any other matters in relation to risk assessment, the police are monitoring that very carefully and will discuss, with all political parties in this House, any additional changes that they might wish to make.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Reform): I join colleagues across the House in paying tribute to Ann, a woman who was brave, principled, kind and generous. I, like many others, will miss her enormously—even though on my first morning as a Member of Parliament, when I was the youngest MP, I met her in Westminster Hall and she asked me whether I was here on work experience. *[Laughter.]* I think I have eventually shed my MP nappies.

The Home Secretary is the ultimate arbiter of what happens in the Home Office. She is not powerless and no one would pretend so. Would she agree that it was unwise of the Government to heavily reduce the security offered to the former Member for Clacton, given all we know about the particular danger that is posed to him and his family? Does she agree that, frankly, it should not have taken the murder of Ann for him to be offered a meeting with the committee, and that many will conclude—perhaps unfairly, but none the less—that it is only because of the political views of the former Member for Clacton that he is placed in this position? Will she use her power as Home Secretary to make sure the security that he and his family need is put in place immediately?

The Secretary of State for the Home Department

(Shabana Mahmood): The right hon. Gentleman will know that it is an independent process within the Home Office that deals with the risk assessment and risk management of those in public life. I am not going to compromise the integrity of those arrangements by commenting in any detail on specific instances. Let me simply observe that, in the 10 months I have been in the Home Office, I have seen media reports in relation to various suggested risk assessments and risk mitigations. I have never commented to say whether something is true or false, simply because I believe that the principle of not commenting should not be breached, so as to protect the integrity of the system. The meeting has been offered.

Let me assure him that RAVEC is and will always be fiercely independent. It must be, because the protection offered to people, and the level of protection and the tactics of protection that are offered, must never be based on a political assessment of who needs it, but on an independent operational assessment of what risk is and how it is best managed. That operational independence is incredibly important. I will always maintain it and protect it, and I know the Government as a whole will do so as well.

Zöe Franklin (Guildford) (LD): The death of Ann Widdecombe is shocking. I did not know her as an MP, but it has been wonderful listening to colleagues from across the House share some of their memories. She was clearly a formidable political leader. Of course, we will also remember her as an entertainer. My thoughts are with her family and friends at this incredibly difficult time.

Her death is a devastating reminder of the problem that all of us elected Members and councillors face on a day-to-day basis while we try to serve the communities we love and have been elected to serve. It has come across very clearly in the Chamber that we all want and need to do more to protect each other and our democracy. I speak a lot to my councillors in Guildford and, as the Liberal Democrat local government spokesperson, to

councillors across the country. The stories I hear are horrendous, whether it is parish council leaders or council leaders telling me about death threats. This is a democracy and elected representatives should not be experiencing that.

I am grateful to the Home Secretary for what she has already set out, but could she also set out what actions the Government are taking to protect elected officials at all levels, in particular councillors and those who are served by Operation Ford? Can she confirm that more resources will be made available to Operation Ford, so that a consistent level of support can be provided across the country? I know that police officers and forces across the country want to do that, but I hear about varying levels of support.

Shabana Mahmood: I join the hon. Lady in saying that it has been a very moving afternoon, hearing tributes to Ann Widdecombe from across the House, particularly from her former colleagues in the Conservative party and her colleagues in Reform UK, who are obviously personally affected. Once again, I offer my condolences to all of them on the loss of their friend and colleague.

I take very seriously the wider risks to our democracy, including for local councillors. The hon. Lady has already referenced some of the steps that the Government have taken through our defending democracy taskforce and Operation Ford. I am sure that there will be further developments in this space. We are learning lessons from the taskforce's work in relation to the most recent local elections, and the developing nature of the threats must be reflected in new arrangements as we move forward.

We are very alive to the risks to those of us in this place, given what has happened to Jo Cox, to Sir David Amess and now to Ann Widdecombe. The security of parliamentarians gets a lot of attention, and this is perhaps the most high-profile Chamber—we are often referred to as “the mother of Parliaments”, so that is understandable—but this country also cannot do without the work of its local councillors, parish councillors and all the people who put in the hours to make their local area better, and this Government will stand by them too.

State of Climate and Nature

5.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): With permission, I would like to make a statement about the nature and climate crisis. Nature is the monopoly provider of everything we need to live. We are living through the Anthropocene, an age where human activity is now the dominant influence on our planet's climate and ecosystems. We are seeing its consequences: pollution, climate change and mass extinction. Last year, the Energy Secretary gave the first ever statement to this House on the crisis. One year on, I am here to set out the Government's commitment to tackle those challenges.

Climate change drives nature loss, and nature loss drives climate change. We must tackle both. Droughts and floods are disrupting harvests, straining supply chains, and pushing up costs. Our nature security assessment published in January shows that if the current rate of biodiversity loss continues, every critical ecosystem is on a pathway to collapse, from the coral reefs that protect our coastlines to the peatlands that store carbon and prevent floods.

The UK's climate is getting hotter and wetter, with more extreme events—2025 was the UK's hottest year since records began. In the heatwaves in May and June this year, the Met Office reported that as many as 2,700 people may have died, railway tracks buckled, over 1,000 schools closed, and the London ambulance service had its busiest day on record. Since 1901, the UK's sea level has risen by about 20 cm, but that rate is accelerating, because two thirds of this rise has happened in just the last 30 years. That is why this Labour Government are stepping up, leading globally on nature recovery, climate mitigation and adaptation. In the UK, we are working in partnership with local communities, businesses, conservationists and farmers. Before the Paris agreement, the world was on track for around 4° of warming; now, national commitments put us on course for around 2.5° degrees. There is so much more to do, but this represents real progress.

In December, we launched our environmental improvement plan, which, for the first time, set out delivery plans to underpin our targets to restore nature, boost our recycling rates and protect our environmental security. Since then, we have published the land use framework, the water White Paper and the farming road map. We have invested a record £2.65 billion in flood resilience, invested in new food waste collection services and invested £1 billion in our national biosecurity infrastructure in Weybridge. Over the next three years, we will invest more than £7 billion in nature—the largest investment in nature ever. That includes £5.9 billion for environmental farming schemes, £816 million for tree planting and £85 million for peatland restoration.

Last October, we published the carbon budget and growth delivery plan to set out how the UK will continue to reduce emissions in order to lower bills for consumers and secure good jobs for British people. Last month, the majority of Members in this place voted to cut emissions by almost 87% from 1990 levels for the carbon budget 7 period, which runs from 2038 to 2042. Under this Government, more than £100 billion of private investment in the net zero economy has been announced.

[Mary Creagh]

We have done much on mitigation. However, following advice from the Climate Change Committee, we are setting stronger objectives for climate adaptation. We are building our resilience for a minimum of 2° of warming by 2050 and supporting combined authorities to increase their resilience to climate change, too.

In 2024, we saw a single year exceed 1.5° of warming, which is why we are committed to working with our domestic and international partners to keep the Paris agreement goal of limiting temperatures to a rise of 1.5°C. Global warming is likely to reach 1.5° in around 2030, but 1.5° is and will remain the right limit. Every fraction of a degree of warming reduces the severity of impacts on people and nature worldwide. Every species saved reduces the risk of losses to the ecosystems we rely on—pollination, disease prevention, and food and climate regulation.

The key to delivering our nature and climate goals is how we use our land and seas. Our land use framework shows that we have enough land to achieve our priorities across economic growth, housing, food production, climate and nature recovery. However, we must make better decisions about how we use our land. We are moving from paper-based systems to making land digital and opening up the Land Registry free for all. Today, we have published an interactive story map of our spatial evidence to support decision makers to use their land more effectively.

The UK has also committed to protect and conserve 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030. Today, we are publishing the 30 by 30 delivery plan for land in England and guidance to land managers on how to implement it. In May, we announced the £30 million wildlife-rich habitat fund, and today we are providing an additional £37 million a year for the next three years for national parks and national landscapes.

This is a whole-of-Government effort. This weekend, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ratified the biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction agreement to create marine protected areas on the high seas, covering nearly two thirds of the world's oceans. Funded by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Advanced Research and Invention Agency is investing £81 million in its forecasting tipping points programme. The Ministry of Defence is developing climate security analysis and critical emerging technologies to support energy resilience for the UK and our armed forces. The Department for Education is investing £710 million out to 2030 to improve the condition of school and college buildings, reducing their emissions and bills, and increasing their resilience to climate change so that they last for decades to come.

I am delighted that in my constituency of Coventry East, Richard Lee primary school and Potters Green primary school are installing new solar panels. At Courthouse Green school, I opened a sensory garden built by the pupils' eco team to bring nature closer to children.

This week, I am visiting the Great North Bog to see successful peatland restoration in action, and later in the week I will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the first four national parks—a legacy of the great 1945 Labour Government. Tomorrow, we launch a competition for young people to join our new youth climate and nature panel.

These young people will offer their expert insight to Government as we deliver for climate and nature action through outreach.

From introducing wild beavers to planting three new national forests and creating nine new river walks, this Labour Government are bringing nature closer to people. We will all benefit from a more resilient, more prosperous and greener country. As my right hon. Friend the Energy Secretary said in his statement last year,

"We have been at our best in the House when we have worked across parties on these issues."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 2025; Vol. 771, c. 31.]

By preparing our country and our citizens for the climate and nature crises, we are showing leadership internationally. This Government are acting now to protect the world in which we live, which we pass on to future generations. I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the shadow Minister.

5.56 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement.

I am sure that no one in this House disputes the importance of protecting our climate or restoring nature; the real question is whether this Government are capable of delivering both. The Minister speaks about climate and nature as priorities, yet the Government have repeatedly chosen to target the very individuals tasked with delivering: our farmers, who are the frontline custodians of our natural world.

Let us have a look at the choices this Government have already made in the past two years, which are in direct contradiction to the ambitions the Minister has set out. First, part 3 of the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 was rightly heavily criticised by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which warned that the legislation would

"rip the heart out of environmental protections and risks sending nature further into freefall."

The Wildlife Trust directly challenged this Government's growth-at-all-costs rhetoric, stating:

"Before the General Election Labour promised to restore nature", yet the Government are instead driving environmental regression. Both organisations took the extraordinary step of demanding that part 3 be completely removed, as did the Opposition.

Secondly, last September the Minister pushed through a blanket ban on the controlled burning of heather on deep peat. In doing so, the Government completely ignored the warnings of the National Fire Chiefs Council, the National Farmers' Union and many environmental scientists who understood, quite rightly, that by blocking land managers from conducting traditional, heavily regulated rotational burnings, this Government are letting massive fuel loads build up across our moorland, effectively creating a tinderbox and vastly increasing the risk of devastating wildfires that destroy the very peatlands and biodiversity that this Government claim they want to protect.

Thirdly, the Government have completely undermined the sustainable farming incentive. With only £240 million allocated to this year's applications, the Government have, in effect, made the whole scheme competitive entry. To make matters worse, by capping agreements at £100,000,

they are actively pushing the most ambitious, large-scale nature restoration projects in the country out of the window. We cannot achieve a massive 30 by 30 target by cutting funding, reducing green options and telling farmers that large-scale conservation efforts are no longer welcome.

Fourthly, as a result of this Government's choice to remove the onshore wind farm moratorium, we are now in the ridiculous scenario of applications coming forward to build large-scale wind farms on protected peatland, such as the proposal for the Calderdale wind farm in West Yorkshire, despite warnings from academics and groups like the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust that, if approved, these projects will release massive amounts of CO₂ into the atmosphere. The list goes on.

Today's statement offers no new protections, relying instead on a fragmented, reactive approach that tries to hit targets, rather than redefining how we count and reference land and actually doing anything positive about it. The choices that this Government have made in the past two years do not represent a road map to nature recovery. Before coming forward with today's statement, what consideration did the Government make of the impacts of their choices over the past two years on the targets set out in this plan? Does the Minister agree that those policies are in direct contradiction with the delivery ambitions that this Government have brought to the House today?

Mary Creagh: I am disappointed by the nature and tone of the hon. Gentleman's response to our attempts to right some of the wrongs left behind by the previous Government.

The hon. Gentleman asked in particular about the Planning and Infrastructure Act. What we have done through that Act is introduce strategic policy statements to prioritise outcomes over process, so that Natural England and the Environment Agency can speed up decision making while maintaining high environmental standards. We have given them £100 million over three years to fund specialist staff and modern digital systems to cut costly delays for planners.

It was clear when we came into government that the status quo for development and nature was simply not working. Fragmented site-by-site environmental requirements and increasing costs were adding to the delays to the much-needed housing and infrastructure that this country needs. It was not working for nature either, and the condition of many of our most important habitats and species was continuing to decline. The nature restoration fund will support development and ensure that the money spent by developers on environmental mitigation delivers more. It is a simple levy payment that Natural England will use to deliver impactful conservation measures at scale instead of having a piecemeal approach.

Let me talk a little about peat. Some 80% of England's peatlands are degraded. We are investing £85 million in their restoration by 2030. Since we have come into government, approximately 10,000 hectares of peatlands have been brought into restoration through our nature for climate peatland grant scheme. Last week we announced £44 million for lowland peat—which I do not think the hon. Gentleman's Government invested in—and we expect another 4,000 hectares to be restored this year. We have the target, which his Government set, to restore an additional 40,000 hectares by 2030.

Rotational burning is a contributory factor to 80% of peatlands being degraded. It makes it difficult to restore peat to its natural hydrology and impossible to return it to its natural state. It is also really bad for air quality locally. It damages peatlands, shifts species composition, disrupts the hydrology of peat and, crucially, releases stored carbon, increasing vulnerability to wildfire. Wetter, healthy and functioning peatlands are much more resilient to the impacts of wildfire.

We have published our farming road map, and through the new environmental land management schemes, we are supporting smaller farmers—those organic farmers that were excluded from the larger schemes that the hon. Gentleman talked about. We are spatially targeting, so that we get bigger, better and more joined-up protected areas for nature and wildlife.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I welcome the Government's statement. My hon. Friend the Minister is right to say that climate change drives nature loss and nature loss drives climate change—we must tackle them hand in hand. I met this week with Moors for the Future, who spoke about peatland and the importance of working with land managers. I have to say, they were very much more of the view of my hon. Friend than of the shadow Minister, who we just heard from.

The Minister is right to talk about the importance of adaptation, which we need massively to improve, so will she tell us when the next iteration of the national adaptation plan will come out? The one under the previous Government was widely criticised, and we need to know more. A plan that looks only at adaptation will fail, as that must be secondary to mitigation.

Finally, what more can we do in our approach? It is right to say that farmers are fundamental to success in improving our nature outcomes, and it is regrettable that this Government got off on such a bad foot with them. What can she tell us about how we can rebuild that relationship? Ultimately, we must work hand in hand with farmers and sustainable farming if we are going to achieve what we need for nature?

Mary Creagh: Through some of our landscape recovery projects we are seeing farm clusters get behind the new idea of leveraging in private finance to work alongside public investment, but it is also about understanding their role in a multifunctional and multi-use landscape. In the uplands in the Lake district, for example, it is about working to restore peat so that it can hold much more water in the land to prevent run-off, which can overwhelm the towns and villages below the peatlands and the bogs. We understand the role that nature can play in protecting run-off from farms—particularly agricultural run-off—so it may be a case of, for example, planting trees along river banks and ensuring that there is no run-off into the rivers, reducing their phosphate.

My hon. Friend asked me about the national adaptation plan. We are committed to an ambitious fourth national adaptation programme in 2028. I have requested advice from the Climate Change Committee on appropriate planning assumptions to inform our approach, but we are investing in those flood defences through £104 billion in private investment for new water infrastructure and,

[Mary Creagh]

crucially, the launch of the local authority climate service to support local authorities to respond to flooding and, now, heatwaves.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I thank the Minister for early sight of the statement.

On my way into Kendal this morning, before I came down to Parliament, I observed the jarring reality of fields yellowing in the dry heat and the River Kent so low that I could see the bedrock. Alongside it, defensive walls were being built on the banks of the river in the aftermath of devastating floods—a reminder that climate change has brought extreme weather. It has brought different threats at different times, but they have been equally challenging and dangerous. I am afraid that those who continue to deny climate change look more foolish by the day. We see the danger of climate change especially in the terrifying wildfires in the Peak district—a reminder that we do not protect nature if we completely remove livestock and the human beings that manage nature.

The Government aim to reclaim 30% of our land and seas for nature. I welcome that, and much of the action plan, but 70% of England's landmass is agricultural land. Does the Minister agree that we must start by ensuring that all farmers have access to environmental schemes—not just those who apply for them the quickest? Will she give more detail on the welcome proposal that the Liberal Democrats have long fought for to now permit those who farm common land to access payments to help restore nature in our most precious landscapes like the Lake district, the Peaks and Dartmoor?

Farmers estimate that hot weather this year will cost them 20% of their harvest. What is the Minister's plan to remove barriers so that farmers can build on-farm reservoirs and take other measures that will protect our natural environment and food security?

Finally, if the Government want to meet their targets—we really want them to—are they not being unwise in their rush to deregulate on planning? Should we not be increasing the ability of local communities to resist the destruction of nature and to have greater power to direct developers to protect and enhance nature rather than being at the whim of those whose only motive is profit?

Mary Creagh: The hon. Member asked about a range of policies. I will talk about natural flood management. We will invest £300 million in natural flood management over the next 10 years—the highest ever figure for floods programming, and that is the minimum level. We will be supporting projects that reduce flood risk and deliver wider benefits to communities and nature.

On the concrete flood barriers and dried rivers that the hon. Gentleman spoke about, we must do more to enable farmers to hold water in their land. When they are building their reservoirs, we do not want concrete bowls or buckets; what we need are natural scrapes and areas where they can hold on to water. They can help with that natural aspiration by planting trees and experimenting with agroforestry, as we are doing with the western forest around Bristol and Gloucester. We

are acutely aware of the challenges that farmers face from extreme weather events. In some areas in the east of England, the wheat harvest is already being brought in.

We are committed to maintaining food production and supporting thriving farm businesses. But, as I said earlier, land managers and farmers have an increasingly important role in reducing the risk of flooding and coastal erosion as we adapt to climate changes, and eligibility criteria for natural flood management funding has widened to include them for the first time. We want them to do more on soils, so that they can hold the water as well, buffer strips, to slow the flow, and run-off attenuation features to store and release water.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I thank the Minister for including land use and food systems within this outline. It is so important that that is included as part of the triple challenge of climate, nature and food.

We know that we can meet our climate and nature goals only if we catalyse and incentivise private sector investment. I point to the example of Bristol, where through our strategic energy partnership city leap we have mobilised finance for city decarbonisation, and where the West of England combined authority has just launched a £5 million nature fund to help kick-start nature markets. What more are we doing at a national level to support nature and carbon markets and to incentivise that private sector investment?

Mary Creagh: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. It was clear at London climate action week that the energy and climate transition is already well under way. With the British Standards Institution, we have worked to set nature standards so that when nature projects and large financial funds want to invest in nature, they have the confidence to do so and are not accused of greenwashing as they have been in the past. We also want to learn from some of the issues about investing in carbon markets so that companies feel comfortable in setting carbon and nature losses in their own supply chains, where the first rule is to do no harm. A huge amount of money is going into nature projects and I am excited to see how that will develop in the future.

Dr Roz Savage (South Cotswolds) (LD): I express my gratitude to the Minister and to the Government for delivering this second nature and climate statement, as they promised to do during the conversations around the time of my Climate and Nature Bill last year. It may not be exactly what I had envisaged, but I welcome it none the less. Perhaps we can discuss it further in our meeting on Wednesday.

Despite all the money being put into various climate and nature measures, there seems to be agreement among the environmental non-governmental organisations that the 30 by 30 plan will not deliver on 30 by 30. For example, in the last three years, Natural England has not designated any new sites of special scientific interest, and over the last 20 years the area covered by those sites has increased by only 2.8%. What further funding will be given to Natural England so that it can expand on its important mission?

Mary Creagh: I was discussing that very issue with Natural England this morning. Land covering about 32% of England is already likely to, or has the potential to,

contribute to the 30 by 30 target, including through our landscape recovery projects, and local nature reserves and national nature reserves. We are creating 3,000 hectares a year of national nature reserves, which makes a very significant contribution to that. We have also set out the route to 30 by 30, talking about bronze, silver and gold land. I understand why the ENGOs want everything to be gold, but we must live in the real world and show what the pipeline towards gold looks like.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): Our best hope in the fight to restore our environment is this country's nature-loving public, but many across the House will be aware of the recent example of the Environment Agency threatening to take people to court for trying to clean up their dying river. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that the Environment Agency is empowering the public rather than threatening to prosecute them for protecting nature?

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend is right: we have an army of citizen scientists and naturalists, and we are certainly looking forward to celebrating some of them tomorrow at RHS Garden Wisley for Bees' Needs Week. We also have the pollinator count next week. However, anyone who wants to clean up their river needs a permit from the Environment Agency beforehand, as we have habitats and flood defences there. My hon. Friend is right that we should empower citizens to take action but they need to do so without there being unintended consequences.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): I welcome the statement from the Nature Minister, and thank her for recognising the crucial link between nature restoration and tackling climate breakdown. Does she recognise that whatever action is taken—we need to see far more action taken both on nature restoration and on decarbonisation—if large-scale new oilfields are granted at Rosebank or Jackdaw, for example, there could be emissions equivalent to 28 low-income countries from just one oilfield, which would undo all the good work that she and all of us in the House want to see?

Mary Creagh: The hon. Member knows that I am unable to comment on individual licences and that the Energy Secretary will make his decision in due course. What I would say it is that it is essential that we have a climate transition that is fair to those workers in the North sea. North sea oil and gas have been in decline for about the last 20 years, so he is right to say that, and we have to get off the fossil fuel rollercoaster to secure energy security and prices for the future.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I really welcome the statement and all the commitment that the Government are giving to nature. I know that the 30 by 30 plan is focused just on land, with the justification being that 40% of our waters are marine protected areas, but the Joint Nature Conservation Committee has said that less than 1% of our MPAs are assessed as being truly protected. Will the Minister please tell us when she will focus the next plan on marine protection, which one hopes would include a ban on bottom trawling?

Mary Creagh: The Water Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Haltemprice (Emma Hardy), is only too happy to meet my hon. Friend

to discuss bottom trawling. I believe that about 32% of our waters are currently protected. My understanding is that this depends on the site that is protected and the particular feature, animal or creature that is found there—it is about getting the appropriate protection for the appropriate thing. I will get the Water Minister to talk to her in detail about this matter.¹

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I am sure the Minister will agree that to meet our climate and nature obligations, we must not take decisions that commit us to creating waste and causing harm for 40 years. The Government's own policy, published in late 2024, said that new incinerators could be approved only where there is a local waste disposal need. However, one in my constituency at Canford Magna has said that 12% of the waste processed will come from the wider Dorset area and only 60% from the whole Wessex region. Will she pause any new approvals until their impact beyond 2050 has been fully assessed, and done so in the light of the seventh carbon budget?

Mary Creagh: By publishing that incineration capacity strategy, we set out clearly the standards that we are looking for on new incineration permits. We have a problem—an epidemic—with abandoned landfills left behind by the previous Government and illegal landfills that are springing up because of organised crime groups across the country. It is infinitely better to use energy from waste plants than to bury waste in a hole next to where people work, live and go to school. There is an issue with the sustainability of incineration, but it is part of our clean power as we go forward.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Yesterday, fire spread rapidly along the railway line in Walthamstow, with dry vegetation from the heatwave acting as kindling. Hundreds of residents had to be evacuated as an emergency and several lost their homes, which burned down. I pay tribute to the St Mary's Welcome Centre, the Waltham Forest Islamic Association, the fire brigade, the police and the council staff who joined hundreds of residents in helping those affected by setting up emergency centres with food, water, fans and phone chargers, all at short notice. The honest truth is that this is not the first time Walthamstow has risen to the challenge to support our community when such a crisis has happened. What is the Minister doing to build climate resilience into local government planning? I fear that, whether from flooding or heatwaves, my community will face more of these incidents in future without that.

Mary Creagh: I remember when I was Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee doing an inquiry into heatwaves that started during the "beast from the east", so nobody gave us any evidence, and ended on the first 36° June day in London, which I think was back in 2017 or 2018. The point my hon. Friend makes is a valid one. I am incredibly sorry to hear about the impact that that fire has had on her constituents, and I am sure it has had huge impacts on the local fire and rescue services as well. What we need to do in local government is to plan for these mutual assistance moments, because there was also a fire in Stratford—last week, I think—and people had to be evacuated from the train track. Network Rail is taking action on the clearance of trees to ensure that the line is clear, and it has created new areas of grassland.

1. [Official Report, 16 July 2026; Vol. 789, c. 16WC.] (Correction)

[Mary Creagh]

We need to look at whether the shrubs we have are appropriate for the intense heatwaves we are having, and if not, ask what needs to change.

Lara Bird (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): The Energy Secretary says that he supports green jobs, yet there is growing concern that only two of the six National Energy System Operator pipelines will support the Scottish wind pathways, with the rest of the investment being redistributed to areas across the rest of the UK, despite the fact that Scotland is a renewables superpower. Can the Minister confirm whether one of the Energy Secretary's last moves in the job, potentially, will be to rob Scotland of £100 billion of renewables investment while jeopardising thousands of Scottish jobs? Or will he commit to investing in the grid connectivity that Scotland needs to support our crucial Scottish renewables industry?

Mary Creagh: The North Sea Transition Authority is equipped to support a fair, managed and prosperous transition, including through a new statutory objective to consider workers, communities and supply chains in its decisions, and we are extending employment rights and protections for offshore workers in renewables, bringing them into line with those working in oil and gas. We have a pragmatic plan for the North sea to secure and renew the basin's place as Britain's powerhouse, protecting jobs in our oil and gas heartlands, and to build the next generation of good jobs in clean energy industries. Beyond that, I am afraid I cannot say much more.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): As you will be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, Harlow is full of some incredibly beautiful areas of natural beauty, from Hatfield forest and Harlow town park to Parndon Wood nature reserve. I am determined that these beautiful areas will be protected not just for this generation but for generations to come, which is why I am concerned when I hear voices in this Chamber that deny the climate emergency. It is not just an emergency for the future; it is an emergency now. Will the Minister confirm that she will ensure that we do everything we can as a Labour Government to protect nature and the environment and to tackle climate change?

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend is right to say that we have seen a big flip-flop from the Conservatives. I am old enough to remember when, back in 2019, they put net zero into law under Theresa May and she described it as a Conservative mission. Now their leader says that the very same target is "impossible", so which Conservative party are the voters supposed to believe: the one that legislated for net zero or the one that now instructs its MPs to vote against it?

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Some schools in my constituency were forced to close during the recent red alert heatwave, causing disruption and loss of learning, so could the Minister explain what discussions she has had with the Department for Education about preparing our schools for more frequent and more extreme weather events, and about improving outdoor learning spaces, as advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for South Devon (Caroline Voaden), to ensure that the citizens of the future feel more connected to nature?

Mary Creagh: I mentioned in my statement the solar panels for schools, which have had the benefit of cutting bills and providing a resilient electricity supply for those schools. The DFE is investing £710 million to improve the condition of school and college buildings and, crucially, they are part of our Government estate nature plan, so they are part of that cross-Government work. Schools cover a land mass the size of Birmingham, and they need to play their part in educating pupils about the climate and nature crisis and in helping to tackle it.

Matt Rodda (Reading Central) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's statement and thank her for her work in this important area. Will she say a little more about rewilding in lowland Britain, tree planting and changes to agricultural practices, all of which reduce emissions of carbon and, indeed, capture carbon? Could she perhaps mention the work in towns as well? There is some fantastic work along the Thames in my area that she might want to see.

Mary Creagh: I always like to go and see trees being planted, and my hon. Friend is right to talk about the importance of trees, both for shading our streets and as part of the three new national forests, two of which we have already announced. That is why we have more than doubled the grant for trees outside woodland through the Tree Council. It has gone up from £1 million in the last financial year to £2.5 million this year. Crucially, however, we need the right trees in the right place for the right reason, and the trees that will survive to 2100 are not the same trees that our mums and dads were planting in our back gardens.

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): I declare an interest as the chair of the local nature recovery all-party parliamentary group. As Britain endures another summer of extreme heat, droughts and devastating wildfires, this nature and climate statement is crucial, and I only wish that those on the Conservative Benches felt the same about it. I welcome the focus in the 30 by 30 delivery plan on the network of local nature recovery strategies, because they tackle climate change, improve resilience and hit our nature targets, but we need more than a plan, a map and warm words. We need a commitment to make it work in practice, including through weight in planning and public funding to leverage private finance—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. The hon. Lady really does need to get to a question. There is a really important piece of legislation still to come and this statement will finish at 6.40 pm, so many Members are going to be disappointed unless questions are very brief.

Mary Creagh: The depleted numbers on the Conservative Benches are beginning to make me wonder whether they need some funding to avoid extinction—[Laughter.] I'm here all week!

Local nature recovery strategies have been a brilliant vehicle to get these better, bigger, more joined-up landscapes, and I have been in discussion with officials in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about how we can align and spatially target funding towards those areas in particular. I have been talking about exactly that with the West Midlands combined authority.

Afzal Khan (Manchester Rusholme) (Lab): This weekend, I joined constituents in Hulme for a screening of the “People’s Emergency Briefing” on the threats to British life from ongoing damage to nature and our climate. My constituents want to ensure that everyone across the country is properly informed about the causes and impact of climate change, so will the Minister commit to holding a prime-time televised emergency briefing on the climate and nature crisis?

Mary Creagh: I look after many things, but sadly I do not yet control the broadcast schedules of any national broadcasters. The point of the National Emergency Briefing is to get people together, a bit like the great organisation that rejoices in the name of People Planet Pint. I have been people, planet and football for most of the last three weeks, but bringing people together to discuss these issues in local areas is a really positive way for people to grab this crisis by the neck and set out what they are going to do locally.

Manuela Perteghella (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): Despite the whole-of-Government effort to tackle the climate and nature crisis, I fear that there is still a misalignment of policies across Departments, as we have seen with the dilution of environmental protections in the revisions to the national planning policy framework. Can the Minister therefore ensure that there is more collaborative working across Government so that future decisions on planning and infrastructure leave nature in a better state, rather than contributing to its decline?

Mary Creagh: We have the biodiversity net gain framework, which is all about making sure that there is a biodiversity uplift of 10% in every planning policy. It was a brand-new policy left to us by the previous Government, but it was not working perfectly—nothing is born perfect—so we have made some changes to make it more proportionate and ensure that it works better in practice.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the 30 by 30 nature and climate plan, which responds to the crisis that we face and builds resilience and restoration. Following my youth environment conference in York, “Our Planet, Our Future”, it is clear that young people want to get involved, so in addition to setting up the youth climate and nature panel, will the Minister ensure greater accountability to young people across the country, through local panels that will hold local authorities to account for their actions?

Mary Creagh: Again, my hon. Friend tempts me beyond my brief. Given that most local authorities have declared a climate and nature crisis, it strikes me that her suggestion is an excellent topic for the Youth Parliament—or local youth panels could be organised through schools.

Jonathan Davies (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): The Minister was right when she said that climate change drives nature loss, and nature loss drives climate change. We are seeing the effects of that on people’s health, the economy and global security, so I welcome the work that the Government are doing to address that. There has been a national security assessment on global biodiversity loss. May I encourage the Minister to put as many as possible of its

findings into the public domain, so that people understand the threats to our security? May I also invite her to give us some information about the relationship between the report’s findings and the new climate security taskforce?

Mary Creagh: The climate security taskforce is part of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero’s remit, so I can ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero to talk to my hon. Friend about that. The report that he mentions says that analysis shows there is “high confidence” that “ecosystem degradation is occurring across all regions. Every critical ecosystem is on a pathway to collapse.”

It goes on:

“Global ecosystem degradation and collapse threaten UK national security and prosperity...Without major intervention...this is highly likely to continue to 2050 and beyond.”

So what is already in the public domain makes for sobering reading, and I commend the full document, which is in the public domain, to all hon. Members.

Sojan Joseph (Ashford) (Lab): This morning, I visited the Churchill school in Hawkinge and had a good interaction with the young children. Most of their questions were about protecting nature, and they repeatedly asked how we can support them to plant more trees. Children care about our environment, so how can we encourage members of the public, and especially Members of the Opposition, to talk about nature and net zero in the same way as those children?

Mary Creagh: Given the intense heatwaves that we have experienced this year and in previous years, it is vital that children in Ashford have the protection of shade from trees. Academy trusts should be making funds available for adaptation, to mitigate impacts in their schools, and to keep their schools open. We do not want children at home, not learning, and schools overheating to absolutely impossible temperatures. I commend those students, and I encourage them in their efforts.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I am aiming to finish this statement at 6.40 pm, so please can we have short and snappy questions and answers.

Alex Sobel (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): The Government have produced a global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security report, and I support the call by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Jonathan Davies) for the analysis to be released in full. The information already in the public domain warns about the exact cumulative heatwaves we are now experiencing. What work is being done to protect nature globally, particularly in relation to the Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework? What adaptations are being made here at home, to protect people from this extreme heat?

Mary Creagh: We are having a triple-COP year. We will be setting out our approach and our achievements as we move towards the biodiversity COP in Armenia and the climate COP in Turkey. There is also an important desertification COP taking place in Mongolia, which is on the frontline of the climate crisis as the permafrost there collapses. We are looking to ensure that every

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£1 we invest in climate also delivers for nature, because the era of £1 for one thing and £1 for another thing and Governments being asked to do this on their own is emphatically over.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): This weekend, many people have heard from their water suppliers, who are urging them to conserve water due to high demand, but there have been no new reservoirs built for over 30 years and there is little uptake of grey water systems. Does the Minister agree that we need to urgently address water storage issues and make use of grey water systems and rain water collection in homes?

Mary Creagh: We are building nine new reservoirs, but further to what my hon. Friend says, I have had messages from Severn Trent Water, who advise me to put a bucket in the bath, get a hosepipe, and do a bit of siphoning of the bathwater to water the garden. There are already three areas with hosepipe bans, and I fear that there may be more bans on the way.

Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab): I commend the organisers of the national emergency briefing, which I attended last year, as well as the local organisers of the people's emergency briefing in Shipley. The climate and nature crisis is an emergency. We see the consequences; in particular, wildfires are becoming more common on the upland moors in my constituency, such as Baildon moor, Harden moor and Rombalds moor. What further action is the Minister taking to protect upland peatland moors in areas like mine?

Mary Creagh: I will be travelling to Fylingdales this week to make an announcement about what we are doing to help those brave farmers who are on the frontline of that wildfire.

Sarah Coombes (West Bromwich) (Lab): Over the past few weeks, the Black Country turned red hot in this intense heatwave, which is most impacting vulnerable people, particularly elderly people. Because of the urban heat island effect, urban areas like mine, West Bromwich, are often much hotter than rural areas, so will the Minister set out what the Government are doing to protect urban areas, and to green them, to protect us from extreme heat in future, in addition to the excellent work we have done already?

Mary Creagh: As I mentioned before, we are more than doubling the funding for tree planting through the trees outside woodland fund. Climate change is sexist: it seems to be that women are particularly affected, and because of our body composition, we are less able to reduce our core heat, so we need to look at specific policies to protect particular members of the community, including the under-fives, the over-65s and those with heart and lung problems. We look to our health service to do that, but it cannot do that if the hospitals are heating up beyond 28°C.

Liam Conlon (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): Earlier this month, in my constituency of Beckenham and Penge, the River Pool was lined with thousands of dead fish, including critically endangered European eels, following a pollution incident. Thankfully, the water quality has now returned to normal, and the Environment Agency

has agreed to restock the river with fish species. Will the Minister join me in asking the Environment Agency and Thames Water to urgently conclude their investigation into what caused the incident and share the findings? Will she support my efforts to ensure that whoever is responsible is held accountable and faces the full force of the law?

Mary Creagh: I pay tribute to everyone who is helping with the restocking. My hon. Friend is lucky to have a river so close to London that has such a sensitive and rare species as the European eel in it. It is important that perpetrators of environmental crimes are brought to justice swiftly, but it is also important that any case that we bring is watertight and achieves the right outcomes.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): A couple of years ago, I went to Spain at the end of a severe heatwave, and what I saw devastated me. There were fields and fields of blackened crops. Now farmers in my constituency are increasingly experiencing drought, flooding, extreme heat, and a change in the seasons due to climate change. Does the Minister agree with me that acting on climate change is vital for securing Britain's food supply, and farming's future as an essential industry for our country?

Mary Creagh: We know that we need to experiment with agroforestry, and that we need to do farming differently in this country, but sometimes it is about going back to the old ways of farming, with mixed arable crops and cattle and sheep, to get back that grassland; and about re-wiggling the waters. I was talking today about the blocking up of a little river in East Anglia for blackcurrant bushes—we all grew up on Ribena. That is resilient farming—growing our own fruit, and not relying on Spain for our fruit and veg, because if Spain's water supply dries up, we will have to do more at home.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): The latest heatwaves have been really unsettling; kids have been unable to learn in schools, and care homes have been unable to keep residents cool. One of the GP practices in my constituency had to shut its waiting area because the temperatures were dangerously high. We have heard the Minister talk about adaption and resilience measures. We are in this climate emergency, so can she say more about how those measures will help my constituents in Aylesbury?

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend lives in a particularly beautiful part of the world that has a lot to commend it. We need to take a whole-city approach to the issue. We need to look at our roads. We need to reduce the urban heat island effect, with more tree planting and soft planting, and moving away from the grey concrete. We need more planting that will hold water out of our drains and keep it on our streets. We need to reduce the concreting over of front gardens, which has done so much to contribute towards flooding problems.

Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab): I represent a constituency at the frontline of the climate and nature emergency. Flood risks are part of our daily life. Moors for the Future has demonstrated that restoring peatland can slow waterflow on hills; water passing over restored peat goes 670 times slower than it does over degraded peat.

Moors for the Future is working on projects with the Highways Agency to stop roads flooding. That is a win-win initiative that helps nature and infrastructure. Will the Government continue to support healthy peatland across the country?

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the subject of peatlands and their role in hydrological protection. He raises the same point as the hon. Member for Keighley and Ilkley (Robbie Moore) did about Calderdale, but from a completely different direction. We know that peatlands have this important role to play. They are this country's Amazon rainforest, and we are doing everything we can to protect them for the future.

Connor Naismith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): The Minister's statement will be welcomed by year 2 at St Michael's community academy in Crewe, who I visited recently. I heard letters read aloud by the children, demonstrating their concern about the need to protect our environment and natural habitats. Will the Minister join me in congratulating those year 2 classes, and set out why the Government's 30 by 30 delivery plan is so important for reversing decades of nature decline?

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend's year 2s at St Michael's show that you are never too young to start caring about the environment, but it is important that we nurture and protect that climate awareness and eco awareness. Often as kids go into secondary school, they can lose that. I am excited that we will have a new GCSE in natural history, so that children can learn about what they love—again, that is something being done under this Government, not the last.

Samantha Niblett (South Derbyshire) (Lab): Coton in the Elms in my constituency hit the national news for having recorded the UK's highest temperature on Friday of 35.2°C—a reminder of the realities of climate change and the need to transition to renewable energy. Most of my constituents support that transition, but they are concerned that South Derbyshire is being asked to shoulder more than its fair share, particularly through the Castle Way energy proposal, and the concentration of battery storage linked to Willington and Drakelow grid connections. Will the Minister reassure my constituents

that the burden of hosting solar and battery storage infrastructure, and of nature protection, will be shared fairly across the country?

Mary Creagh: I commend my hon. Friend on getting through that quickly. She tempts me to go beyond my brief, and on to the subject of battery and solar energy. Solar installations can result in biodiversity net gains of up to 300%; there can be farmland, sheep-grazing grassland and solar alongside each other, and that can provide extra income for the farmer. On battery energy storage, I feel like that is a question for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): Climate change is upon us, and it is costing lives. We must change society to try to stop the situation from getting even worse. Even with the smallest amount of analysis, we know that extreme weather hits the poorest in Britain the hardest. What steps are the Government taking to close inequality gaps, as an essential way of improving our resilience to climate change?

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend asks a great question. I said earlier that climate change is sexist; it also hits the poorest harder—a point he makes well. As we look towards the future, as well as thinking about offering warm spaces through our local government colleagues and councils, we also need to start looking at offering cool and air-conditioned places, such as this Chamber, where we can all go for a bit of relief from the heat.

BILL PRESENTED

MAXIMUM WORKPLACE TEMPERATURE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Hannah Spencer, supported by Rebecca Long Bailey, Alex Sobel, Graham Leadbitter, Jeremy Corbyn, Liz Saville Roberts and Nadia Whittome, presented a Bill to establish an independent body to make recommendations to the Secretary of State relating to maximum safe workplace temperature; to make provision about the implementation of those recommendations; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 113).

Immigration and Asylum Bill

Second Reading

[Relevant Documents: Oral evidence taken before the Justice Committee on 7 July, on Immigration and Asylum Appeals, HC 522; Oral evidence taken before the Home Affairs Committee on 16 December 2025, on Asylum and Returns policy, Session 2024-26, HC 1579]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): The reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition has been selected.

6.43 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Two years ago, when this Government took office, we inherited an asylum system in chaos. The Conservative Government had ceded control of our borders to criminal gangs and, as a result, between January 2021 and June 2024, 110,000 people arrived here by small boat, while a further 175,000 claimed asylum by other routes. As numbers soared, so did the cost to the taxpayer. In just a single year, spending on asylum support was £4.7 billion, including £9 million spent daily on housing people in 400 asylum hotels.

In the last two years, this Government have begun the work of restoring order to our borders. That starts by taking the fight to the criminal gangs. In the last year, arrests of people smugglers were up 55%. Since taking office, we have disrupted organised immigration crime on 3,700 occasions—up by 46%. In partnership with French law enforcement, we have stopped 46,000 attempted channel crossings. We are now taking that partnership further with a new deal signed in April. This will fund increased patrols and intelligence operations, with a 53% increase in personnel on the French coast. The deal is already bearing fruit. In May, nearly two thirds of attempted small boat crossings were thwarted.

Meanwhile, we have rebuilt a shattered asylum system. Decision making ground to a halt under the last Government; now, decisions are at a 24-year high. As a result, removals are now at their highest level in nearly a decade—up 41% on the same period prior to our taking office. We have now deported and removed nearly 10,000 foreign criminals. That is 36% more than the last Government achieved.

We are also beginning to lighten the burden on local communities. This Government committed to ending the use of asylum hotels within this Parliament. Two years in, we have already emptied one in five, reducing the hotel population by 29% and cutting asylum costs by £1 billion.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): I can say absolutely wholeheartedly that the Home Secretary retains my complete support for seeing this legislation through in full. Does she not agree that, as we take this action forward, it is important not just that the hotels are reduced, but that the dispersal accommodation that has overburdened communities, like mine in Hartlepool, is also reduced?

Shabana Mahmood: I thank my hon. Friend for what he said. He is absolutely right: we need to reduce the pressure in local communities as much as possible. He knows that dispersal accommodation has been part of the asylum accommodation estate for many years, including under the previous Government. Of course, the best way to reduce the need for asylum accommodation—the use of large sites, dispersal accommodation and other sites—is to reduce the inflow of people coming to the country on small boats in the channel. Once we get to grips with those numbers, we will see the biggest decrease in asylum accommodation, no matter what form it takes, and that is the work that this Government are taking forward.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I congratulate the Home Secretary on not resiling at all from the tough stance that she is trying to take. Has she received any indication that after 20 July, a Labour Home Secretary—hopefully she herself—will be able to continue to develop this important work?

Shabana Mahmood: Oh, the right hon. Gentleman tempts me with some attractive bait, but I will resist the temptation! I am sure that once the events of 20 July have taken place, all these matters shall become clearer still.

This Government have taken some considerable steps forward, but we must do more: around 94,000 people remain in asylum accommodation at a total cost of £3.7 billion per year; while asylum claims fell by 12% last year, they remain close to historic highs; and with the criminal gangs still at work, people continue to die in the channel, with over 100 deaths since the start of 2024, including women and young children.

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): We always forget that people lose their lives in the channel—including last year, tragically, a young girl of four and a young man of 16 who had just tried to phone his parents. Does the Home Secretary agree that anyone with any humanitarian beliefs at all should be doing everything they can to stop cross-channel boats, and that it is incumbent on everyone that we do everything we can about that?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is really shocking that we no longer seem to give huge amounts of attention to the deaths that still occur in the channel; in fact, they barely make the news. Most people do not realise that so many still lose their lives when crossing on small boats in the channel. That is why there is a moral responsibility on all of us to think about how we deal with the particular challenge of small boats crossing the channel, how we play our part as a Government committed to our humanitarian responsibilities, and how we ensure that we finish off this trade once and for all. The only people who really benefit from this trade, and from the huge risks that people place themselves under, are the criminal gangs themselves. That money is going into the pockets of hardened criminals who would harm us in other ways, and we have got to put a stop to it.

This country has always provided sanctuary to those fleeing war and persecution, and I am proud of that fact, but we must accept that public consent for our asylum system is fraying, and unless we restore control, we will lose the British public's support entirely. My goal

as Home Secretary is to rebuild the public's confidence, and thereby ensure that we can continue providing protection to those in need today and for generations to come. To do so, I believe we must restore fairness to our asylum system—fairness both to those who are fleeing war and persecution, and towards those communities already here who bear the burden of support.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): On fairness, I understand that some 80 Labour Back Benchers have written to the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham), asking him to review the Home Secretary's plans for indefinite leave to remain. Are they likely to be disappointed or encouraged by his response?

Shabana Mahmood: Indefinite leave to remain, and the Government's proposals on earned settlement, will be settled policy later this year when the Government respond to the earned settlement consultation, in which we have said that we are consulting on transitional arrangements. Those will be settled later this year, but as the hon. Gentleman knows, that is not the subject of the Bill.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: we have a proud tradition of welcoming those fleeing persecution, oppression and injustice. In my constituency, over a decade ago many Rohingya who were fleeing genocide made Bradford their home, and we welcomed them. Many of them were able to reunite with their families from refugee camps, who are now living with them in Bradford, and all of them are contributing very positively to Bradford and to this country. Under the Home Secretary's changes, they would never have been able to reunite with their families, and they would not have done that. Does she think that is right and fair on them?

Shabana Mahmood: I remind my hon. Friend that, as he knows, we have paused family reunification, and the Government have said that we will bring forward further proposals for our approach to that. We need to ensure that we have more parity of treatment between those who are ultimately recognised as refugees and other migrants who come to this country—and indeed British citizens who may marry from abroad but are subject to different rules that do not apply to their refugee counterparts. I think there is a need to bring some coherence to the family reunification system, and to ensure that we have an approach that is fair to all the sorts of people who make claims for family reunification. That is not the subject of the Bill, but it is something on which the Government will soon bring forward additional policy proposals.

There is nothing fair about a system that is based on uncontrolled, unsafe and illegal routes into this country. The only people it serves are the people smugglers. Instead, a fair asylum system must be grounded in controlled, safe and legal asylum. For that reason, in the last few weeks I announced new routes for genuine refugees to build a new life here. These capped, safe and legal routes will soon allow communities, universities and businesses to sponsor refugees. The approach means that those in need of protection arrive with the consent of communities, and with the financial support of their sponsor and not the taxpayer. It is an approach to asylum that promotes integration within, and contribution to, this country.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Friern Barnet) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary put on record thanks to communities like mine in Hornsey and Friern Barnet who have opened their doors for the Homes for Ukraine scheme? People have been deeply involved—through the synagogue, the mosque and the church—in community-based schemes that find accommodation locally, and have helped people into work who were already refugees—the UNHRC had decided they were refugees, so there was no question about their application—and that has been a really positive development for our communities.

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When people arrive through controlled, safe routes, when we have made a decision to allow people to enter, and when we are in control and not the people-smuggling gangs, the inherent openness, tolerance and generosity of the British people is unlocked. People are willing to welcome those who are in need and who come to this country at our invitation and through a system that has broad public support. Those are the principles that will underpin this Government's approach to the asylum system.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): Even in rural areas like Cornwall, community schemes welcoming Syrian refugees are working very well. They show that community sponsorship schemes can work well across the country.

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—yes, they can and they do. That is the difference with a safe and legal route that has buy-in from communities across the country, and that is the basis on which we will build a system for the future.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): It is great to hear my right hon. Friend supporting schemes like Homes for Ukraine. The reason we do not see Ukrainians crossing the channel on small boats is because, rightly, we have a safe and legal route. Why not expand those safe and legal routes to places like Sudan and Eritrea, because obviously if an asylum claim comes from those countries, at the very least they should be fast-tracked? That would help to clear up the backlog, so would she support that?

Shabana Mahmood: We have set out our proposals to open up a student refugee scheme and a community sponsorship scheme that will go live later in autumn this year, with the first arrivals coming in the autumn of the following year. Numbers on those schemes will grow. We will also make it possible for businesses to sponsor refugees to come to this country and provide them with work opportunities. I think that is the right way forward. It means that we will be able to accommodate different cohorts of refugees, where we believe we are able to offer a fresh start for people, and to make the best of the contribution that they are able to make to the country. I look forward to getting those routes open, and to welcoming the first arrivals.

In Canada, local communities have long sponsored refugees, and 70% of those sponsored refugees have found work within a year. Here the story is very different. In the first year after being granted asylum, just a quarter of refugees are in work. That leaves them unable to contribute and build a life here, relying instead on the

[*Shabana Mahmood*]

support of British taxpayers. This autumn we will begin to take applications for our new community sponsored and study routes. The first refugees will arrive in autumn 2027, and while numbers will start relatively small, it is my intention that they grow in scale as we restore order to our asylum system by reducing the numbers arriving by unsafe, illegal routes. The Bill is focused on how we reduce the numbers arriving unsafely and illegally in this country, and on reducing the burden placed on local communities.

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Reform): We have read reports recently that the Home Secretary's important reforms to indefinite leave to remain are being watered down because of the views of the incoming Prime Minister. We have also read of the letter from 80 Labour MPs, many of whom are in the Chamber today, who oppose her plans today. My simple question is: what are we all doing here right now? Is there any guarantee that her reforms and the Bill will survive contact with the next Prime Minister, who will be assuming power without any scrutiny, without any transparency, and with absolutely no accountability as to what his plans are?

Shabana Mahmood: I have already answered the point about proposals around indefinite leave to remain; I remind the right hon. and learned Lady, and the House, that it has been settled Government policy to increase the qualifying period from five years to 10 years since last summer—since before I was Home Secretary. In our earned settlement consultation, we have set out a series of proposals that we are consulting on. We are seeking views on the appropriate transitional arrangements that should be applied to that cohort. That is not what we are debating today, but if there is one thing I am sure of, it is that those arrangements will be the subject of intense debate in the weeks and months to come.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): For the benefit of the House and for clarification, does the Home Secretary intend to implement her proposed ILR changes via amendments to the Bill, or via the immigration rules in the autumn?

Shabana Mahmood: As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, the Bill is specifically about the changes we are making to our asylum system, to human rights laws, and to the approach that the Government want to take to asylum appeals. This is not a Bill about indefinite leave to remain. When we have settled policy later this year, those changes will be subject to the usual procedure for changes to immigration rules, which always take place with the scrutiny of this House.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Ind): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Shabana Mahmood: I will give way to the right hon. Lady, but I will make progress after that.

Ms Abbott: The Home Secretary referred earlier to immigrants coming here to live off the taxpayer. I put it to her that not only do a disproportionate number of

immigrants find themselves in work, whether legal or illegal work, but the children of immigrants pay tax. She should remember that.

Shabana Mahmood: I say to the right hon. Lady, for whom I have the greatest respect, that it is not as if I am about to forget my own background, so I do not really need other people to remind me of my own history or background in my own country. We are talking about people smugglers, and about men, women and children—these days, primarily young men—getting on small boats in the channel and crossing into this country. They are not arriving in a safe and legal way. They are not migrants in the usual sense.

We wish to pivot to a system in which this country will live up to its responsibilities to help those in need across the world and fulfil our international obligations by taking people through safe and legal routes. We will be able to increase the numbers that we take on those routes, and that will be subject to debate in this Parliament. We will ensure that we are playing our full part, but in a controlled way that does not put tens of thousands of pounds per person in the hands of people smugglers. The right hon. Lady knows that that is the trade we are trying to break. We have been going after the gangmasters, and now we must make legal changes to change the calculus of those who seek to get on a boat in the north of France.

The Bill focuses on how we reduce the numbers arriving unsafely and illegally in this country and on reducing the burden placed on local communities. It is designed to be fair to genuine refugees and fair to British citizens. It will ensure that asylum claims are fair and fast, with legitimate claimants not stuck in limbo, and ensure the swift removal of those with no right to be here. It will ensure that human rights protections remain robust where they must be, but are also tightened where necessary to eradicate the abuse that has crept into our system. Finally, the measures in the Bill ensure that we support those in their hour of need while making it clear that, although this may be a right, it comes with responsibilities. When the recipients of public support are in a position to contribute to their costs, they should do so.

With those goals in mind, I will take the House through the detail of the Bill. It begins with measures to make asylum decisions fast and fair. Today, the backlog in appeals hearings is a major barrier to this. Although the Government have slashed the backlog in initial decisions, the vast majority of failed asylum seekers lodge an appeal. There are now more than 150,000 people waiting for an appeal decision, with average wait times of well over a year. We must be honest about the nature of the appeals queue.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): A number of civil rights organisations are opposed to the changes to the appeals process, and the Bar Council has spoken out strongly against them. It has said that

“it is in the interests of justice that the persons who decide immigration appeals are legal qualified”.

Will the Minister listen to those criticisms, and the strength of feeling in this House, and remove these proposals so that we can ensure high-quality and legally sound dispute resolution for asylum appeals?

Shabana Mahmood: Well, I disagree with my hon. Friend, the Bar Council and other groups on this matter. In fact, I will shortly set out the many tribunals in which people make decisions of great import every single day without being required to be legally qualified professionals before they do so.

We must be honest about the nature of the appeals queue. Some are genuine appeals, but others have been made simply to delay a legitimate removal from this country. By placing themselves last in the long queue for a hearing, people delay the date of their removal, continue to receive taxpayer support and use the time to accrue rights that could strengthen their appeal. The best way to prevent this gaming of the system is to speed up decision making while ensuring that claims are heard fully and fairly.

Tony Vaughan (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way on that point?

Shabana Mahmood: I will in a moment. I will make a little more progress—I think I have been rather generous.

As many here will know, appeals are currently heard by judges in the first-tier tribunal immigration and asylum chamber. This model, which relies on judicial availability, simply does not have the capacity to meet the scale of demand, nor does it have the flexibility to respond to sudden surges in cases. Part 1 of the Bill will therefore establish a new independent immigration appeals authority, staffed by independent adjudicators, not judges. That will allow us to recruit from a far wider pool of candidates and therefore respond more rapidly to increasing and changing demand.

To those who say that such decisions can be taken only by a judge, I need point only to the complex and weighty decisions taken each and every day by those without law degrees, such as magistrates, parole board members, ombudsmen, planning inspectors and many others. A person does not have to be a judge to have good judgment.

Tony Vaughan: The Home Secretary refers to the “gaming of the system”, but will she clarify the basis on which she says that? Around half of Home Office initial asylum decisions are overturned on appeal, so there is a huge issue about the quality of Home Office decision making, as various National Audit Office reports have shown. It would be useful to know the proportion of appeals that are actually, in her words, abusive.

Shabana Mahmood: As my hon. and learned Friend will know, 50% of a 150,000 backlog is still 75,000 cases. He will also know that the multiple appeals made to delay and frustrate legitimate removal from the country are a real problem in the system. That is why our proposals include a single appeal route. With the new authority, we are seeking to change the totality of the behaviours that are designed to frustrate lawful, legitimate removal from this country.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Shabana Mahmood: I will make more progress and I will come back to the right hon. Lady.

As anyone who knows these tribunals can attest, most immigration and asylum appeals turn on the facts. That requires careful, impartial and well-trained decision makers. Our adjudicators will be paid professionals who are trained to make robust, defensible decisions. Where specific legal expertise is required, we will have on hand a smaller cohort of legally trained adjudicators, who must have been a barrister or solicitor or have similar legal experience. Decisions taken in the new authority will be appealable to the upper tribunal, which will continue to sit before a judge. As today, the appeals will be only on a point of law; they will not be an opportunity to rehear full cases.

Liz Saville Roberts: On the independent immigration appeals authority, I wonder whether hon. Members will be concerned, given the political nature of the decisions made here, that the Home Secretary’s proposals involve a blurring of the line between the Executive and the judiciary.

Shabana Mahmood: As the right hon. Lady will see, the authority will be fully independent, and the impartiality of this new authority is vital. As clause 1 makes clear, its decisions will be entirely independent of Government, with every Minister of the Crown compelled to uphold the independence of the authority. As is often the case with establishing a new body, the first chief executive and chief appeals officer will be appointed by the Home Secretary, but appointments thereafter will be made by the chair of the authority, as set out in clause 2. These will be made on merit and on the basis of fair and open competition.

The authority’s operations and performance will also be subject to external scrutiny, and it will be placed under the remit of the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration.

Chris Murray *rose*—

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab) *rose*—

Imran Hussain: On that point, will the Home Secretary give way?

Shabana Mahmood: I will give way to my hon. Friend who has not asked a question yet.

Patricia Ferguson: Does my right hon. Friend think it would be more appropriate for the Lord Chancellor or the Judicial Appointments Commission to have input into the first of each of these appointments, to ensure their independence is guaranteed?

Shabana Mahmood: All such appointments will be subject to the usual public appointments principles, which will apply here as they do elsewhere. I am happy to discuss with Members, as the Bill passes through the House, whether there are any additional safeguards—

Imran Hussain: On that point, will the Home Secretary give way?

Shabana Mahmood: I have given way to my hon. Friend before; I will make progress and come back to him.

[Shabana Mahmood]

In the new system, a single, faster appeal route will be established, as addressed in clauses 11 and 12. Today, too many claimants make multiple claims at different stages of the process, including at the last possible moment, often to thwart their legitimate removal from this country. To give just one illustrative and eye-opening example, one case involved a convicted rapist who was due to be sent home after serving eight years in jail. Despite not challenging his deportation at first, he went on to make a series of late claims, including a judicial review on the eve of being removed from this country. Although we eventually managed to remove him, it took more than four years to get this criminal out of the country. For that reason, alongside the new authority, we will create a single appeal route. That will require claimants to raise all relevant matters up front.

Where late claims are raised, particularly in the run-up to removal, they will be dealt with through an expedited process. That means that genuine issues will still be considered, but tactical claims can no longer be used to frustrate a removal. As is already the case, claimants may access advice and legal representation, with legal aid available to those who are eligible. That advice and support are vital to ensure that appeals progress fairly, without delay or disruption.

In clause 21, in part 3 of the Bill, we are introducing further measures to ensure that decision making is fast and fair. Today, there are two separate types of protection: refugee status and humanitarian protection. Both carry near-identical entitlements and eligibility for settlement. That creates near-duplicate claims and unnecessary complexity, which slows down our asylum system. The Bill therefore replaces those two forms of protection with one form—the core protection model. That means that each claim will be assessed once, with one outcome. A right of appeal will be available only to those refused protection, not those who wish to seek protection under a different status. That is a clearer, simple process that will make no difference to those lodging genuine claims, but will cut inefficiency in the system and ensure that those with genuine appeals get a faster, fairer decision.

An effective asylum system is one in which claims are heard fast and fairly. Those who have a legitimate claim receive the protection they need, while those who do not are removed from this country, without turning the bureaucracy against us. That is what the measures in this Bill seek to achieve.

Chris Murray *rose—*

Shabana Mahmood: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), if he still wants to come in. *[Interruption.]* No? I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray) then.

Chris Murray: The Home Secretary is being very generous. The purpose of the Bill is to make the system more swift, but I am surprised to see that there is no component of mandatory reconsideration included in it. As we have seen in the Department for Work and Pensions, that has really made the system faster. We had a broadly similar system in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, which was replaced, and that did not make the system quicker. How will this situation be different from what we have had before?

Shabana Mahmood: I think my hon. Friend means mandatory reconsideration in the context of a case when an appeal is made.

Chris Murray *indicated assent.*

Shabana Mahmood: To reassure my hon. Friend, before a case proceeds to appeal, we already have an internal process whereby we check whether we should still defend the claim at appeal stage. If the facts have changed or if there are issues with the original decision, we remove cases from the list of those proceeding to an appeal under the current system. We are doing something similar already. I do not want to create additional bureaucracy and ever-more complication, but that is part of the Home Office's current process. We have removed cases from the appeals backlog where we know that they should be granted.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The case that the Home Secretary is making for this legislation is that the way in which appeals are being dealt with is unnecessarily slowing up and clogging up the system, because of the nature of the appeals being made. She has just argued that there is a quality control with the initial decisions that the Home Office is making. Looking at the figures, I see that that accounts for 40% of these appeals being overturned. Will she reflect again on the quality of initial Home Office decision making? Will bringing in a piece of legislation that will further complexify that decision-making process lead to better decisions being made the first time? For value for the public purse and the decency of how we treat refugees, surely that is where she should focus her efforts.

Shabana Mahmood: Actually, I think we need to focus our efforts in a number of areas. We need to ensure that we are improving the quality and speed of initial decisions, and we have been doing that. However, as my hon. Friend will know and as I have just set out, people make multiple claims, often at the last minute. I raised the example of a foreign national offender who it took us four years to remove from the country after he had served a sentence. That is because he kept putting in appeal after appeal after appeal after appeal. These reforms are designed to deal with that problem.

I am sure my hon. Friend will agree that we need to be able to look at the system in its totality, so we should absolutely look at the quality of initial decisions, but there is no silver bullet here. There is nothing that says, "As long as you fix that one thing, you are not going to have a problem anywhere else." There will still be claims that are rightly refused both at the initial stage and at appeal stage, and it is imperative that we can remove people from this country as quickly as possible when they have no right to be here.

It is vital that we provide protection to those who are truly in need. Following the devastation of the second world war, this country led the world in promoting human rights to ensure that we learned from the horrors of the past. This Government will always be committed to that internationalist ideal and to the robust human rights laws that underpin it. However, we are also realists, so we admit where noble intentions have been misused and abused. Today, too often, we see well-meaning laws used not to defend a human right, but as a way to frustrate

the removal of someone with no right to be in this country, including failed asylum seekers, visa abusers and even foreign criminals.

The British people have a natural sense of fairness. They believe that those who require protection should receive it, but no one should be able to abuse that protection. The abuse of human rights law does not just erode the public's support for our immigration system; it erodes their support for the very idea of having such laws at all. For those who believe that these laws matter, it is essential that we reform them to end their abuse.

Clauses 17 to 20 reform the domestic application of article 8 of the European convention on human rights—the right to a family and private life. Article 8 is undoubtedly a vital protection, but it is a qualified right. That means that the rights of individuals must be weighed against the public interest. Over time, the balance between an individual's family rights and the rights of the wider community has shifted. Without a clear definition from Parliament of how that balance should be struck, the interpretation of article 8 in our domestic courts has expanded beyond the original convention and what Strasbourg case law requires.

To understand how far the balance has shifted, consider just one example. In 2025, an Albanian man jailed for growing cannabis escaped deportation not because he had any right to be here, but because it was deemed unduly harsh on his partner to deport him. She was not his wife or life partner—instead, this relationship began only after a deportation order had been served. Why was the deportation deemed to be unduly harsh? The partner spoke no Albanian and had never visited the country before. While that is just one example, the expansion of article 8 is clear throughout the system. More than half of those who stayed in the UK for family reasons last year did not meet our own rules, relying instead on their article 8 rights, and 71% of those who stay in the UK because of article 8 rights arrived here illegally or overstayed their visa.

The Bill addresses both the definition of family life and the public interest test. Clause 19 tightly defines the public interest. It clarifies that judges must consider the economic impact on the taxpayer of allowing people to remain in the UK, including whether they are able to support their family, and that no weight should be given to an article 8 claim when someone is here illegally.

Clause 20 strengthens the public interest test so that foreign criminals can be removed more easily. It states that the more serious the offending, the greater the public interest in removing them from this country. It also specifically addresses those facing deportation who may be appealing on article 8 grounds. The Bill makes it clear that a deportation should go ahead outside of a limited number of truly exceptional circumstances, as set out in clause 20.

On the subject of deporting foreign criminals, the Government intend to table an amendment to the Bill in response to the widely reported case of the vile grooming gang leader Shabir Ahmed. Our amendment will provide the Home Secretary with a new power to disapply section 7 of the Immigration Act 1971 for serious criminals. That section provides protections for long-term UK residents, but it clearly should not act as a bar to removal in cases such as that of Shabir Ahmed. The threshold for the power will be tied to the power to deprive citizenship, which applies only in cases of

exceptional severity. It is important to note that that does not guarantee his removal from this country, as the Conservatives know all too well from their own experience. The Foreign Secretary and I will continue to work on all avenues to pursue a deportation. I know that the thoughts of everyone here are with the victims and survivors of this vile criminal.

Let me return to the Bill as drafted and our reforms to the definition of family life in domestic law. Clause 18 tightens the definition of family life. For immigration purposes, a “family” will now normally mean relationships in the immediate family unit. That means a spouse or partner, a parent or a child under the age of 18, apart from in truly exceptional circumstances, such as an incapacitated adult who lives with and is entirely dependent on their sibling.

Clause 19 makes it clear that judges must consider when article 8 rights were established and, in particular, whether that happened after someone entered this country illegally or overstayed their visa. In clause 17, we clarify whose article 8 rights should be considered. This makes it clear that for someone overseas to come to the UK on article 8 grounds, a family life claim must be made by a UK-based sponsor, and cannot be made by family members overseas. That is because our obligations under the ECHR are, rightly, to those who are living in the UK.

In clause 19, as part of our reforms to article 8, we set out where it is unreasonable to expect a child to leave the UK when a member of their family is being removed. Specifically, it is if the child will not receive an education in the other country or will not be able to integrate into that country, or where relocation would have a very significant and long-lasting adverse effect on them. This brings us in line with case law in the European Court. We also set out the limited circumstances in which it may be reasonable to remove a parent where they do not have a genuine and subsisting relationship with the child. In doing so, we once again bring UK law in line with existing Strasbourg case law.

We do so with legitimate cause. As the interpretation of article 8 has widened, we have seen shocking examples of the abuse of parental relationships, including a paedophile who was allowed to stay in this country because his deportation to Pakistan was, under article 8, considered “unduly harsh” on his children. That was despite the fact that his contact with those very same children is restricted by law, in order to protect them from their father. The Home Office appealed the case and eventually won, but only after a lengthy legal battle necessitated by the lack of a clear definition in the law. This Bill rectifies that situation.

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that these agreements have come about through partnership working with our European partners, and that this has been a central part of the negotiations? There is a unity of purpose among other European countries that want to tighten their borders and prevent people abusing the system.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I am sure the Home Secretary has seen the number of people in the Chamber, and will be bringing her remarks to a conclusion shortly.

Shabana Mahmood: I have been far too generous, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will plough on, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right: the way to make sure that the interpretation of international human rights law is in line with what the general public would expect and with the original intention of the drafters is to work with our international colleagues—not to rip up human rights law and give up on it, but to make sure it is fit for purpose.

Just as article 8 has been exploited by those facing legitimate removal from our country, so has our modern slavery system. Human trafficking is an abhorrent crime, and we will always provide the support victims need, especially vulnerable children. For that reason, the Bill strengthens a number of those protections, especially by placing child trafficking guardians on a statutory footing and making sure that modern slavery decisions about children are devolved to local authorities, so that those closest to the child—those best placed to make decisions about the support they need—make those decisions properly. We are also strengthening slavery and trafficking prevention and risk orders, ensuring that law enforcement can restrict offenders' movements and work. Clauses 44 to 49 raise the standards for businesses and public bodies. They must report on their actions to identify and tackle abuse in their supply chains, or face potential fines of up to £1 million.

However, we know that we must also address the growing misuse and abuse of those protections. In 2025, modern slavery claims by arrivals on small boats reached an all-time high. Over half now relate to alleged exploitation overseas, rather than here in the United Kingdom, and claims are increasingly being used to frustrate legitimate removals from this country. Last year, over a third of charter flight returns failed to go ahead because of a modern slavery referral lodged at the last minute. Foreign criminals have seen the opportunity—in recent years, last-minute claims have been made by a convicted rapist, a gangster jailed for possession of a firearm, and an attempted murderer. In every case, those claims successfully delayed their removal from this country.

For that reason, part 5 of the Bill introduces measures to address abuse in the system. In particular, we make it clear that anyone who poses a threat to public order or national security will not receive modern slavery protection and support. This includes any foreign national who has received a custodial sentence, including if that sentence was suspended. In clause 36, we make clear that delayed disclosures have a damaging effect on a person's credibility unless there are good reasons. By doing so, we further reduce the incentive to make claims as late as possible.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Shabana Mahmood: I will not, because Madam Deputy Speaker wishes me to wind up quickly.

In clause 37, we close another significant loophole. As it stands, those whose claims turn out to be unfounded can continue to receive taxpayer-funded support for a 30-day recovery period. The Bill will ensure that we stop providing protection for those who we know do not need it.

This Government are committed to the protections provided by human rights law, but those protections must be applied fairly. That means ensuring that they are always given to those who are truly in need, and it

means ending the abuse that runs contrary to their spirit and intention. The measures in the Bill are realistic and proportionate, and are designed to protect those who are genuinely deserving while bearing down on abuse that erodes public support for the very existence of such protections.

A fair asylum system is one in which claims are heard fast and fairly, and where protections are upheld for those who need them, but not for those who seek to abuse them. It is one in which we provide support, but expect that those who are in a position to contribute do so. Every day, we ask our constituents to bear the burden of funding our asylum system. As that asylum system has spiralled out of control, the weight on their shoulders has grown. That is not fair, and it was also never foreseen; the original drafters of the refugee convention could never have imagined that the British people would spend billions each year on asylum support. To continue their legacy—providing protection to those in need while retaining public support—we need to adapt to our new reality. We need a fair way of addressing the challenges of the world as it is.

To that end, part 4 of the Bill creates a new contributory principle within our asylum regime. It does so through clause 23, by introducing a power that requires those who have received taxpayer-funded support to pay back a portion when they can. This measure reflects a principle that most people would recognise as fair: once you are able to contribute, you should.

Refugees have immediate access to the labour market and housing, and many go on to work, build successful lives and contribute enormously to our society. Payments under our new system will be proportionate and made over time; no one will be asked to contribute more than they can afford, but payments will not be optional for those who can make them, and those who have received support but have been removed from the country will not be able to return until their debt is repaid. There are some to whom this will not apply, including children and anyone who came to this country via a safe and legal route. Clause 23 of the Bill introduces this new power; however, the precise design of the payment programme will be set out in draft regulations, which I will share with the House during the Bill's passage through Parliament. There will be ample opportunity for full parliamentary scrutiny of these changes.

That brings me to the end of the Bill. It must be read in the light of the inheritance that this Government received—borders out of control, an asylum system in crisis, and a burden placed on the British people that was simply too great. This country has long provided support to those fleeing war and persecution, and proudly so, but the chaos that the Conservative party left behind has eroded public trust in our asylum system. This Government have already done much to restore order at our borders, but there is more to do. That is the goal of this Bill: to ensure that decisions and appeals are fast and fair; to provide protection to genuine refugees; to offer protections under human rights laws for those who are in genuine need, while closing loopholes that have too often been abused; and to ensure that the generosity of the British people is not forgotten, and that people can contribute when they are in a position to do so. This is a Bill that will provide fairness for genuine refugees, but also fairness for local communities, thereby making sure that we secure our asylum system for generations to come.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): With the exception of the Front Benchers, we will be starting with an immediate seven-minute time limit. I call the shadow Home Secretary.

7.28 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

“this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Immigration and Asylum Bill, while welcoming some of its provisions, because the Bill does not ensure all foreign criminals and illegal immigrants will be deported; does not end asylum for illegal immigrants; does not stop modern slavery claims suspending removal; does not stop illegal immigrants getting citizenship; does not make the changes the Government promised to reduce the numbers of people eligible for Indefinite Leave to Remain; because the Bill will allow sponsor human rights claims, which will enable people outside the UK to enter under human rights grounds; because measures in the Bill such as narrowing the ability to make Article 8 and modern slavery claims will not be effective while the UK remains in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998 remains in force; and because the provisions in the Bill are not capable of eliminating illegal immigration.”

The reasoned amendment, which stands in the names of the Leader of the Opposition, myself and my right hon. and hon. Friends, is to decline to give a Second Reading to the Bill on the grounds that it does not go far enough to combat illegal immigration or to ensure that all foreign criminals are deported.

First, I cannot help but notice the absence of the hon. Member for Dover and Deal (Mike Tapp), the immigration Minister, whom I was expecting to see in his place. Perhaps the Home Secretary has not yet forgiven him for openly defying her a few weeks ago, leading to her rather extraordinary public campaign to get him fired. No wonder she has so much trouble deporting illegal immigrants—she cannot even deport her own junior Minister from Marsham Street. *[Interruption.]* Does the Home Secretary deny that she tried to get him fired a couple of weeks ago, unsuccessfully? I notice that she makes no such denial.

At the beginning of her speech, the Home Secretary made a number of claims about statistics, one or two of which I would like to gently take issue with. She referred to small boat crossings. Since the election, 76,000 people have dangerously and illegally crossed the channel by small boat. That is more than under any other Prime Minister. Let us keep in mind that those crossings were undertaken mainly by young men, all of whom were leaving a safe country, France. Nobody needs to flee danger in France.

The Home Secretary also referred to removal numbers. Some 85% of those removals are voluntary, and only a tiny fraction are of people who arrived by small boat. In fact, since the election, removals of people illegally entering by small boat have amounted to only about 5% to 7% of small boat arrivals. Given that someone entering this country by small boat has a 95% chance of staying, and gets put up in taxpayer-funded accommodation, it is no wonder that crossings have occurred in record numbers. The only way of deterring these crossings is if almost everybody arriving gets deported when they arrive.

I observe that of the 80,000 people whose asylum claims were rejected at first instance in 2025, only 12,000 left or were removed. It is true that FNO removals are somewhat up, which I welcome, but if we look at the breakdown by nationality, it tells a rather different story. The numbers of foreign criminals deported to countries such as Albania,

Romania, Lithuania and Poland are high when we compare them against the offender population. When we look at countries outside of Europe, the numbers are much lower. For example, Jamaica, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia together have 1,150 offenders in prison—and many more out in the community—yet last year, only 110, or less than 10%, were removed. Yes, the removal of FNOs to countries in eastern Europe is going well, and I commend the Government on that, but when it comes to removing foreign criminals to countries outside Europe, such as Jamaica, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia, the figures are very low. The reasons for that are some of the ones that the Home Secretary touched on earlier.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): I am reluctant to interrupt the shadow Home Secretary when he is in full flow, but he listed countries to which we are successfully deporting people; does he think that our membership of the ECHR has any impact on our ability to deport people to those countries?

Chris Philp: Our membership of the ECHR has less effect on deportations to Europe, because it is hard to make an ECHR-based claim if the receiving country is in Europe. However, when it comes to deporting foreign criminals to countries outside of Europe, such as those I listed, there are frequent ECHR-based claims, as the Home Secretary said earlier. I will expand on that point later, but there is no question in my mind that ECHR-based claims are one of the reasons why it is difficult to deport foreign criminals to those countries I just listed. Human rights claims, combined with asylum claims and modern slavery claims, mean that dangerous criminals remain in this country.

I will give the hon. Gentleman a number. Under section 32 of the UK Borders Act 2007, the Home Secretary is under a legal duty to deport a foreign national sentenced to more than a year in prison, yet 20,000 people who meet that criterion are at large in the community, and many of them continue to offend. They are still at large in the community because they make claims under the ECHR, modern slavery and asylum routes. Those 20,000 people are a risk to my constituents and to his, and I take exception to some of the Home Secretary's high-fiving at the beginning of her speech.

Let me touch on the proposal for so-called safe and legal routes, or refugee sponsorship. The numbers that we are talking about would be in addition to the number of asylum claims that we are already processing. Last year saw the highest number of asylum claims in history. From memory, it was somewhere in the region of 109,000. This year, the number will only be a little lower. Adding to that when we already have record numbers of asylum claims strikes me as irresponsible. The Home Secretary said that there would be a cap, but she did not specify what it would be; I would be interested to hear that. She also asserted that the people coming in by these routes would not be a burden on the general taxpayer, because their sponsor would look after them. She neglected to mention that that support has to last only for the first year. Thereafter, the taxpayer could have to pick up the tab. I must say that I do not support the creation of these schemes until we have illegal immigration and asylum claims down essentially to zero.

The argument that the creation of safe and legal routes will somehow stop small boats is absurd, because unless we give access to this country to everybody who

[Chris Philp]

wants to come—to everybody congregating in northern France, waiting to get on a dinghy—the ones who do not come in on that scheme will still try to cross on small boats. The idea that safe and legal routes will stop the boats on their own is absurd.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Does the shadow Minister agree that rising numbers of asylum claims, and rising numbers of approvals of said asylum claims, are essentially acting as a magnet for others? Essentially, that amounts to an amnesty for asylum claimants.

Chris Philp: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. For many nationalities that cross the English channel by small boat—Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi, Eritrean and Sudanese, to name just six or seven—the asylum grant rate is well over 90%. In some cases, it is very close to 100%, which means that crossing by small boat is tantamount to an automatic right to stay here, even though those illegal immigrants—and they are illegal immigrants—are leaving a safe country. They are not fleeing danger; they were in France already. I agree that that creates a massive pull factor.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Your Party): I know the shadow Minister is an intelligent man who thinks a lot about these things. Has he considered for a moment why there are so many refugees globally, and why there are 70 million people without a home to call their own? Has he considered the effects of wars, environmental disaster and human rights abuses on populations around the world? Should there not be an international effort to try to help those people, as well as to deal with the problems at home? Does putting up barbed wire all around the world solve the problem, or create an even worse situation globally?

Chris Philp: I agree that the situation in countries such as Afghanistan creates large movements of people—that is correct—and fixing problems at source is clearly the best thing to do. However, I do not think transferring potentially tens of millions of people—he gave the number just then of 60 million or 70 million—into the west is the right solution to this problem. Those people who are displaced are probably better helped close to their country of origin. Transporting people en masse into this country is not the solution. When we have illegal migration under control, by which I mean at zero, there is a case for a limited safe and legal route, but until such time as we do that, I do not think such a transfer is reasonable.

By the way, the people who are crossing by small boat are not the most vulnerable. They are not typically women and children, or people who are sick and vulnerable. They are mostly young men who are paying people smugglers. If we were going to choose who to help, it would not be them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Chris Philp: I will give way again, but I want to make a bit of progress first. There will be plenty of other opportunities later.

I will briefly touch on indefinite leave to remain, which is conspicuous by its absence from the Bill. We heard the policy proposal when it was announced last November, but we still do not have any of the details laid out. I agree with the thrust of the Home Secretary's proposal to increase the period to 10 years, because otherwise a large number of people—about 2 million—who entered in the past four or five years will get a permanent right to stay, including a full right to benefits. That includes people who came in on skilled worker visas sponsored by, among others, kebab shops and fried chicken shops.

I am keen to make sure that the Home Secretary sticks to her previous pledge that these rules would apply to people who are in the country already, and does not give in to pressure from her Back Benchers. I remind the House that the Home Secretary said to the Institute for Public Policy Research on 5 March this year that the change to a 10-year qualification period means “applying any rule changes to those who are in the UK today, but have not yet received settled status.”

I hope she stands by her commitment. If she does, we Opposition Members will vote for it. She has our support on that.

While we are speaking about legal migration, let me urge the Home Secretary to reconsider her plan to introduce remote language tests, which are open to enormous fraud and abuse. Australia and Canada rejected them for that reason, and some domestic professional bodies, including the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, have stopped carrying them out because they are so open to fraud. I know that this testing is more efficient and I know that it will save money, but it is massively open to fraud.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is quite something to listen to a shadow Secretary of State whose party oversaw a net migration increase of 2.5 million in four years, and who has the brass neck to lecture the party in government on how to clear up his mess. Does he think he has any credibility at all on this matter, or is this just about the Facebook clip that he will undoubtedly be pumping out on his social media this evening?

Chris Philp: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows nothing about Facebook clips, but let me be honest: mistakes were made in the past, and the policies that we have now developed, under new leadership, will fix those issues. In fact, this indefinite leave to remain policy was first proposed by us about a year ago, and then, very wisely, the Home Secretary adopted it.

Let me come to the commitment that the Home Secretary made on Shabir Ahmed, the vile gang rapist who should be deported back to Pakistan. We support the amendment to section 7 of the Immigration Act 1971, although section 33 of the UK Borders Act 2007—I think it is subsection (1)(b)—might need some attention as well. I would only ask the Home Secretary not to do that by amending this Bill, which will probably take a year or so to reach the statute book. I hope that she will consider doing it instead through emergency legislation in September, which could be completed in a couple of weeks; we took the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Act 2020 through Parliament in, I believe, 15 days in February of that year. There is not a moment to lose, and this can be fixed quite quickly.

As for the substance of the Bill, I agree with some of the Home Secretary's analyses of where the problems lie. She is right to say that the immigration appeal system, modern slavery laws and human rights laws are being abused on an industrial scale by foreign criminals, and also by people with no legal right to be here, including people who came here illegally in small boats. These illegal immigrants and foreign criminals do make repeated claims, time after time.

The Home Secretary gave the example of a foreign criminal whom it took four years to deport. I was aware of the case of a Somali man who entered the country illegally and participated in the violent gang rape of a 16-year-old girl. On his release from prison, it took eight years to deport that man back to Somalia, because he made two or three different claims on sometimes contradictory grounds. I think that he made two modern slavery claims, and a number of human rights claims as well. There have been other cases in which foreign criminals have avoided being deported. For example, an armed robber avoided being deported back to Nigeria on the grounds that his mental health needs would not be taken care of perfectly there. Another man, a drug dealer, was not sent back to Iraq on ECHR grounds because, apparently, he had become too westernised. There was not a single thought for the safety of British children and the need for them to be protected from paedophiles. A Zimbabwean paedophile was not deported to Zimbabwe because he might get treated with hostility there. The judge gave no thought to protecting British children, and no thought to protecting our citizens from criminals.

In another case, a man was taken off a charter flight to Jamaica, again on human rights grounds—I think it was article 8—and about six months after being removed from that flight, he murdered someone on the streets of south London. That happened because of the supposed human rights of a criminal who went on to commit murder. I agree with the analysis that our immigration legal system, our modern slavery system and the human rights system are being abused on an industrial scale, and that has to end.

Sir Julian Lewis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that part of the problem is that practitioners of the legal system seem to believe that there are such things as absolute human rights, whereas most human rights are relative, and can be trumped by other people's human rights, and in fact, can be abrogated? When you infringe other people's human rights, you surely cannot expect your own to have priority over theirs, in a sensible system.

Chris Philp: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. When it comes to foreign criminals, and people who enter this country illegally, having exited a safe place, namely France, I do not think that they should be given all the protections that we have been discussing this afternoon.

Let me turn to some of the specifics that the Home Secretary has put in the Bill. The changes to the immigration tribunal system, and the measures dealing with modern slavery and trying to better define article 8 constitute small steps in the right direction, but on their own, they are not going to work. Past Governments have attempted to make such measures work, but they have essentially failed, and I think that they will fail again. For example,

better defining article 8 in domestic law was attempted in—I think, from memory—section 19 of the Immigration Act 2014, which I believe created section 117 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. That was an attempt to do, broadly speaking, what the Home Secretary is trying to do now, and it did not work, because judges—not just those in Strasbourg, but our domestic judges, empowered by the Human Rights Act—simply continued interpreting family rights very expansively and allowing foreign criminals to stay. I admire the Home Secretary's effort to do this, but it has been tried before and it did not work.

Excluding modern slavery claims by foreign criminals has also been attempted before. The Bill essentially seeks to amend section 63 of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which was an attempt by a previous Government to fix this problem four or five years ago, and it has been repeatedly struck down by the courts. Because of the ECHR and the way in which it is incorporated by the Human Rights Act, it does not matter how we legislate. As with section 63 a few years ago, following the Home Secretary's most recent attempt today judges will use the European convention on human rights, empowered by the HRA, to circumvent laws passed by this Parliament. The Home Secretary experienced that herself just last week, when her "one in, one out" scheme was upset by vexatious modern slavery claims. She tried valiantly to fix the loophole in guidance, and last week a court struck it down. The conclusion that I have reached—having suffered in the Home Office in the past as she is suffering now, trying to fix these issues within the construct of the ECHR and modern slavery legislation, and the examples that the Home Secretary gave only support this—is that the only way to fix this issue is to come out of these institutions entirely. We cannot do it by tinkering, which is what the Bill seeks to do. The previous Government tried it, I have tried it personally, the Home Secretary's predecessor tried it, and she is now trying it again. The truth is—

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab) rose—

Chris Philp: Let me finish the point. The truth is that tinkering like this does not work when we have very expansive rights-based conventions. The only way of fixing this properly is to exit the ECHR entirely, repeal the Human Rights Act entirely, exit the Council of Europe convention on action against trafficking in human beings—the modern slavery treaty—and say that people entering the country illegally, particularly from a safe place such as France, simply cannot claim asylum. That would enable us to legislate in this House without courts' effectively circumventing our legislation, as they do on a near-daily basis. It would enable us to deport not just some foreign criminals but all foreign criminals, and it would enable us to deport, within a week of arrival, anyone entering the country illegally by small boat, either to their country of origin or to a safe third country if we could not deport them to their country of origin. That would be a genuine deterrent to prevent these unnecessary crossings, and would give us back control of our borders. While I share many of the diagnoses in the Home Secretary's speech, I honestly do not think that these measures, which are incremental and an attempt to work within the existing framework, will work. Only radical solutions will actually work.

[Chris Philp]

I see that the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) is twitching with excitement, so I think I had better give way.

Clive Lewis: I do not know whether I am alone in this, but I am hearing the shadow Secretary of State glibly throw away 80 years of legislation on human rights—human rights that were forged in the aftermath of the Holocaust, of concentration camps, of the horrors of fascism. He stands there and talks glibly about throwing them out when they have protected hundreds of millions of people around the world. There is a clue. The reason they are called “human” rights is that this is the universal condition—we are all human beings—and the day we forget that in this place is the day we open a dark chapter in our country’s history.

Chris Philp: When the ECHR was first conceived and entered into as a treaty in 1950, it was developed for very good reasons. It was designed to avoid a repetition of the horrors of the second world war, which the hon. Gentleman refers to, but over the years judges in Strasbourg and domestically, using the living instrument doctrine, have expanded and expanded and expanded the definitions of the articles, which are necessarily very vaguely worded.

For example, article 3 of the ECHR is on “freedom from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment.”

When it was written, that meant “Don’t send people to concentration camps.” On the face of it, the words are very reasonable; if we were to sit down today and come up with a convention, it would have those words in it. But the way it is applied by judges today means that we cannot send foreign criminals back to other countries, like Zimbabwe, in case they face hostility there as foreign criminals. We cannot run our border system because of the way the articles are interpreted. The balance has now shifted so far that it is preventing border control and a number of other things as well, and that is why we have to leave the ECHR.

I do not accept the proposition that the only thing standing between us and barbarism is the ECHR or the Human Rights Act. This country has led the world in human rights, not just for decades but for centuries. If there are any gaps in our protection of rights that this Parliament feels are exposed by leaving the ECHR, the proper remedy is for this sovereign, democratically elected Parliament to legislate to fill them. If there is a gap in our domestic statute or our common law, and this House feels that the gap needs to be filled, the right way to do so is not by having judges make up expansive case law; it is by having this democratically elected parliament debate the issue, as we are doing now, and take a vote on it. That is the way in which democracy should function.

I think that one of the reasons mainstream politics is coming under pressure, if I can put it euphemistically, is that pledges made at elections, by successive Governments, on issues like immigration do not get delivered. One of the reasons why is that the human rights legal framework prevents them from being delivered. The Home Secretary gave examples of that, and it is essentially a democratic deficit; this Parliament, not judges, should decide how our borders are run. While I welcome these measures as small steps in the right direction, I do not think that

they will work. I do not think that the measures in this Bill go far enough, because they do not address the fundamental problem.

Ms Creasy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Philp: I will take one last intervention before finishing.

Ms Creasy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving us his experience. Governments of all colours have always been angry about the European Court of Human Rights, because they are kept honest by having a court of human rights that can act to protect citizens when Governments make incorrect decisions about people’s basic fundamental liberties. If he wants a good example of why upholding international treaties matters, I suggest that he talk to our colleagues from Northern Ireland about the Good Friday agreement, which is rooted in the European Court of Human Rights. Before he argues that we should remove those protections in such a cavalier fashion, perhaps he might reflect on why people like Winston Churchill wanted to protect citizens from Governments who might make incorrect decisions, whether in the immigration system or about their fundamental human rights.

Chris Philp: First of all, I do not think that Winston Churchill would ever have envisaged that the ECHR, which he helped create, would lead us to being unable to control our borders. Secondly, on the Good Friday agreement, I urge the hon. Lady to read the 175-page report by Lord David Wolfson KC, which explains how our Good Friday agreement obligations could be upheld after leaving the ECHR. Thirdly, on her point about protecting rights, the ultimate guarantor and protector of the rights of people in this country should be this democratically elected Parliament, not judges handing down expansive definitions of vaguely-worded clauses that have acted as a charter for illegal immigrants and foreign criminals.

I ask the House to support our reasoned amendment. While these are small steps in the right direction—

Suella Braverman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Philp: I need to finish.

While I agree with the diagnoses that the Home Secretary eloquently set out in her speech, the measures that she proposes simply will not work. I know that because I have tried to introduce such measures in the past, including by amending section 63, and the courts do not let them stand. Until we come out of the ECHR and the ECAT treaty, stop illegal immigrants claiming asylum and end judicial review of most immigration cases, we will not get control of our borders and the public will continue to lose trust in mainstream politics. That is why I moved the Opposition’s reasoned amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): There is now a seven-minute time limit.

7.54 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Ind): I listened with great care to the Home Secretary’s speech, and one of the things she said—she said it more than once, in different phraseology—was that her legislation is designed to remove the burden of asylum seekers from the shoulders of British people. I live in a part of

the world that has as many asylum seekers and immigrants as anywhere else. Over the centuries, we have had Irish immigrants, Jewish immigrants, Caribbean immigrants, south Asian immigrants, Turkish immigrants and African immigrants. None of them was a burden on anyone's shoulders, and my constituents will be dismayed to hear her talk in those terms.

The Home Office website tells us that there have been well over 150 pieces of primary legislation or policy changes on immigration since 1988. I have been in the House for some of them, and each one was accompanied by the same grand assertions that the Home Secretary has made this afternoon: that they would bring fairness to our immigration system and fairness to our asylum system. They did not. They simply took away rights and treated people badly. One example of a piece of legislation that was introduced in precisely the same terms in which she is introducing this Bill is the Immigration Act 2014, which was created in the name of the hostile environment. Again, the House was told that it would bring fairness. Instead, it led directly to the Windrush scandal. People who had been invited here, with cross-party support, to help rebuild Britain after world war two were treated in the most shameful way. People who had given their lives to the UK were deported. People born here were deported. Families were split up. People lost their jobs. Others were denied re-entry to the country after holidays or travelling to family events, including funerals.

That scandal is not over, and it is not something that we can move on from. Very many victims of that legislation are still facing severe delays, wrongful rejections and low payouts. Maybe the Minister should talk to some of the people waiting for their compensation, because there is a view that Ministers or officials are trying to wait out the victims. It is as if they are hoping that, year by year, there will be less victims to give compensation to.

The legislation before us is being sold and explained in exactly the same way that nearly 40 years of immigration legislation has been sold to this House. I would argue that that legislation has failed to do what Ministers said it would do; in fact, it has made people's lives harsher and more difficult. I would argue that if the Bar Council or any amount of legal bodies are saying to the Secretary of State that this legislation is unfair and unduly cruel, and will not achieve the result that it is meant to achieve, she needs to look again. This very negative and hostile rhetoric and language about asylum seekers and immigrants is not what one would want to hear in this House.

My parents were immigrants, and many of my relatives were asylum seekers. We need to be talking about the contribution that immigrants and asylum seekers have made to this country, not talking about them as if they are some kind of burden. Even at this late stage, maybe the Home Secretary will reconsider the legislation that she is bringing forward.

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

7.59 pm

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): I was quite taken aback by the passion that the shadow Home Secretary showed for wiping out many decades of hard-won human rights that we all enjoy. Human rights are not just

for asylum seekers and people from other countries; in the first instance, human rights are for all of us. To put the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) slightly correct, some rights are absolute, and others are qualified and limited.

Sir Julian Lewis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Max Wilkinson: I will make progress. *[Interruption.]* I will give way.

Sir Julian Lewis: To put the hon. Gentleman right, it is customary when a Member names another Member, particularly in a critical way, to give way to them freely, not to have to be forced into it.

The fact of the matter is that I would love the hon. Gentleman to list all these absolute human rights. Even in a democracy, there is not an absolute right for people not to put themselves in danger when they get conscripted in a wartime situation. Does he or does he not accept the basic moral fact that, if someone infringes the human rights of other people, they cannot expect their own rights to be fully respected, because they abrogate those rights? If there has to be a clash between an innocent person's rights being infringed and the perpetrator's rights being infringed, I—and, I would like to think, most sensible people—would say it is the perpetrator who should lose out.

Max Wilkinson: These things are actually defined in law. I saw a human rights barrister on the other side of the Chamber, the hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Tony Vaughan), furrowing his brow at the same time. The shadow Home Secretary mentioned the report by Lord Wolfson, who is in fact a commercial barrister. When he goes into a hospital with a urology complaint, I assume, therefore, that he demands a cardiologist. Maybe he does not, but who knows? Does he seek experts from the right field? Perhaps he does not.

According to the Oxford Migration Observatory, asylum seekers in Calais regularly tell researchers that they know the UK's absence from agreements with the EU is a weakness in our asylum system. They even use the word "Dublin" in reference to the agreement that we left. If asylum seekers have worked it out, why have Ministers not done so? One commentator has even described how Brexit has turned the UK into the final court of appeal for any asylum seeker in the EU.

It will come as no surprise that the Liberal Democrats will not be supporting this Bill. It is not because we deny the problems in the UK's asylum system, which impact not only local people in our constituencies but asylum seekers themselves. It is quite the opposite: the backlog is too large, accommodation costs have spiralled and dangerous small boat crossings must be brought to an end for the good of everyone.

However, this Bill does not solve those problems. It piles more bureaucracy on to the Home Office, it risks greater costs to the taxpayer, it undermines integration and it still fails to address the fundamental causes of irregular migration. The Government's stated rationale for this Bill is:

"Claiming asylum in Britain today is more attractive than elsewhere in Europe".

[Max Wilkinson]

However, data from the Home Secretary's own Department shows this not to be true. Britain was fifth in the number of asylum applications made to European countries in 2025, behind Germany, France, Spain and Italy.

The truth is that many migrants who have had their asylum claims rejected in EU nations are trying their luck in Britain. This is the legacy of the Brexit given to us by Farage and the Conservatives, including the shadow Home Secretary. Our damaged relationship with Europe has created Brexit pull factors, yet nowhere does this Bill attempt to restore an orderly relationship on asylum with our European neighbours to end small boat crossings once and for all. It is an uncomfortable truth for the Conservatives, but it is a problem they created.

There is the issue of the asylum backlog. Accommodation costs have risen sharply, with more and more people stuck in hotels at considerable cost. Poor Home Office decision making is a key cause of this backlog, with two thirds of the concluded appeals finding that the Home Office's initial decision was flawed, yet the Bill does not address the quality of first instance decisions. Instead, it proposes the wholesale reform of the appeals process, creating the Independent Immigration Appeals Authority, which will not be operational until late next year. Even the Home Office has described the value of this measure as uncertain. If the Government want to solve the problem, they should focus their resources on clearing the backlog by expanding processing capacity and ensuring decisions are right first time.

Those asylum seekers fortunate enough to be successful in their claims will apparently face a later penalty of £10,000. We Liberal Democrats are in favour of asylum seekers and all migrants contributing to our economy and paying taxes. That is the fair thing to do. It is just one way that we believe migration can make our country a stronger place, but only if integration is successful. However, this measure is punitive, and pushes refugees further towards destitution and state support. Refugees with a job after eight years of being here had a median income of just £23,000 per year. It has been suggested that repayments will start when refugees are earning far less than that, which seems unfair. If the Home Secretary was serious about getting refugees to pay their way, she would take the opportunity to allow asylum seekers to work. This would immediately relieve the burden on the taxpayer and bring down costs.

Instead, these proposals create a bigger burden on the state, often falling on already overstretched local councils, which will be forced to look after those who would otherwise become destitute. That is un-British. Sadly, this measure, coupled with potential decades-long waits for leave to remain, will actively undermine the integration that everyone in this House should be aiming for. Costs to the taxpayer are likely to go up and not down. The reviews of refugee status alone are set to cost up to £725 million extra in the first 10 years.

On the unintended yet entirely foreseeable consequences, there are serious concerns that this Bill could inadvertently criminalise victims of modern slavery. It is simply unrealistic to assume that people trafficked here by criminal gangs will be able or willing to raise a claim on arrival. The Home Office's own statistics suggest that there is not widespread abuse of the current system, so it seems this particular measure is unnecessary and could work against the Government's aims.

On the point about the ECHR, the Government know that the interpretation of the law remains in the gift of the UK courts—the judges whom the shadow Home Secretary dislikes so much, but who perform such a valuable role in our justice system—and that will be the case regardless of what happens with this Bill. The reality is that this Bill is all show and no substance.

When this House discussed the Home Secretary's statement last November, something weird happened. An unholy alliance emerged between Labour and the Conservatives, and even the Reform party welcomed the Home Secretary's approach. The thrust of our response to that statement last November was that there were issues to resolve in the asylum system, which had been devastated by the Conservative Government, but recognition was also needed that immigration has a role to play in our economy and in delivering public services.

I also urged the Government to drop divisive rhetoric on this subject, but that suggestion did not quite find favour with the Home Secretary and others. Indeed, after my plea for moderate language, I was in receipt of some direct and forthright feedback from the Home Secretary, which the Minister for Border Security and Asylum will remember. Lord Gove used his "Quite right!" *Spectator* podcast to call me "oleaginous", a word that I later learned means oily, the "king of smuggling" and an offensive term, but I will spare Members' blushes by simply saying that it starts with d and rhymes with "mick". That is from a Member of the House of Lords in this Parliament. I continue to wear that as a badge of honour.

In a different recent podcast, the Home Secretary told an audience member who disagreed with her stance on migration and asylum to eff off, and later she joked that she would taser and deport four of her political opponents. I am clear it was a joke, but I am not absolutely certain that those are the actions a Government Minister should be taking. It is clear that the tone of this debate has not improved much since November. Unfortunately, policy heavy and rhetoric—

Sir Julian Lewis: Get it right!

Max Wilkinson: Unfortunately, this is policy heavy on rhetoric and light on substance, and it risks playing into the hands of Nigel Farage. I thank the right hon. Member for his heckle. He says, "Get it right!" I suggest he gets his knowledge of human rights right.

Accommodation costs will remain sky high, small boats will keep coming, with all the danger that that causes to people being trafficked, and the British people will rightly feel that the system is neither fair nor functional. Until Ministers recognise, as asylum seekers seem to, that not having a proper agreement with the EU is at the heart of the small boats crisis, there will be no resolution. Labour MPs claim that the new Prime Minister will present a reset for the country, and we all hope it does, but if the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) sticks with these plans, it will be more of the same—bad value for money for the taxpayer, failures on integration and no comprehensive plan to stop dangerous small boat crossings. That is why the Liberal Democrats will not support this Bill.

8.8 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I think all of us in the Chamber accept that the immigration and asylum system is broken. All of us want an asylum system that is both firm and fair, in which the impact is managed both for those seeking asylum and coming here to build a better life for themselves and their families, and for the host communities, with integration managed in that process.

Where there is clearly disagreement is on how on earth we fix a system that is so broken that there is not a single lever to pull to make all this mess right. We have an absolute crisis in our immigration system, as well as in our asylum system, and every debate is polarised. Unfortunately, when we come to this place, which is meant to be a place of evidence-based policymaking and exchanges that try to find a degree of common ground, at times it feels as though we are just parroting the social media posts that I see every morning when I dare to open X or Facebook. We need to be better than that.

I think we can say that immigration has made a positive contribution to our country, but that there are strains of immigration in some parts of the country that have been managed so poorly the public consent for immigration is fraying. If we do not accept that principle, we will not win back public support. But we also have to accept that the tone of the debate means that every person coming to flee persecution and war is being cast somehow as a chancer—that they are here to try it on and are acting against our national interest. I do not think that that is in tune with British values.

We have a long and proud history, certainly in a town such as Oldham, of supporting people fleeing persecution. We are, however, also a town that believes in fair play and contribution. On the other side, there are people in the system who are not living up to those values. They are trying to play the system through the appeals process and different claims, and are not contributing because when they arrive they break the laws of the land. If we on the Labour Benches are not willing to be honest about those tensions, how on earth can we build the middle ground?

There is a lot of work to do to build trust and I have a great deal of confidence in the work the Home Secretary is doing. The evidence speaks for itself, and not just on asylum and immigration. This week, the figures on knife crime have come down again. It takes a lot of hard work—often quiet hard work—to get through these issues, but it is happening and we are just two years in, so I am optimistic that we can get a grip.

But where I think the country, and certainly people in Oldham, want to see progress is on a tougher line on small boat crossings, because they do not believe that is playing fairly or playing by the rules if people are breaking them on day one. But people are aghast that there are no safe routes to support families fleeing persecution. Most fair-minded people look at the images of children fleeing war—we see it in Gaza, but also across the world—and think, “There but for the grace of God go I. If that was my child, what would I want in terms of sanctuary to give them a future and not leave them exposed to starvation or death?” This is where we are not quite getting the balance right, so I welcome the efforts being made to introduce safe routes.

I want a fairer distribution of asylum seekers around the country. Under the previous Labour Government, we were so fearful of right-wing headlines about asylum seekers being housed in accommodation in London “living in a £1 million townhouse”—they would pick out a Camden townhouse as an example—that the Government responded by saying, “Where is accommodation cheapest?” So, of course, they came to towns such as Oldham, Rochdale and Stoke, where housing at that time was probably plentiful and very cheap. That is not the case today.

In Oldham, there are 588 children living in temporary accommodation and over 100 of those households have been in temporary accommodation for over a year. Those housing pressures are felt by the whole community across Oldham. A fairer distribution of asylum seekers might win a bit more public support. On top of that, we are still waiting for the asylum hotel to close at some point. The Minister has been lobbied heavily on that. It is important to know, as a way of rebuilding public consent, that all parts of the country are playing their part and are taking their fair share.

I appreciate the speed and the efforts being taken in the case of Shabir Ahmed. I do not think that anybody would look at the Rochdale grooming gang and Shabir Ahmed as its ringleader over a long period of time and think that he is anything other than evil and abhorrent. The way he sexually abused and exploited young girls in both Oldham and Rochdale shook the town. It was on a scale that we had not seen before. What really struck home was the complete lack of any empathy for the victims, his refusal to take any responsibility, and his laughing at the justice process that was holding him to account. When news came of his release back into the community—of course, we do not know where he is; it certainly is not in Oldham and Rochdale, because of the exclusion zones—it retraumatised the victims who have spent a long time trying to rebuild their lives.

The fact is this: he has already been stripped of his British citizenship. He has no right to be here, bar the loophole in the Immigration Act 1971 that will now be closed thanks to the actions of our Home Secretary. That is not to say that we should rush to say the answer is always deportation, but in the case of a child rapist who has acted in such an abhorrent way, that must be the ultimate justice secured for the victims who were affected.

I give credit for the work that is taking place, but pace is really important. The parole board rejected his early release on three separate occasions because of the risk he posed to victims and wider society. I do not believe that he is any safer today than he was 18 months ago when the parole board last looked at the terms of his licence conditions. As speed is of the essence, I ask Ministers, please, whether there are grounds in such cases to return people back to custody, pending deportation?

8.15 pm

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton (Jim McMahon). He was absolutely right about the tone we need to employ. I recognise the comments he made about his constituents. I suspect that his constituents have a very similar view

[*Dame Karen Bradley*]

to my constituents—we are not too far apart. I refer him to the Home Affairs Committee report on asylum accommodation, which talked about the point he made about the disproportionate numbers of asylum seekers in lower-cost accommodation areas. We did ask the Home Office to look at that. I also suggest that he avoids X and Facebook in the morning. It will probably make his life a lot better.

I rise to speak briefly on the Bill, which I broadly welcome. These are matters on which our constituents expect action to be taken. It may not go as far as some would like in some areas and it may go too far for others, but on Second Reading we look at the principle of a Bill, and I agree that it should have a Second Reading and then be considered in Committee and on Report.

There are a couple of points I want to make before I move on to my main comments. On article 8 of the ECHR, the Chişinău declaration was very encouraging. It is a good step forward to see agreement across the Council of Europe area on the way article 8 and other parts of the ECHR are being abused. I suggest that the Minister look at section 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998, which states that the UK courts “must” refer to decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. Perhaps the wording could be changed to “may” to make it easier for courts to disregard clearly ridiculous decisions that should not have any bearing on the decisions being taken in our courts. I also refer him to the work done in the coalition Government on the European arrest warrant, when we were still a member of it. We changed the rules in the UK so that only somebody who was guilty of a crime that would be a crime in the UK could have an arrest warrant applied to them. Previously, we had all sorts of spurious claims such as not paying tips to Greek waiters and so on. The Minister may want to look at that.

On small boats, the Select Committee visited northern France. The hon. Members for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray), for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) and for Bassetlaw (Jo White) were all there to see the work being done. It is very impressive to see the work being done jointly with the UK. We heard a lot from UK law enforcement and others who were working closely with their French counterparts. I encourage more of that.

However, I cannot stress enough how important ministerial oversight is. I pay tribute to our former colleague James Brokenshire, who as Immigration Minister insisted that he receive an update every single day on the number of people entering the country, the number who were in claims and the number of visas being issued. He kept on having a daily update. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a delight that you are in the Chair, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) was also an Immigration Minister and she employed a similar approach. It would be fair to say that the evidence we have heard on the Select Committee indicates that that level of ministerial oversight has not happened at all times, and perhaps that is why we saw some big spikes.

Chris Murray: The Chair of the Home Affairs Committee and I were in northern France together. Does she share my impression from that trip that the scale and complexity

of the operations the French Government were undertaking was quite astonishing? Will she join me in welcoming the new iteration of the Sandhurst treaty? This may be stretching the bounds of bipartisanship too much, but does she agree that it is good to reset the relationship with our European friends and neighbours? In cross-border channels, when difficult issues arise, it is only through those joint working operations—now that we have left the European Union—that we can collectively tackle the small boats, which are as much of an issue for France as for the UK.

Dame Karen Bradley: I thank the hon. Member—my friend from the Select Committee—for an enjoyable visit. We learned a lot, but it was a challenging visit, as there was an awful lot to take in. This is a problem that affects countries across the world; it is not an issue that can be solved by one country alone. We have to work together. We also came away agreeing that if everybody who arrived from France was immediately taken back to France, it would kill the trade of the people smugglers. That is something that we should start trying to negotiate with our friends in France.

In the short amount of time that I have left, I will focus on part 5. I declare that, as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on human trafficking and modern slavery, I have some concerns. Apart from anything else, human trafficking and modern slavery is not an immigration crime. Someone’s immigration status may make them more vulnerable, but it is a financial crime—it is the exploitation of one human being by another for financial gain. Although I understand the reasons and we are grateful that there are some good points in the Bill, it is concerning that it keeps being put into the migration bucket, rather than being seen as the financial crime that it is.

I am in contact with a number of organisations, and the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Eleanor Lyons, has been in touch with me. There is general agreement that there are some good things in the Bill—the strengthening of civil orders and the support for children are welcome. However, the abuse of the modern slavery protections needs to be looked at, because nobody can self-declare as a victim of modern slavery. A first responder has to say that this person is likely to be a victim of modern slavery, so what is going wrong with the first responders? Why is it that first responders are being dragged into, as the Government say, declaring people to be victims of modern slavery to avoid deportation? That is something that should be looked at without removing protections for victims.

One has to have a victim-centred approach to this crime in order to solve it; it cannot be solved only by pursuing the bad guys. The victims have to be at the centre, because it is an extraordinary crime in which the commodity that money is being made from is the human being. It is not a drug, a firearm or any other product; it is a human being. That human being needs to be prepared and able to give evidence, to speak out and to recognise the crime that has been committed against them.

Victim support is essential to solve this crime. If one wants to see the issue in a hard-nosed way, the only way we are going to kill the trade is by looking after the victims so that we can stop the bad guys. That is the basic point.

I do not have time to go through the specifics, but I urge the Minister to engage with the many authorities—in particular, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner—to see where the measures that the Government have introduced may have unintended consequences that make it harder to tackle this crime. With that, I will sit down and let other Members speak, as there are many others who wish to do so.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I am imposing an immediate three-minute time limit.

8.23 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): In the time that I have, I will focus my remarks on clauses 1 to 16, which create a new appeals body for immigration and asylum cases known as the independent immigration appeals authority. It will be staffed by non-lawyers or members of the public and will perform much of the work currently done by the first-tier tribunal immigration and asylum chamber.

The backlogs in the FTT have reached around 60 weeks for cases to be heard—11 weeks longer than a year ago. It is vital, however, that such reforms are properly thought out and resourced. Last week, the Justice Committee took evidence from experts in the sector. The Committee has taken a keen interest in the proposals since they were announced last year and has visited the first-tier tribunal. We saw a system under great operational strain, but with judges doing a good and efficient job. From that visit, our diagnosis was that these are operational problems.

There are two key questions for the House: will the IIAA fix the problems with the current system, and will it be truly independent from the Home Office? On the first point, while I do not have time to give all the figures, a big part of the problem is the poor quality of initial decision making, with 45% of decisions being overturned. How will a body staffed by members of the public, as opposed to judges and legal experts, result in a reduction of errors in a complex area of law?

A further risk created by an increase in errors is that it may shift the current backlog in the first-tier tribunal to the upper tribunal. It is not clear from the impact assessment accompanying the Bill that enough thought has been given to the potential impact on the upper tribunal. It is also fair to assume that non-expert adjudicators will take more time to hear cases than judges would, given the complexities of asylum cases. There is insufficient legal aid available, which is likely to lengthen hearings as well.

On the second point—the issue of independence—the Home Secretary says that the IIAA will be independent from the Home Office and puts the word in its title, but the Bill contains provisions for the Home Secretary to expedite cases, to set the length of time for cases, and to appoint the chair and chief executive. The IIAA is effectively a quango over which the Home Secretary has substantial control. I cannot do further justice to the issue in the time available, but I would like to see that this body, if it is set up, is independent and able to make sensible and judicial decisions. I do not see that at the moment with what is in the Bill.

8.26 pm

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): I hope the whole House can agree—surely it can—that public confidence in our immigration system depends on the principle that those who seek to undermine our borders, exploit vulnerable migrants or, worse still, profit from illegal migration are identified, apprehended and removed wherever possible. All our constituents expect robust border security, effective immigration enforcement, and a system that distinguishes between genuine asylum seekers and those who seek to abuse the rules.

It is against that backdrop that I wish to raise the deeply troubling case of Twana Jamal, who was recently exposed by journalist Sue Mitchell and her team through a BBC investigation, which was broadcast only a week or so ago. Twana Jamal was exposed as an illegal asylum seeker apparently working in my constituency in Blaby—and worse still, in a mini-mart right next door to my constituency office. According to reporting by Sue Mitchell and the BBC, Mr Jamal is a convicted people smuggler who was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in France after being identified by French authorities as a major organiser of illegal migration operations. The BBC subsequently traced him to my South Leicestershire constituency, where he was allegedly working while also claiming asylum in the United Kingdom. The allegations reported by the BBC are extremely serious.

Sue Mitchell confirmed with me only a few hours ago that the Home Office has not engaged with her or her team, post broadcast, about the evidence that they gathered during their painstaking and thorough investigation. I am grateful to the Home Secretary for confirming earlier today that she will seek to ascertain why civil servants have not responded, or done me the courtesy, as the local MP, of giving me an update on what the Home Office is doing, and I hope that the Minister will ensure that that is taken forward.

What we all want to know today, and what I would be grateful to hear from the Minister, is whether the Bill will militate against a case like that of Mr Jamal's arising again, if it is passed into law. Can the Minister assure all of us that convicted human traffickers will not be allowed into the United Kingdom, let alone allowed to apply for asylum?

8.29 pm

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): First, I thank the Home Secretary for listening to me and my hon. Friends the Members for Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton (Jim McMahon), and for Heywood and Middleton North (Mrs Blundell), as well as all our constituents; she acted super quickly and seized this issue, to make sure that we could change the law to allow for the deportation of Shabir Ahmed.

The Bill introduces a new power, personally applied by the Secretary of State, to allow offences like Ahmed's to be classed as so serious that the offender loses protections under the Immigration Act 1971. Let us be clear: that Act was meant to give rights to law-abiding citizens of the Commonwealth who came here to work hard and play by the rules; its drafters never intended for it to exempt vile sex offenders and grooming gang leaders from deportation.

Shabir Ahmed's release from prison this month was, for many, another painful reminder of the wicked crimes he committed. Ahmed, who lived in Oldham, was the

[Paul Waugh]

ringleader of the Rochdale grooming gang. He was convicted of the serial rape, exploitation and vile abuse of young white girls in Heywood, and was separately convicted of 30 rapes of a young Asian girl. All his victims were failed for years by the institutions that should have protected them. It is important for me to say that the people of Rochdale, whatever their racial background, are united in their disgust at paedophiles like Ahmed.

It was this Labour Government who finally created a specific offence of grooming, which, unbelievably, did not exist before. The Government are also trialling the use of chemical castration for convicts in jails, which I personally would welcome being made compulsory for sex offenders like Ahmed. Ever since my election, I have pressed Ministers to pursue the deportation of every grooming gang member who can legally be removed from the UK. I know that this is just the start, and that even once the law is changed, Pakistan may still say that it will refuse to take back this man. Whatever diplomatic barriers exist must be challenged, and every possible avenue must be explored.

The public interest is clear in this case; more broadly, the public interest is strengthened by this Bill. Article 8 of the European convention on human rights—the right to family life—has always been a qualified right, as the Home Secretary has pointed out. This means that judges are asked to strike a balance between those rights and the public interest. That is precisely why the Rochdale grooming gang members lost their appeals under human rights law. However, these bogus appeals happen far too often, and for many, it is a sick joke that paedophiles who have robbed children of their own right to family life depend on human rights to stay in this country. That is why I welcome the new provision in the Bill to require decision makers and courts—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I call Tim Farron.

8.32 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): This Bill is riddled with bogus context and false premises, as are most debates on this issue. It is worth bearing in mind that the majority of European Union countries take more asylum seekers per head than the United Kingdom.

We heard from the Conservative Front Benchers this stuff about young men coming here in disproportionate numbers as irregular migrants. I just want to tell the House a little story on that, which I am sure the hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Tony Vaughan) will also recall. Just over a year ago, we went to Cairo, where we met some young women, mostly refugees from Sudan. One of them was presented to us as the chair of the young mothers group—it all sounded very lovely. It turned out, though, that every single person in that young mothers group had been a victim of sexual violence between the ages of 14 and 20. There are reasons why women do not end up on these boats, and do not take those risky journeys. I wish that we could have a debate on the reality of fleeing for your life from war-torn circumstances.

The problem with this Bill is that it is a set of proposed changes that are a combination of the ineffective, the performative and the cruel. Let us start off with the new appeals body. We already see 40% of decisions successfully appealed. How does it make any sense to reduce the quality of the decision-making process now? They tried the same thing in Australia, and it clogged up the system even further. On article 8, 382 applications under the ECHR were decided against the Government in the last 10 years. How many of those were under article 8? Just one. Again, the Government are being performative, and are not tackling the issue. When all is said and done, human rights matter for all of us. To throw them out of the window because of a few difficult cases is to throw human rights out of the window entirely.

Telling asylum seekers who have been successfully granted refugee status that they will have to repay the cost of their asylum is performative and cruel. This Government are refusing to allow asylum seekers the right to work.

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): I wonder whether my hon. Friend and the Minister, in their efforts to prevent modern slavery, might consider asylum seekers being allowed to work, so that they can pay their way, but being fitted with ankle tags until their status is decided.

Tim Farron: I certainly think that people who are seeking asylum in this country should be given the right to work. First, it will help them to integrate, if their asylum claim is successful; secondly, it will enable them to cover the cost of their accommodation and many other things while they are here. How cruel it is to tell people who have gone through goodness knows what and have been granted refugee status that they have to pay it all back. We do not make British prisoners pay back the cost of their time in prison, but we are going to do this to asylum seekers. Again, this is performative and cruel, and it will probably end up costing as much to administer as it would bring in. Victims of modern slavery are terrified of their captors. They are often under coercion, and may not realise that they are victims of modern slavery until much later, so giving people only a handful of days to declare themselves victims is cruel and, again, performative.

There is nothing in this Bill to undo or relax the moratorium on family reunion, which is a safe route. Nine times out of 10, the beneficiaries of that safe route are women and girls. The failure to restore family reunion is a deliberate decision to remove a safe route that would have been a good and positive way to counter the need for people to cross the channel irregularly.

For the Government to give raw meat to people who will never vote for them anyway—to people who already take the view that immigration and immigrants are bad—is utterly and totally pointless and counterproductive. When the last Government—some of whom are in the Reform party now—did this kind of thing, I thought it was despicable, but at least they meant it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I cannot see Steve Yemm, so I call Euan Stainbank.

8.37 pm

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): In Falkirk, discussion of asylum policy has taken unprecedented command of our local debate. What has occurred in our community is an example of the failure of the past Government to provide solutions that work in the best interests of communities across the country, or the best interests of asylum seekers fleeing persecution and conflict, to put it mildly.

The previous Government's lack of control over the asylum system has almost destroyed public confidence in the system. The number of applicants rose from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands from 2020 onwards, which led to Ministers in a panicked state directing the acquisition of town-centre hotels for use as accommodation. They placed asylum seekers, who are unable to work, as Members have mentioned, into goldfish-bowl hotels across the country. They ground processing to a halt. They forgot about asylum seekers, and forgot, or simply did not care, about communities like Falkirk, which hosted them. We saw costs balloon, and we failed to stop the rise in the number of people coming through illegal routes.

Under this Labour Government, on the other hand, Tory asylum hotels are down by over half since the peak of 400. Crossings came down 41% in one year, and claims came down by 12% in one year. We have also seen the grant rate fall from 45% in July 2024 to 39% today, enabling £1 billion a year to be saved in accommodation costs. Where the previous Government lost control, this Government have taken steps to restore it.

The challenge that the Bill presents us with is finding a way to re-establish public confidence in an asylum system that many of my constituents have told me they are questioning. We cannot let the palpable anger—and there is anger out there, in certain corners of our community—irrevocably push us towards breaking the rights-based order that we have had for 80 years. We must demonstrate that we can control the asylum system without sacrificing our constituents' rights, as many from opposition parties have suggested.

The tone that the Government have used to communicate our record has caused, I will admit, reasonable concern in my constituency. There are concerns about the measures that we are considering today, and the measures that we have to acknowledge we are not considering today. I do not believe that we can deal with those concerns tonight by abandoning the essential objectives that the Bill seeks to pursue. If we vote against the Bill, we throw away an opportunity for asylum appeals reform. The backlog left by the Conservatives has been rapidly reduced, but many cases have been displaced into the appeals system. We must be quicker, imminently, to resolve appeals. If we vote against the Bill, we are throwing away a chance to build a system of controlled routes, which is the only sustainable solution to boat crossings, but one that requires the public to have confidence in the basic norm of an asylum system, which is being threatened. We also throw away a chance to align with our partners in the Council of Europe on article 8 interpretation, as we did in May in Chi inău, as we seek to resolve an international humanitarian crisis, instead of being pushed to the more extreme solutions that others offer.

There are several areas where we could improve the Bill, and I will bring those up with Ministers in Committee. However, I will not be indulging Conservative Members,

who broke my community's confidence in the asylum system; I will support the Government in making a good faith attempt to resolve it.

8.40 pm

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): I am conscious of the short time we have. I will concentrate most of my comments on clauses 44 to 49. This is a Bill about our border, who crosses it and on what terms, but a border policy that scrutinises every person while waving through products of slavery is really only half a border policy. The slavery that we see in the modern world impacts every part of the globe, and greatly impacts this country. One in five cotton garments worldwide is linked to forced labour in China, and Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights warned in July 2025 that the UK risked becoming "a dumping ground" for goods prohibited elsewhere. The International Labour Organisation estimates that forced labour generates roughly £176 billion in illegal profits every year. The Bill does many things, and I welcome many of them, but when it comes to combating modern slavery, which is mentioned in its long title, it does nothing more than offer meek and weak words.

Members on both sides of the House have often worked together to make a difference—we led the world in tackling modern slavery—but we see the United States charging ahead and taking more action than we are. If we look across the channel, which we all talk so much about in this debate, we see that the European Union is doing more than we are doing in this House. What are we proposing to do? We are just asking for a little more reporting. We are not acting to stop goods produced by slavery coming to these shores. In fact, we will act as a magnet for slave-produced goods from not just China, but so many other countries that turn a blind eye to slave labour.

While there is much that I welcome in the Bill, I urge the Government to look at how they can work cross-party, so that they can have an improved Bill that protects some of the most vulnerable people in the poorest parts of the world from being exploited. If they do that, they will have made a much better Bill than the one currently in front of the House.

8.43 pm

Tom Collins (Worcester) (Lab): I have been campaigning on modern slavery for over 20 years. Back when I started, most modern slavery in the UK was sexual exploitation, and let me be clear that it was of girls. I put myself in the shoes of a parent whose child was in another country, suffering unimaginable abuse and exploitation. I realised that I would pray every night for someone in that country not to rest until my child was rescued. I realised that I had to be that person in this country, and I brought that sentiment with me to Parliament.

The Government have taken some good steps to tackle modern slavery by breaking down the criminal gangs and international organised networks behind small boats, starting to open up more safe and legal routes, and clearing the operational backlog of immigration cases. That is good, but if there is diminishing consideration of cases in which people do not disclose that they were victims of modern slavery straight away, or in which the victims had carried out criminal activity, that goes against the very basic, fundamental, "modern slavery

[Tom Collins]

101” principles of how to tackle modern slavery. Recognising who is a victim and who is a perpetrator, and recognising the effects of trauma, were great accomplishments of the Modern Slavery Act, but I fear that there is now a risk that we will start to see tackling illegal immigration and tackling modern slavery as being in conflict or in tension, when in fact they are entirely aligned.

The Secretary of State raised some powerful examples, but they are examples of decision making that was clearly bureaucratic, detached and lacking professional judgement. I echo the comment by the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley) that disclosure does not automatically mean a referral under the national referral mechanism. We should be fixing those operational problems. We should be fixing the system, rather than hoping that changing the law will suddenly result in it making better decisions. In fact, I would say that deploying that approach—right the way down to policing and through our multi-agency response to modern slavery in local areas—is a job still to be done, even since we introduced the Modern Slavery Act.

We should not be going backwards. We should be surging and pushing forwards to eradicate modern slavery in the UK. If we were to do that, we would find that much of what concerns our communities about illegal immigration would be solved. We must tackle modern slavery head-on. We must strengthen our systems, which are failing at an operational level in their design, decision making and implementation, and we must bring in good governance. For that reason, I really welcome the further discussions with the Government following today to improve this Bill.

8.45 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): There are several reasons why my Plaid Cymru colleagues, along with hon. Members from the Scottish National party, the Greens and others, have tabled a reasoned amendment to oppose this Bill. The Bill does not fix the problems in the UK asylum system; nor does it deliver the controlled and compassionate system we need. It sees political heavy-handedness creeping into an area where there should be clear division between the Executive and the rightful domain of the judiciary, with the creation of the independent immigration appeals authority. It also sees the creation of a non-judicial body for immigration appeals, as well as high-handed use of Henry VIII powers in clause 16, whereby the IIAA replaces any reference to tribunals in previous law, including devolved legislation.

The Bill avoids the roots of real problems while creating others, and the level of detail in some of its measures is scant at best. There is little information on how the core protection status provision will work, or on the requirements for asylum support contributions. I understand that more detail will be provided elsewhere, but when we have had announcement after announcement—often directly to the press rather than here in this House—how can the Government expect the public to keep track of which proposals are in motion as we all endlessly wait for further details? This creates complexity and confusion, which does nothing to address the dangerous narratives about people fleeing war and persecution who are genuinely seeking safety through asylum. All

the while, people’s rights under the international order, including the rights of innocent children, are further undermined. Is this truly what Labour wants as its legacy? Apparently the Prime Minister-in-waiting is happy with this approach.

Last month, Plaid Cymru colleagues in the Senedd stood in defence of the nation of sanctuary scheme in Wales, when all it does is help people already living there to become a part of our communities. That is the reality of where we really are. This is the performative nature of politics and how it plays out in our communities. In the age of misinformation, surely it is the UK Government’s duty not to harm our communities further by brushing over the real problems in our asylum system. Such problems include the Home Office’s poor initial decision making, limited safe routes, and further demonising individuals, all while shifting away from long-held principles of needs-based and rights-based protection. With this in mind, and given the concerns we have heard today from both sides of this House about the detail and the principles of this legislation, I call on the Home Secretary to consider the arguments in the reasoned amendment tabled by the SNP, the Greens and Plaid Cymru. The Bill as it stands should not proceed.

8.48 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): I always hear the UK being described as having a welcoming nature and being a haven for people in times of great difficulty. I would say that it is, but only in limited circumstances. With Ukraine, for example, there was a broad consensus that the UK should play its part and offer assistance, but we should be under no illusion that that agreement was anything more than temporary, limited in scope and made in the context of the current status of the social contract. Where specific schemes have been agreed separately by the Government, the public have felt that there was good reasoning, exceptional circumstances and that the UK had a greater reason to provide assistance.

That is not the case with small boat crossings. The social contract is fragile and a careful narrative is required to clearly explain what the UK is doing, for who and for how long. We will not be able to take the heat out of this policy area until the Government can clearly, confidently and repeatedly demonstrate that the systems in place are sufficiently robust that citizens do feel secure and that they understand the system, and increasingly that the measures in place cannot be undermined through endless appeals or judicial reviews.

Article 8 has to receive serious attention when we see that in 2025, 71% of people with newly granted residence rights had either entered the UK illegally or overstayed their previous visa. It is also concerning that more than half of those who had their article 8 appeal turned down may remain in the UK illegally. Those who commit a crime are utilising the same article, despite breaching the terms of permission of being in the country. It is just not seen as being fair. When the host nation’s people start to feel that their hospitality has been exploited, that quickly turns to resentment and a rejection of the whole principle—none of us wants to see that.

We should be speeding up the processing of applications for immigration and asylum claims. That is what we promised we would do at the last election. While asylum

processing is not far off 2020 rates, it is unreasonable to leave people waiting for months or years on end to get their initial decision, and we should also be taking action to speed up appeals. I worry that anything that undermines this delicate balance will see even greater frustrations growing and being exploited by those who thrive on disruption and division. This is not about chasing the policies of the right; it is about having rules that meet the needs of the day, and they cannot be static, because the world is not.

8.51 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): We are at a critical juncture in the whole debate about immigration. Look at what is going on across the UK—things are not good. Such is the noise that a general culture of anti-immigrant sentiment now sweeps this country, leading to whole communities feeling unsafe, demonised and scapegoated. On a weekly basis, we now see disgusting scenes at hotels hosting asylum seekers, vigilantism is on the rise, and people of colour do not feel safe in their own homes. All the time, dangerous misinformation fuels the mood, supported by billionaires and bad actors spreading messages of hate and division.

The far right is on the rise—more confident, visible and organised than it has been in decades. The rise of the far right is perhaps the most dangerous political development of recent years. Looking at the situation just now, I would say that, at best, it is 50:50 whether it succeeds or not. That is the context for the introduction of the Bill. The Government continue to think that they can beat the far right and the populists by doing exactly what the anti-immigration right wants them to do: they accept the right's premise that immigration is bad and negative, and that it must be controlled by ever-increasing restrictive and repressive measures; they join in calls to weaken essential human rights protections and to use force to remove them; and they agree that routes to citizenship should be extended and for payments that cannot be afforded. It is the usual doomed attempts to try and out-Farage Farage. After two years of following this particular logic, the Government's attempts are almost becoming heroic.

People who come to this country seeking refuge from conflict and persecution are not asking for special treatment—they just want to feel safe. I have gone through the Bill hoping to find measures that genuinely address the problems facing the asylum system, and I have spoken to organisations that work daily to support refugees and survivors of trafficking and modern slavery. All are disappointed and concerned because the Bill does not address any of the issues at hand.

I thought that when we had a Labour Government, we would see a new and fresh approach to issues around immigration—how disappointed we have all been. At least there are some Labour Back Benchers who are prepared to change the narrative and who want to do something positive when it comes to things like indefinite leave to remain. This is their chance. They will have new leadership within the next week, so they should try and impress upon whoever is going to be leading this country that we cannot go on continuing to do these things again. We are at a critical juncture and we need to change our approach.

8.54 pm

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I will be blunt: my constituents have lost faith in the asylum system. Under the previous Government, they watched borders slide out of control, criminal gangs profit and taxpayers face ever-rising costs while hotel use spiralled. Fairness collapsed and public trust collapsed with it. This Bill is how we earn that trust back.

First, we need control at the border. A fair system needs a firm line. We must stop the boats, target the smugglers and strengthen the checks so we know who is coming, how and why.

Secondly, we need swift decisions and final outcomes. Endless delays destroy confidence. Claims must be processed quickly. Appeals must be heard promptly by independent adjudicators, with decisions enforced. If someone qualifies, they receive protection without unnecessary delay; if they do not, departure should follow swiftly.

Thirdly, fairness means contribution. Those granted protection should work, rebuild their lives, contribute to our society, and help to offset the costs associated with processing their claims. Responsibility must sit alongside rights, and contribution alongside compassion.

Fourthly, protection must remain justified. Refugee status should be reviewed through a clear and streamlined process. If danger remains, protection continues. If circumstances change significantly, the system should respond accordingly. That is how we keep asylum credible.

Fifthly, we need honesty about costs and communities. Hotels are a symptom of a system under strain. By reducing backlogs and speeding up decisions, we can lower costs and ensure that outcomes are delivered. If protected, people move into work; if not, they are removed. Every pound saved can be redirected towards border security and genuine protection.

Sixthly, we need safe and legal routes. If we want people to choose safe routes, these routes must be real, reliable and fast. Clear criteria, rapid processing, UNHCR referrals and community sponsorship can provide a genuine alternative to dangerous crossings. The legal route must always be the better route. That is how the economic model of the people smugglers can be broken.

Those constituents who have lost faith are right to want to control the borders and to want faster decisions, lower costs and rules that are enforced. We need control of the border, compassion where it counts, and contribution and consequences in equal measure. We cannot undo yesterday's failures, but we can build a system that is fair and credible. That is why I support the Bill.

8.57 pm

Lewis Cocking (Broxbourne) (Con): We must reduce immigration to this country and get a grip of our asylum system. Unlike the MPs behind her, I do think the Home Secretary is starting to move in the right direction. But, as she will know, small boat crossings are on the rise since Labour came to power, with an average of 105 illegal migrants crossing the channel every single day for the last two years. Almost 100,000 people are being housed in asylum accommodation, with the numbers in houses in multiple occupation up 11% under this Labour Government.

[*Lewis Cocking*]

The case for urgent action is now overwhelming, but the measures in the Bill before us fail to meet the gravity of the situation. I will therefore be supporting the reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Just look at the tinkering to the application of article 8 of the European convention on human rights. We all know that the protection to family life has been abused and twisted far from its original purpose. The public rightly expect foreign nationals who have broken our laws to be deported. The rights of the British people should always outweigh the interests of foreign criminals—no ifs, no buts.

In 2023, a Nigerian man used article 8 to stay in this country despite a two-year prison sentence, but the tribunal ruled that deportation would breach his article 8 rights. Horrifically, he then went on to violently rape a teenage girl—whose rights were being protected then? Will these sorts of cases be a thing of the past as a result of the modest changes within this Bill? I am not convinced. The Government are allowing vague and ambiguous exceptional circumstances to be used by criminals to avoid deportation. The phrasing in the Bill leaves far too much room for legal argument, appeals and delays. No ifs, no buts—every illegal immigrant should be deported.

By making changes to article 8, the Government have conceded that membership of the European convention on human rights places significant limits on the UK's ability to maintain and control our borders. There is only one logical conclusion: the only way that we will truly end illegal immigration into the United Kingdom, deport all foreign criminals, and create a system that is genuinely fair and robust, is to leave the European convention on human rights in its entirety, and repeal the Human Rights Act.

8.59 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): There is little evidence that the Bill will do what it claims and fix the most serious issues in our asylum system. In fact, experts say that it will divert focus and resources to a system that is unfair, unsafe and unworkable. There are many problems in the Bill, but for the sake of time I will focus on the independent immigration appeals authority. The Government say that to tackle the backlog they will replace the tribunal system, which is made up of judges, with a new system of adjudicators, who are not legally qualified but who are given power and responsibility to make what are, in many cases, life and death decisions. The Government claim that they will be independent, but they are appointed by the chief executive, who is appointed by the Secretary of State. That undermines the independence of the judiciary and the separation of powers, which are key cornerstones of our democracy. The Law Society says that it risks

“more wrong decisions, more court challenges, higher costs and longer uncertainty.”

Poor Home Office decision making drives the appeals backlog. In the last financial year, 39% of appeals were granted, and more than 10,000 were withdrawn because the Home Office abandoned its initial decision. Rather than building new expensive bodies, the Government should invest in the existing system and get asylum decisions right the first time. The Government could

have brought forward a Bill containing evidence-based policies that would fix our broken asylum system—for example, a not-for-profit asylum accommodation system to improve living conditions and integration, genuinely safe routes that are not severely restricted and heavily capped, and fast tracking of obviously well-founded asylum cases such as those from war zones. Instead, I am ashamed to say that the Bill is a betrayal of our party's values, and I cannot support it. I urge the Government to withdraw this Bill, and instead to work with sector organisations and experts to create an immigration and asylum system that is rooted in compassion, justice and human rights.

9.2 pm

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Reform): I agree with one word that the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) said, “betrayal”, but the Bill is not a betrayal of the Labour party; it is a betrayal of the British people. This Bill will fail, just as the Labour Government have been promising for two years that they will smash the gangs and stop the boats, but they have failed—[*Interruption.*] Labour Members all laugh; they are all laughing at the British people who are furious with this Labour Government. This Government have failed, the last Tory Government failed, because they have been lying to the British people—[*Interruption.*] I will get to that.

Why will the Bill fail? Why is it a total and utter farce? It is because of the European convention on human rights. Reform UK has tabled a reasoned amendment opposing the Bill because it does not do what is needed. It does not take the United Kingdom out of the ECHR, and that is what we need to do if we have to stop the boats.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): Will the right hon. and learned Lady give way?

Suella Braverman: I will not because I do not have any time. Let us go through this. Part 1 is about the independent immigration appeals authority. That will get ripped to shreds by article 6 of the ECHR, with claims in the High Court saying that it does not offer a right to a fair trial. Part 2 is on article 8 reform, but that will get destroyed by article 8 claims in the High Court, and it will probably get overturned by Strasbourg. Part 3 of the Bill is on protection status and asylum. Article 3 of the ECHR is about rights against torture and inhumane or degrading treatment, and that will block the operation of part 3. The Bill is not fit for purpose, and it will let the British people down. Now I will give way to the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mike Martin).

Mike Martin: The right hon. and learned Lady advocates leaving the ECHR. I assume that is after a process of analysis, so could she tell the House two good things that the ECHR does for British citizens?

Suella Braverman: It is after a process of analysis: 10 years as a barrister, five of which were spent defending the Home Office in the immigration tribunals; time as Attorney General, finding and seeing how the ECHR thwarted Government decision making time and again, including in relation to eco-protesters and using articles 10 and 11; and then as Home Secretary in 2022. That is why, in 2022, I was the first Conservative Minister to

say publicly that if we wanted to stop the boats, we needed to leave the ECHR. For that, I was attacked by my former Conservative colleagues, including the current leader of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for North West Essex (Mrs Badenoch), and many members of the shadow Cabinet—many of whom still privately oppose leaving the ECHR today, as they did publicly four years ago.

I am glad that it has taken the Conservative party three years to catch up with me, but it is three years too late and too little. When they had the power and the mandate, and when they had Ministers telling them that we needed to leave the ECHR, they blocked, attacked, criticised and vilified people like me. I will not take any lectures from the Conservative party, which cannot be trusted one bit on leaving the ECHR.

The former hon. Member for Clacton was the original advocate for leaving the ECHR; he first raised the alarm about the small boats crisis, and it was only thanks to his pressure and his campaigning, which he led single-handedly, that this place was forced to wake up and take some action. We need to leave the ECHR, and I have set out a plan on how to do so, which was published last year. I urge all hon. Members to read it—the Conservative party copied it about a year later. It sets out how to leave, why to leave, how to protect civil liberties in doing so, how we can amend the Good Friday agreement and protect Northern Ireland in doing so, and why it is what the British people deserve if we are going to stop the boats.

9.6 pm

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Fareham and Waterlooville (Suella Braverman), who was the author of the mess that we are discussing clearing up; I am sure she will look forward to sharing her comments with Count Binface soon enough. I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The Government are absolutely right to be tackling the appeals process—as a supporter of humanitarian protection, I accept that it needs reform if it is to be resilient—but I will focus on part 4, which creates powers to recover the costs of asylum support. I am pleased that the Bill discusses the cost of asylum system, and I support the principle that refugees who go on to earn a lot should contribute back what they received from this country. I suspect that many of them would be happy to do so.

However, let us be clear that those refugees are not responsible for the extraordinary costs of the asylum system. Since entering Parliament, I have been on a one-man mission to highlight the biggest public procurement scandal in Britain—a system causing untold damage but costing the taxpayer £15 billion. The real problem lies with the asylum contracts, signed by the previous Government and overseen by the right hon. and learned Member, with three private providers. The contracts generated eye-watering profits; a founder of one of the companies entered *The Sunday Times* rich list at taxpayer expense. When these companies come before the Home Affairs Committee, they refuse to answer even the most basic questions, while serious concerns about misconduct in their supply chains remain.

I recognise that this Government inherited those contracts from the right hon. and learned Member and are roped into them for the foreseeable future. I support asking successful refugees to contribute, but that is a peripheral issue.

Suella Braverman: The hon. Gentleman is almost making my argument for me. The whole reason the Home Office has to enter into expensive contracts and spend £5 million of British taxpayers' money every day to house asylum seekers is that the ECHR imposes onerous duties on the state to accommodate unlimited numbers of asylum seekers, without any thought as to cost effectiveness.

Chris Murray: No, it is not. It is because the right hon. and learned Lady passed the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024, which allowed the backlog to soar. It is because the right hon. and learned Lady signed off on putting asylum seekers in hotels, which cost £34,000 per asylum seeker, as opposed to £14,000 per asylum seeker when she came into office. It is because the right hon. and learned Lady failed to get the Department to grip the use in public procurement of taxpayers' money, which she wasted then tried to instrumentalise to sow division in the country.

These outsourcing contracts have allowed extortionate profit at taxpayers' expense. They have damaged communities, failed the vulnerable and exposed serious weaknesses in Home Office procurement. Are the Government certain that they do not need further powers to sort out these contracts and recoup the costs that have already been wasted? If not, why is that not included in the Bill?

Second Reading is about principles. I believe that this Bill identifies the right areas for reform—appeals, protection and costs—and, for that reason, I will support it tonight. I look forward to seeing concerns about the detail, implementation and asylum contracts being addressed as it progresses.

9.10 pm

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): I support the reasoned amendment tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart), which has not been selected, alongside me, my Green party colleagues and a cross-party grouping. I associate myself with the comments made already by Members on the Opposition Benches; we must reject division, not feed it.

I believe that our reasoned amendment represents the views of the majority of the UK public, who reject the far right, delight in the strong reputation that this country has for welcoming refugees and believe in human rights. We must treat those fleeing war, danger, discrimination and oppression the same as we would want to be treated if circumstances changed in this country. I believe the majority of the UK public are proud of the many, many migrant families of all kinds over the years, who are not only well-settled and well-integrated, but integral to our British identity.

This Bill will do the opposite of maintaining our proud British tradition of integration and community cohesion. It is designed to make it harder for families to form, reunite or remain together, and it is clearly designed

[*Siân Berry*]

to prevent refugees from finding a permanent safe new home here, which will damage community cohesion by preventing long-term integration.

The conclusions of Liberty around the impact of the Bill on children are stark. It says that more children will face separation, either from their parent or their home. It has huge concerns about the proposals to force no weight to be given to relationships formed by people in the UK in irregular circumstances. Banning people from falling in love is unlikely to work, so many children will undoubtedly be seriously harmed by this blunt and bad-faith proposal.

In addition, the proposals in part 4 of the Bill to force payments from financially vulnerable refugees are misconceived and cruel. Remember, these proposals will apply to the very poorest refugees, so it is a tax on poverty and on being a victim of war or persecution. It is a tax on free speech exercised by those who end up as political prisoners. It is a tax on LGBT+ people and on women fighting for education. It is a tax on discriminated-against minorities under authoritarian regimes.

The Bill does nothing to increase the right to work for people seeking asylum, which is the most obvious way of closing the hotels, reducing poverty and destitution and reducing the costs to the state of the long waits that refugees face. Above all, the Bill does nothing to improve the poor initial decision making that every MP's caseworkers know all too much about. It does not fix the problems caused by Brexit or provide any new safe routes for seeking asylum here. It does not reduce the number of small boats or prevent the criminal exploitation of those with clear and legitimate claims, but no safe way to reach the UK at all. The Home Secretary must reconsider and withdraw this Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I have made it very clear to the Whips on duty that I am not going to get everybody in, and interventions are not helping.

9.13 pm

Lewis Atkinson (Sunderland Central) (Lab): Asylum and immigration are key concerns for my constituents, and their judgment on the asylum system that this Government inherited is clear and correct: the system was broken, lacked control and cost taxpayers too much. By that, they do not just mean illegal and dangerous crossings of the channel; they mean that it was broken post-arrival, in the extended periods of time in which people have been accommodated in dispersal accommodation while awaiting decision or appeal outcomes. They are right to expect that the amount of public money spent on that system will reduce—an amount that has increased as a result of the failings of the system that the right hon. and learned Member for Fareham and Waterlooville (Suella Braverman) oversaw. It is on that basis that I welcome this legislation, along with the other steps that the Government are taking to restore control to the system while maintaining a proper offer of safe routes for those fleeing war and persecution.

In the two years since the election, rather than chuntering on like those on the Opposition Benches, the Government have begun to get a grip. Small boat crossings are down

by 12% compared with the equivalent period in 2024; initial decisions are at the highest level on record; and removals of people without a legal right to remain in this country are increasing. That is not happening by accident, and it is certainly not happening because of gimmicks and political game-playing. It is happening as a result of hard, unglamorous work: disrupting the gangs, deepening co-operation with our European partners, and actually making decisions on applications.

Like others have said, I travelled to northern France last year with Home Affairs Committee colleagues and saw the significant UK-backed efforts to stop the boats. However, I also heard from the French a concern that we cannot dismiss—that there remain pull factors on this side of the channel, including a system that incentivises late appeals. Because of the lengthy appeals backlog, it is right that this Government take steps to reform the appeals system. I think the shadow Home Secretary said that no previous attempts to reform the system had worked. The Blair Government, faced with a broken appeals system, passed immigration Acts in 2002 and 2004. Against opposition from across the House, they ensured that, by slowly getting through appeals and making sure that decision-making was proper and streamlined, the backlog fell repeatedly. That is not glamorous work. It is not noisy work that seeks to score political points, but it is the real work of governing that my constituents expect.

Our country has a proud tradition of offering refuge to those fleeing war and persecution, and Sunderland has lived that tradition, including the many families who offered their city of sanctuary to Ukrainian refugees. As others have said, in order to maintain that proud tradition, we need a system that commands public confidence, and it is right to reform it in the way that the Government are proposing.

9.16 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Your Party): The media, Reform and all on the far right in Britain have created the most horrible and dangerous atmosphere in this country against refugees, migrants and minorities. They have promoted racism, and that racism has played out in the violence on the streets, the violence against mosques, the violence against synagogues, and the violence against any minority group within our society. They should think very carefully about what they say and how they depict asylum seekers and refugees. When I listen to the rhetoric in the media and follow it in some of the papers, it seems to me that they have taken leave of all aspects of humanity.

The hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) said that he had been over to northern France to examine what was going on there. I have been over to northern France as well—I have been over to Calais and talked to people living in tents, and they are desperate. They are desperate people who once worked for the British Army in Afghanistan. They are desperate people who were bombed in Iraq or in Syria. They are desperate people trying to find somewhere in this world to survive, and what they find is hostility, danger and abuse.

Nobody in their right mind would get into one of those dinghies and cross the channel unless they were utterly desperate to do so, so can we not just have a sense of humanity about this and have an international, Europe-wide approach to the issues faced by people

who are desperate? Thousands have died crossing the Mediterranean, and hundreds have died crossing the channel. The historians of the next century will say of this century, “What were the politicians of Europe doing while all these people were drowning because they were trying to get to a place of safety?” Can we not instead accept the importance of international institutions and the value of the European convention on human rights, which protects all of our human rights, and try to have a humane system of doing things?

In the last minute I have for my speech, I want to draw attention to the amendment I have tabled, endorsed by Members of the independent alliance group, which concerns the Afghan resettlement schemes. The people of Afghanistan have suffered grievously from the war. In August 2021, the Taliban took over in Kabul; the UK created resettlement schemes, and then dropped them all. Now, we have the horrible situation in which, although many Afghan families who have come to Britain as part of those schemes were told that the rest of their family could come, there are many dependants stuck in Afghanistan who can have no place here. The Government, through the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office, guaranteed that right of family reunion and guaranteed that extended family members could come here. When the Minister for Border Security and Asylum responds to the debate, I hope he will remember the words of the Afghan International Council in the United Kingdom, who said that

“many Afghan families continue to endure the pain of prolonged separation”—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I call Rachel Taylor.

9.19 pm

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): My constituents in North Warwickshire and Bedworth have been clear that Britain must secure its borders, enforce the rules and remove those with no right to remain here. They also recognise that Britain should continue to uphold our proud tradition of offering sanctuary to people genuinely fleeing war, persecution and violence. Those two principles do not conflict. A system that is firm, fair and fast is the only way to maintain public confidence. My constituents are angry about the fundamental unfairness in the current system at a time when they are having to tighten their belts ever more.

Clause 23 tackles that unfairness head-on by giving the Secretary of State the power to require adults who have received asylum accommodation or financial support to make a contribution when they have sufficient means. Those who can afford to contribute should pay their fair share. That principle safeguards taxpayers' money and creates a stronger incentive to come through safe and legal routes.

The new capped routes for genuine refugees being introduced alongside the Bill are so important. Working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Government will establish controlled community sponsorship, study and work routes. The numbers will start small, because we have to restore confidence in the system. People arriving through those routes will have proper support in place, so that they can reach safety without dangerous journeys or people smugglers.

My constituents are rightly concerned when serious foreign criminals are allowed to remain here by relying on a broad interpretation of article 8 of the European convention on human rights, but the answer is not to leave the ECHR; the answer is to make the law clearer. Clauses 18 to 20 clearly define what constitutes family life and ensure that public safety and the prevention of crime come first.

People in North Warwickshire and Bedworth are tired of politicians making promises on immigration without a credible plan to deliver them. They want border security, not slogans, and an asylum system that protects the vulnerable without being open to abuse. I am backing this landmark legislation because it will restore control of Britain's borders and deliver an asylum system that is fair to the British taxpayer, compassionate to those genuinely seeking safety, and tough on those who seek to exploit our country and its generosity.

9.22 pm

Tony Vaughan (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): I draw attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I will focus in the short time that I have on part 1 of the Bill on immigration appeals reform and specifically on whether it will cut the appeals backlog.

I start by making the point that Home Office decision making is a significant driver of appeal numbers. The Home Office's internal quality checks show an error rate of around 48% in the most recently published figures, and around 45% of Home Office refusals were overturned on appeal, according to MOJ statistics for the year ending March 2025. It is important to make the point that if those decisions were right first time, there would be substantially less pressure on the appeals system.

I fundamentally agree with the Government that the asylum appeal backlog must be addressed urgently. They were right to enact a six-month target for asylum appeals in accommodated cases in section 49 of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act 2025. Since then, around 70 first-tier tribunal judges have been recruited. My first question for the Minister is this: given the increase in FTT numbers, the increase in sitting days and the impact of section 49 and other measures, where can we find the Ministry of Justice and Home Office assessment that explains why the FTT is unable to clear the backlog? Without that kind of assessment, and in particular an estimate of how much it will cost, it is impossible to understand why these far-reaching reforms are better than improving the existing system.

My second question is, why are the Government bringing forward a new model for appeals, when the Home Office's impact assessment says that it will have an “uncertain” effect on the appeal backlog, with no evidence that the appeal reforms will actually work?

Sarah Smith (Hyndburn) (Lab): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is incredibly important that there is certainty that the reforms we are making will create a better system, rather than risk making things worse?

Tony Vaughan: I completely agree. Another hon. Member referred to the importance of evidence-based policymaking. When I look at the impact assessment, it is not clear to me that the case has been made. I think it fair to say that

[Tony Vaughan]

the only evidential basis for these reforms is a hope that they will be better than the current system, but that, I suggest, is not a basis on which to abolish an arm of the judiciary of this country and undertake major structural changes to a key part of our asylum system.

There is evidence to suggest that a lay adjudicator system will not work. Last week the Justice Committee heard evidence that Denmark tried to bring in lay adjudicators about 15 years ago, but, as non-lawyers, they struggled to apply the law to the facts. They made numerous errors and ended up being either too sympathetic or too harsh, and they were got rid of. Danish asylum appeals are now heard by a judge, a lawyer and a civil servant. As another Member pointed out, Australia tried the same system some years ago, but it too was got rid of because it increased the backlog.

That brings me to my third question to the Minister: what assessment has been made of the impact of this new system on the upper tribunal? I believe that the new appeals body will simply shift the backlog, or a major part of it, from the first-tier tribunal to the upper tribunal, because lay judges will make more legal errors that will have to be corrected on appeal to the upper tribunal. I say that on the basis of 18 years of full-time practice in the courts and tribunals of this country, when I appealed against decisions made by both lay decision makers and judges. However, that is not just my view but the view of witnesses who came before the Justice Committee last week, including a former judge of the upper tribunal itself.

Let me add that the way in which the Bill has been sold—for example, its purpose is said to be to crack down on abuse of appeals—is incorrect, given that about half those appeals are allowed. The idea that all unsuccessful appeals are abusive, as was suggested at the outset of the debate, is wrong. A case that was clearly unfounded would not go to appeal. We already have a filter to get rid of weak cases before they start.

To end, I quickly point out that in respect of every element of the reforms, the Home Office's own impact assessment says that the effects are uncertain. There is, I suggest, scant evidential basis for believing that these measures will actually work.

9.26 pm

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): To have concerns about this Bill does not mean that we defend the status quo. It does not mean that we want the boats to continue, or that we do not want to see Shabir Ahmed deported, or that we do not recognise that claims are down, channel crossings are down, the number waiting for decisions is coming down and things are moving in the right direction. It means making the very simple case that the Bill could take us backwards, and could end up being more expensive for the taxpayer.

I do not stand here raising concerns about this legislation because of my concerns about the approach to the ECHR and my belief in the importance of defending it as a fundamental part of our liberty, or because I am proud to live in a community that welcomes refugees and proud to have spent this morning talking to a refugee businessman. If we are going to tell stories about refugees, let us tell the whole story about the contribution that they make to our country. I stand here as someone speaking up for the taxpayer's interest.

As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Tony Vaughan) has just pointed out, the truth is that much of the backlog is a result of poor-quality decision making. That is where cost is mounting up for the British taxpayer. The idea that there are no lessons to be learned about how we can save money, when in two thirds of cases the appeals are accepted or the decisions are withdrawn by the Home Office, does not bear scrutiny. Frankly, it would be decent if the Home Office turned up at those first-tier tribunals in the first place, and it would probably improve decision making as well, because we know that that has been a problem. Our failure to go after the Eurodac data means that it is harder for us to deal with asylum claims between the UK and Europe. That is why Brexit has caused problems.

Fundamentally, spending money on getting it right the first time would be the best way to give people confidence in our asylum system. Bringing in a new system that will add further complexity is only likely to add cost. We are creating a refugee system that will see us spending money on repeatedly asking people whether they are still victims of torture and whether there is still civil war in their country—testing and retesting these people for no apparent gain other than proving that we have a broken system. The Bill introduces a Diet Coke version of refugee status, the core protection visa, which will require refugees to be retested every two and a half years, potentially for 20 years. Think of the cost! The Refugee Council has estimated it to be about £1 billion. Then there are all the people that we are forgetting in this process. We have already talked about the madness of introducing a £10,000 debt for people on low incomes so that they are never able to sort themselves out properly in the UK if we do give them status.

In the final seconds remaining to me, I want to refer to the overseas domestic workers in this country who are being exploited. The right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley) spoke powerfully about the importance of not seeing everyone who comes here as a criminal, but recognising criminal behaviour. There are things that we could do so much better, which would save the British taxpayer money and restore confidence in the system, but I am sad to say that I do not think the Bill will take us in that direction.

9.29 pm

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): This Bill seems inspired by the belief that hostility towards asylum seekers will deter them, whereas hostility towards migrants will not deter those we need economically, but we cannot have it both ways. There is a deeper problem with the Bill's logic on citizenship provisions. The only way to make this approach work is by creating a second class of citizen, but what do we do with those whom we cannot deport? What happens when the person who has done the harm was born here, with no claim to another citizenship? The Bill has no answer, because citizenship deprivation was never really about safety; it is about who this Government treat as fully British, and the proposed amendment on citizenship deprivation confirms that.

To be absolutely clear, I am not arguing against deporting foreign national criminals, which we too often fail at. My concern is that the Home Office, with its full arsenal, cannot think of any other way to ensure that

we are safe from all groomers and abusers, regardless of where they or their grandparents were born. The Home Office seems able to resolve difficult cases only by creating citizens with fewer rights, which should trouble every single Member, whatever their view on deportation.

Press briefings have suggested that the Bill hands Ministers sweeping powers to strip British citizenship. Rather, it moves deprivation appeals out of the independent courts and into an immigration appeals authority that is largely controlled by the Home Secretary. That is a serious change to who judges these decisions, but it is a change of process, not of who can be deprived of citizenship or why. This appears to be blurred with a separate Bill that stops citizenship being restored after the first successful appeal, letting this Government sound tougher than they are while avoiding scrutiny of a power that is already used disproportionately against black, Asian and migrant-heritage citizens.

Forcing asylum seekers to pay £10,000 for their own shelter is purely punitive and ignores the legal right to asylum. Denying the right to work and rent, and then demanding repayment, is designed to punish, not uphold human rights. The Bill also deliberately ignores article 8, the right to family life, potentially tearing people away from loved ones, including British citizens. The Bill contravenes the spirit of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 by imposing arbitrary disclosure deadlines and removing leave to remain for trafficking survivors. Automatic deportation for custodial sentences introduces double jeopardy; a wrongful sentence can now also mean unjust deportation. The deportation system is already a mess and is run by the Home Office, which is now asking for sole control of it, without oversight. If the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs oversaw food shortages, would we accept a bid from it to take over all our farms?

Finally, this Government have yet again missed the chance to fix child citizenship fees. It costs £1,214 for a child who was born here, and who has lived here their whole life, to register as a citizen in the country that they call home—a fee that the Court of Appeal found unlawful. Between 85,000 and 215,000 such children remain undocumented because their families cannot pay. These children are not migrants, and they are not asking for anything that is not already theirs. If it was not clear, I do not support this Bill.

9.32 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I wish to briefly return to the issue of trafficking. I welcomed Theresa May's proposals and legislation on trafficking, which represented a huge breakthrough. I did so because in my constituency, we had hundreds of unaccompanied children coming into Heathrow, being taken into care and then disappearing. They would often end up in cannabis farms. We also had a large number of young women being brought in for prostitution in local hotels, and often they would have a drug dependency.

Like the Anti-Slavery Commissioner, who has criticised the Government for the language that they have used and for their contextualisation of this issue, I am appalled at the way in which trafficking has been included in this Bill, but also at the narrative that has been developed by those on the Labour Front Bench. Qualifying for asylum as someone who has been trafficked is not a soft touch. As the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands

(Dame Karen Bradley) said, no one individual can claim asylum in that way, because there has to be a first responder—in my constituency, it is usually a police officer. Then there is an assessment process, which is tough. The first stage is demonstrating grounds. The second stage is demonstrating conclusive grounds, and it is a tough assessment. It is a high threshold to meet.

I am concerned that we have been dragged into this debate in a way that undermines the whole process that we have developed in recent years and have been so proud of. The debate does not seem to relate to the reality of trafficking. We are introducing a time limit, and are saying no to people who did not claim that they were trafficked at the first instance, or within a limited period of time. The people we are dealing with are traumatised. Some of them, such as the young women I mentioned, have been made drug dependent and are often ashamed to admit to what they have been doing. The Bill does not reflect the reality of what is happening on the ground. As a result, some people who have been trafficked will be made vulnerable again.

I am really disappointed. The Home Secretary said that this Bill was all about the calculus of those people who were thinking about coming here on the boats. I think it is electoral calculus, and if it is, it is mistaken calculus, because I think it will lose the Labour party votes. It will also lose us the respect we gained for our cross-party approach to tackling trafficking. I am extremely disappointed, and I think this is a step backward. I cannot support the Bill tonight, and I will vote against it at every opportunity.

9.35 pm

Steve Witherden (Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr) (Lab): I recognise the need for reform of our immigration system, but many of the measures in this Bill require further scrutiny. Existing legislation has long served as an important safeguard, ensuring that powers are exercised properly. The Bill in its current form would make it significantly harder for families to claim the rights of a child who is British, or who has lived here for seven years. This will affect a large number of families. The Government's own assessment suggests that around 11,700 people would be affected. We pride ourselves on the British value of decency, but this Bill risks moving the goalposts and separating loved ones, despite their long-established ties to the UK. I welcome the open approach and accessibility of the Department, but what I would appreciate even more is clarification from the Minister of how these changes can be reconciled with the UK's obligations under international law.

As we consider this Bill and the direction of immigration reform more widely, we must think about the enormous contribution that migrants make to our communities and public services. In NHS Wales, more than one in 10 members of staff are non-UK nationals. Across my constituency—in Newtown, Rhosllannerchrugog and the Dee valley—migrant workers play a vital role in our health and social care services. Their dedication and commitment deserve our gratitude, not policies that make life harder for them and their families. This Government should not allow anti-migrant rhetoric and division to shape policy. We should stand firmly on the side of the migrants, who are our neighbours, friends, vital contributors to our economy, and the people who help keep our essential public services running.

9.37 pm

David Smith (North Northumberland) (Lab): Let us be straight: immigration is a good and necessary thing for our country. Successive waves of immigration over hundreds of years have helped make Britain the country we are, whether we are talking about the Huguenots fleeing French persecution in the 17th century, or the West Indians answering Britain's call for workers in the aftermath of world war two. However, it is also true to say that preceding waves of immigration have been small compared with the size of the population, and the pace has been relatively slow.

Today, many Brits hold two positions simultaneously. We want to be a generous, open and welcoming country, but we are also concerned about the lack of control that successive Governments have had over our borders. In the last five years, over 460,000 people have claimed asylum in the UK. A decade ago, that figure was 165,000, and the last Government allowed net legal migration of 2.5 million people in just four years. We must be in no doubt: if we fail to achieve a just and fair system, we will undermine public support for our asylum system, and there is a risk that the general population will turn away from our being the generous and compassionate country that most of us consider the UK to be.

I could talk about many things in the Bill that I think are good and necessary, but I will talk about just one, which is the introduction of requirements for asylum seekers to contribute financially towards the costs of our asylum system, as long as doing so would not push them into destitution. When I was leading a homelessness charity before entering Parliament, we supported a young man called Mobarak, who was only 18. He had come to the UK from Sudan via Libya and Malta. When we asked him what he wanted to do, he was clear: "I want to be a plumber," he said. Let us not deny people such as Mobarak the dignity that they deserve. Let us give them the chance to contribute to the society that has taken them in as soon as they can. Indeed, in my experience, what people who have been welcomed into this country as refugees most often want to do is make a contribution to the country that has welcomed them.

I give my full support to much of what else the Government are doing to secure control of our borders, including community sponsorship schemes, through which they are creating the first ever safe and legal routes to this country. The Government are picking up the pieces of the mess that the previous Government made. The only way we can restore the bonds of solidarity and compassion between citizen and asylum seeker is by restoring trust that the system is fair, effective and based on contribution. That is what the Bill seeks to do, and I fully support it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I am going to squeeze in one more speaker, with two minutes.

9.39 pm

Dr Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): I want to speak about something very simple: the difference between being put somewhere and being welcomed somewhere. When Russia invaded Ukraine, we welcomed Ukrainians into our home, as many here

have done. The questions were practical: "Where is the nearest doctor?", "How does the bus work?". That is why I welcome the Home Secretary's commitment to named community sponsorship. The Government retain control over who enters and in what numbers, and the welcome will come from the community. Canada has a similar system, and we have seen that sponsorship works from Homes for Ukraine. More than 400 Ukrainians were welcomed into west Suffolk; the people of Suffolk are keen to help—they have proved it.

I met the parish council and the headteacher at Barnham primary school. They are concerned about the use being made of the RAF Barnham base. That does not make these people uncaring. Their concern is about how this is being done. They deserve to be properly consulted. Named community sponsorship and asylum accommodation are not the same. One offers refugees a safe and legal route, while the other houses people as their asylum claims are decided. The question is simple: do we begin with a site and ask the community to accept it, or do we begin with a community and ask what it is willing to do to help? The second is a much better starting point.

For sponsorship to work, communities need training, clear guidance and continuing support. The people of Suffolk do not need lessons in compassion—they have opened their homes—but they must be heard when they raise concerns about RAF Barnham. The Home Secretary's reforms can combine control with sanctuary, but to achieve that, we must trust our communities and listen to them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Unfortunately, I have to go to the Front Benchers now. I call the shadow Minister.

9.41 pm

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): This has been an important and thoughtful debate, and I begin by thanking Members from across the House for their contributions.

There have been genuine differences of opinion this evening, but I think there is broad agreement on one point: our immigration system is not working. Immigration is one of the defining issues facing our country. It goes to the security of our borders, the integrity of our laws, the pressure on our public services, and, ultimately, the confidence the British people have in the ability of the Government to keep their promises.

The British people expect an immigration system that is fair to those who play by the rules and firm with those who seek to abuse them. They expect secure borders, swift decisions, effective enforcement and, above all, a Government to deliver. That is the test the Bill must meet.

In many respects, today's debate brings us full circle. Ministers stood at the Dispatch Box and argued that immigration policy should be about grip and control, not gimmicks and false promises, yet over the past two years, we have seen too many headlines, too many announcements and too many promises, while illegal migration has continued to undermine confidence in our borders.

Let me be clear: I do not believe that anyone in this House wants to see people risking their life crossing the channel in small boats. Those crossings benefit organised criminal gangs, undermine confidence in our immigration system, place enormous pressure on communities, public services and public finances, and all too often end in tragedy. Nobody should accept them as inevitable. The question before us today is therefore a simple one: does the Bill contain the measures necessary to stop illegal migration? That must surely be the ambition.

The Government's own impact assessment recognises that deterrence is essential, but it also accepts that the deterrent effect of these proposals is too uncertain even to quantify. That uncertainty goes to the heart of the Bill. The fundamental principle should be straightforward: if someone enters the United Kingdom illegally, they should not be able to stay. Everything else flows from that principle. Without it, public confidence is weakened and genuine refugees lose out. Those who come here legally and contribute to our country are let down, and the criminal gangs continue to exploit the gaps in our system.

To be fair to the Home Secretary, there are measures in the Bill that the Opposition welcome. It is right that the Government are seeking to recover more of the costs of asylum support. It is right that Ministers are finally acknowledging that the article 8 framework has frustrated removals. It is right that they recognise shortcomings in the operation of the modern slavery system. It is right that they acknowledge that the current appeals process is too slow, too cumbersome and too vulnerable to abuse. In truth, one of the most striking features of the Bill is that the Government have finally accepted many of the arguments that they have spent the last two years dismissing.

Recognising a problem, though, is not the same as solving it. The Home Secretary and I agree on much of the diagnosis; we disagree on the cure. Time and again, the Bill identifies the right issues but stops short of the reforms needed to address them. The Government propose a new independent immigration appeals authority, yet they cannot tell us with any certainty whether it will speed up removals or simply replace one backlog with another.

The Bill looks to narrow article 8 claims, while simultaneously creating a new, sponsored human rights claim that risks opening another avenue for litigation. It speaks about strengthening deportation powers, yet it leaves unanswered the wider questions about the legal framework that continue to frustrate removals. Despite repeated promises, the Bill contains no comprehensive reforms to settlement, no clear answer on preventing those who arrive illegally from obtaining citizenship, and no comprehensive removals framework capable of delivering the deterrence that Ministers say is necessary.

That is why the Opposition have tabled our reasoned amendment. We believe that the Bill does not yet go far enough to restore public confidence or deliver the outcome that the British people rightly expect. Our alternative is clear: those who enter the country illegally should have no right to stay.

Several Members have spoken about public confidence, and they are right to do so. Public confidence depends on knowing that the rules matter; that those who have no right to remain will be removed; that foreign national offenders can be deported swiftly; that endless legal

challenges cannot frustrate the clearly expressed will of Parliament; and that those who come here legally, work hard and contribute are not disadvantaged by a system that appears unable to distinguish between those who respect the rules and those who seek to exploit them.

As has been mentioned, the Home Secretary faces a political challenge from her own Benches. If she wants to come back and deliver real and meaningful reform that will properly secure our borders, and if she needs some support to do that, she can give us a call—*[Interruption.]* Give me a call.

The British people do not want another cycle of announcements followed by disappointment. They want to know that criminal gangs will no longer profit from human misery; that dangerous channel crossings will end; and that those with no right to remain will not spend years exhausting endless appeals while the taxpayer picks up the bill. They want to know that Britain remains a country that welcomes those who come legally, while maintaining control over who enters and stays. Those are not unreasonable expectations, but the foundations of a fair immigration system.

As the Bill progresses through Committee, the Opposition will scrutinise it carefully. Where measures meaningfully strengthen border security, improve enforcement and restore confidence, we will support them. Where they fall short, we will seek to strengthen them. The Home Secretary has moved some way towards recognising the scale of the challenge facing our immigration system, and I welcome that. The Bill identifies many of the right problems, but it still stops short of the bold reforms needed to solve them. For that reason, we have tabled our reasoned amendment.

The British people deserve an immigration system that is fair to those who follow the rules, uncompromising with those who do not, and capable of restoring control of our borders. That remains the standard by which the Opposition will judge the Bill. I commend our reasoned amendment to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call my favourite Home Office Minister.

9.48 pm

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (Alex Norris): You are not alone in that assessment, Madam Deputy Speaker—you are not alone!

It is a privilege to close this debate. Today the House is going through the collective trauma of the loss—the murder—of one of our former Members, Ann Widdecombe. During the Home Secretary statement earlier, colleagues from across the House spoke about the forthright way in which Ann Widdecombe put her views, never fearing to tell people that they were wrong, but always listening and keen to engage. The debate we have had today has been in that very best tradition of this House; I have agreed with lots of what colleagues have said, and disagreed with lots, too. I hope to cover as much of it as possible.

It is important to recognise where this Government started from. Two years ago, we inherited a total lack of control and order at our borders; an asylum system in which criminal gangs, not the Government, decided who came into the country; hundreds of hotels being used to house vast numbers of people at enormous cost

[Alex Norris]

to the public; and decision making that had quite simply ground to a halt. We have changed that reality. The system that we inherited worked for neither the collective, nor the refugees who wanted protection. It was a reality that has had to change; it is a journey that we are on.

We have made significant progress. Asylum decision making is up, costs are down, and we are on track to close all asylum hotels in this Parliament. We are seeing a reduction in demand for asylum, getting us much closer to more usual levels for this country. However, we have a long way to go in order to win back the trust of the British public, which is why this Bill is needed.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): On trust, one of the issues that my constituents have is with the sudden rise in planning applications for houses in multiple occupation. Does the Minister think that putting asylum seekers into HMOs in our local communities is really the answer to the immigration problem?

Alex Norris: Houses in multiple occupation have always been a part of providing refuge for people with mental health issues, people fleeing domestic abuse and those in many other circumstances. Use of them can be right. We want to find the right balance and ensure, through our policy of full dispersal, that the burden is shared more equitably. Fundamentally, we want to reduce demand—that is at the heart of the debate.

The Bill does five things, and I will try to group the points made by hon. Members around those five things. On the independent immigration appeals authority, we heard lots from the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), from my hon. Friends the Members for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter), for Bassetlaw (Jo White), for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) and for Clapham and Brixton Hill (Bell Ribeiro-Addy), from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Tony Vaughan), and from the hon. Members for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) and for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts).

I want to recognise the important work that judges do in the system. They work hard and have been creative to provide more capacity, and I am grateful to them for doing so. Nevertheless, I want to be clear with the House that simply trying to sweat the existing model will not give us the capacity that we need to have a functioning appeals system. That is why we are making these changes.

I cannot accept that the lack of legal training in itself is a weakness in this model. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said, we see it, for instance, in the magistrates system. We also know that other countries, such as Canada and New Zealand, have lay adjudication as well.

Colleagues have made important points about the independence of the appeals body and the potential blurring of lines with the Executive. We have no desire whatsoever to do that. I think that what is on the face of the Bill shows that separation clearly, but we will nevertheless work with colleagues throughout the passage of the Bill to give them the confidence that, as I say, we have no desire to blur those lines.

On the impact assessment, a lot of the uncertainty relates to the fact that we are not setting an arbitrary timeline by which the new system must be fully operational. We have to have security that the system will stand up properly, including with a period of double running. That is why there is a degree of uncertainty. Nevertheless, we need the greater capacity that the system will give us.

On the European convention on human rights, again, we have heard important contributions from colleagues across the House, including my hon. Friends the Members for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn), for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson), for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr (Steve Witherden) and for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy), the right hon. and learned Member for Fareham and Waterlooville (Suella Braverman), the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), and the hon. Members for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) and for Broxbourne (Lewis Cocking).

On this point, we have a contrast. We have the empty calories offered by the Opposition in their reasoned amendment, with the idea that all our issues could be solved by leaving international agreements—which would, in fact, make all of us weaker. These rights, both domestic and international, are for all of us. In lieu of serious answers, the Opposition try to offer us three-word solutions, but that will not work in this case. They talk about this in the context of returns, but returns need two things: yes, an individual must be barrier-free legally, but there must also be a place for that individual to return to. Having negotiated returns agreements around the world, I say gently to colleagues that resiling from very important international agreements would weaken the process, rather than strengthen it.

What I will say to those on the Government Benches, but perhaps not to those on the Opposition Benches, is that we must ensure that we do not defend a broken status quo, although I am happy to say that I did not hear much of that in the debate. We must recognise that it is not unreasonable to seek to align those agreements a little better, particularly when they are being applied more broadly domestically than in Strasbourg case law. I think that is an entirely reasonable thing to do.

We have heard from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary about the ways in which some people have sought to game the process. We should close the loopholes so that we maintain can public confidence and consent for the ECHR.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Alex Norris: I am afraid not.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow mentioned core protection. It is right that we simplify the protection status in this country and put into statute what we put into the immigration rules in the spring. I say to those who are concerned about the 30-month status that I have been clear from this Dispatch Box and in other forums that we do not want people to stay on core protection for long periods of time. If they switch to a protected work and study route, it will take them out of the 30-month renewal, as will coming via safe and legal means.

Let me turn to asylum support. Important contributions were made by the hon. Members for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson), for Perth and Kinross-shire

(Pete Wishart) and for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry), and by my hon. Friends the Members for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray), for North Warwickshire and Bedworth (Rachel Taylor) and for North Northumberland (David Smith). In principle, it is reasonable to recognise that support for asylum seekers is a unique thing and that it comes from a significant multibillion-pound contribution made by British taxpayers. It is right, and perfectly in line with the refugee convention and our international obligations, that we ask for a contribution towards that.

I cannot recognise or agree with the concerns around destitution. We have been very clear that this is about when people have the means to earn. We do not want to choke off someone's life that they are building in Britain, and we certainly would not want to push people into poverty. I have heard from colleagues, particularly Labour Members, that they want to see greater detail. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made the commitment in her opening speech that we will publish that regime as this legislation goes through, so that colleagues will know exactly what we are seeking to put into practice.

On modern slavery, lots of colleagues talked about their own personal records in this space, and I say to them: well, me too. I have been doing this for nine years in this place; I have always used my platform to push for better protections against slavery.

Some colleagues—including the right hon. Members for Staffordshire Moorlands (Dame Karen Bradley) and for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge (Sir Gavin Williamson), my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Tom Collins), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell)—asked, “Why is this in here?” First, it is an opportunity to strengthen the regime. I have spoken about transparency in supply chains and section 54 for all my years in this place. This provision strengthens that, and it recognises that there are ways in which the system is being used in interaction with the immigration system.

On the late disclosures, I accept that not everybody's recovery from slavery will allow them to immediately disclose that they have been a slave—they may not even recognise it themselves or have overcome their trauma. We are saying that when that is used at the very, very last minute—as it has multiple hundred times in the last hours before removal—the court ought to take into consideration whether that is really being declared in good faith or not. That will still be a rebuttable proposition, but I think that is right.

Similarly on the public order disqualification, I urge colleagues to look at what is in the Bill. It is totally reasonable for the Government of the day to say that the interaction of slavery protections should not trump considerations of national security. If people do seek to do terror and are convicted of terror offences, then of course that must be taken into account.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham Yardley) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Alex Norris: I am really sorry, but I cannot.

On Shabir Ahmed, my hon. Friends the Members for Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton (Jim McMahon) and for Rochdale (Paul Waugh) made really important points. They heard me say it last Monday, and they will

hear me say it again: from the Government's point of view, all options are on the table. We believe that this legislation provides a really good vehicle to tackle this challenge, alongside working on removals too. I will be very keen to continue to engage with hon. and right hon. Members on this, but I am glad, as I think everyone in this debate has been, that we have the opportunity to move forward on this shared priority.

On safe and legal means, my hon. Friends the Members for Falkirk (Euan Stainbank), for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes, for Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton and for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket (Dr Prinsley) talked about what British people will do if given schemes that are ordered and controlled, and I totally agree. I have seen it in my own community with the schemes on Ukraine, Hong Kong British nationals overseas, Afghanistan and Syria. What British people will not accept is a lack of order and control. That is what is at the heart of this Bill and the Government's approach. We have the chance to pivot from that broken model to a fixed model that works within our values and keeps public confidence too.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow talked about the overseas domestic worker visa. I would encourage her, if she has not already, to talk to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips). She will know that we are reviewing it at the moment, but if she thinks the Bill is a good vehicle for pushing the points that she makes very well, I would agree.

Finally, on contracts, I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh said—that is why we are going to reform them. With that, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 97, Noes 358.

Division No. 54]

[9.59 pm]

AYES

Anderson, Lee	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Andrew, rh Stuart	Evans, Dr Luke
Argar, rh Edward	Fortune, Peter
Atkins, rh Victoria	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Bacon, Gareth	Freeman, George (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)
Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi	French, Mr Louie
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Fuller, Richard
Barclay, rh Steve	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Bedford, Mr Peter	Grant, Helen
Bowie, Andrew	Griffith, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Griffiths, Alison
Brandreth, Aphra	Harris, Rebecca
Braverman, rh Suella	Hayes, rh Sir John
Cartlidge, James	Hinds, rh Damian
Chope, Sir Christopher	Holden, rh Mr Richard
Cleverly, rh Sir James	Hollinrake, Kevin
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Holmes, Paul
Cocking, Lewis	Huddleston, Nigel
Cooper, John	Hudson, Dr Neil
Costa, Alberto	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Jenrick, rh Robert
Cross, Harriet	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Davies, Gareth	Kruger, Danny
Davis, rh David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Lam, Katie
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Lamont, John
(<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver	Lewis, rh Sir Julian
	Lopez, Julia

Lumsden, Douglas
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McMurdock, James
 Moore, Robbie
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pochin, Sarah
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Rankin, Jack
 Robertson, Joe
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg

Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Smith, Rebecca
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sunak, rh Rishi (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Lincoln Jopp and
Sir Ashley Fox

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Tahir
 Amos, Gideon
 Anderson, Callum
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Begum, Apsana
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bird, Lara
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brewer, Alex
 Brickell, Phil
 Brown-Fuller, Jess

Burke, Maureen
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Cane, Charlotte
 Carden, Dan
 Carns, Al
 Chadwick, David
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Coghlan, Chris
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Collins, Victoria
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Daisy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh

Denyer, Carla (*Proxy vote cast by Siân Berry*)
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Doogan, Dave
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Egan, Damien
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farron, Tim
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Foody, Emma
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Francis, Daniel
 Franklin, Zöe
 Frith, Mr James
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan
 George, Andrew
 German, Gill
 Gibson, Sarah
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Glindon, Mary
 Glover, Olly
 Goldman, Marie
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Harding, Monica
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, rh Dan
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam

Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Clive
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir
 Khan, Ayoub
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Logan, Seamus
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 MacCleary, James
 Macdonald, Alice (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Maguire, Helen
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Mike
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayer, Alex
 Maynard, Charlie
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty
 Medi, Llinos (*Proxy vote cast by Ben Lake*)
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Miliband, rh Ed
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Iqbal

Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Mullane, Margaret
 Munt, Tessa
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Murray, Katrina
 Murray, Susan
 Myer, Luke
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Prinsley, Dr Peter
 Quigley, Richard
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rimmer, Ms Marie (*Proxy vote cast by Rachael Maskell*)
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Scroggum, Michelle
 Sowards, Mark
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael

Slade, Vikki
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, David
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Snell, Gareth
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Hannah
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stone, Will
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Cameron (*Proxy vote cast by Wendy Chamberlain*)
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilkinson, Max
 Williams, David
 Wilson, Munira
 Wishart, Pete
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrigley, Martin
 Yemm, Steve
 Young, Claire
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Gregor Poynton and
 Jade Botterill

Question accordingly negated.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)),
 That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 264, Noes 90.

Division No. 55]

[10.15 pm

AYES

Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Anderson, Callum
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Bance, Antonia
 Barron, Lee
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Burke, Maureen
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Irene
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Collier, Jacob
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Dean, Josh
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Dowd, Peter
 Downie, Graeme
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Egan, Damien
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Foody, Emma
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jarvis, rh Dan
 Jermy, Terry
 Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura

Lamb, Peter
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, rh Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonald, Chris
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Miliband, rh Ed
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Prinsley, Dr Peter
 Quigley, Richard
 Race, Steve
 Ranger, Andrew
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve

Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Robertson, Dave
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Scrogg, Michelle
 Seward, Mark
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, David
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stone, Will
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Williams, David
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Gregor Poynton and
 Jade Botterill

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Amos, Gideon
 Babarinde, Josh
 Begum, Apsana
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Bird, Lara
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Cane, Charlotte
 Chadwick, David
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chowns, Dr Ellie
 Coghlan, Chris
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davies, Ann
 Denyer, Carla (*Proxy vote cast by Siân Berry*)
 Doogan, Dave
 Eccles, Cat
 Farron, Tim
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Franklin, Zöe
 George, Andrew
 Gibson, Sarah
 Glover, Olly
 Goldman, Marie
 Harding, Monica
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Liz
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Jones, Clive
 Khan, Ayoub
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kruger, Danny
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewis, Clive
 Logan, Seamus
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacCleary, James
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Helen
 Martin, Mike
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mathew, Brian
 Maynard, Charlie
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 Medi, Llinos (*Proxy vote cast by Ben Lake*)
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Susan
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Hannah
 Sultana, Zarah
 Thomas, Cameron (*Proxy vote cast by Wendy Chamberlain*)
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilkinson, Max
 Wilson, Munira
 Wishart, Pete
 Wrigley, Martin

Tellers for the Noes:
 Mr Tom Morrison and
 Claire Young

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Immigration and Asylum Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 3 November 2026.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(*Gen Kitchen.*)

Question put and agreed to.

IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM BILL (MONEY)

King's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Immigration and Asylum Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State, and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under or by virtue of any other Act out of money so provided.—
(*Gen Kitchen.*)

Question agreed to.

**IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM BILL
(WAYS AND MEANS)**

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Immigration and Asylum Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the charging of sums of money under or by virtue of the Act, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—
(*Gen Kitchen.*)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate**DELEGATED LEGISLATION**

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): With the leave of the House, I will group motions 5 to 10 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Contracts for Difference (Definition of Eligible Generator) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, which were laid before this House on 14 May, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft West Midlands Combined Authority (Key Route Network) (Amendment) Order 2026, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

That the draft Justification Decision (Generation of Power by the RR SMR) Regulations 2026, which were laid before this House on 3 June, be approved.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Batteries (Placing on the Market) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2026, which were laid before this House on 4 June, be approved.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

That the draft Trade (Mobile Roaming) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, which were laid before this House on 4 June, be approved.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

That the Greater Cambridge Development Corporation (Establishment) Order 2026, dated 3 June 2026, a copy of which was laid before this House on 4 June, be approved.—(*Gen Kitchen.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

DANGEROUS DRUGS

That the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (Temporary Class Drug) Order 2026 (SI, 2026, No. 613), dated 8 June 2026, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10 June, be approved.—
(*Gen Kitchen.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

TRADE UNIONS

That the draft Trade Unions (Permissible Means of Voting) and Employment Rights (Unfair Dismissal) (Amendment) Order 2026, which was laid before this House on 22 June, be approved.—(*Gen Kitchen.*)

The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 15 July (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

**TRADE UNION AND LABOUR RELATIONS
(CONSOLIDATION)**

That the draft Code of Practice on Electronic and Workplace Ballots for Statutory Trade Union Ballots, which was laid before this House on 22 June, be approved.—(*Gen Kitchen.*)

The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 15 July (Standing Order No. 41A).

**INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS
AUTHORITY**

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty, praying that His Majesty will appoint Richard Lloyd OBE to the office of Chair of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority with effect from 1 September 2026 for the period ending on 31 August 2029.—(*Sir Alan Campbell.*)

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty, praying that His Majesty will—

(i) appoint Hywel Williams as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 1 October 2026 for the period ending 30 September 2029;

(ii) re-appoint Chris Ruane as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 1 November 2026 for the period ending 31 October 2030; and

(iii) re-appoint Sheila Ritchie as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 1 February 2027 for the period ending 31 January 2031.
—(Sir Alan Campbell.)

PETITION

Road safety in the London Borough of Bromley

10.28 pm

Liam Conlon (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): Across my constituency, a lack of action on road safety means that parents are afraid to let their children play out, older people avoid using certain junctions, and some streets are plagued by unbearable noise. Just this week, it is likely that two people will have been seriously injured on Bromley's roads. While there are particular issues at hotspots such as Kent House Road, Kent House Lane, Blandford Road and Hawes Lane, residents across all Beckenham and Penge are let down by the wait-for-harm approach employed by Bromley council, under which it will take action only when five people have been killed or seriously injured. The petitioners

"therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to encourage the London Borough of Bromley to adopt a proactive, preventative approach to road safety, in line with the "Vision Zero" principles adopted by comparable London boroughs, and to make full use of the record £7.3 billion of Government funding made available to local authorities"—

including Bromley council—

"for road repair, renewal, and safety improvements."

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the constituency of Beckenham and Penge,

Declares that road safety is a matter of serious and growing concern for residents of Beckenham and Penge with residents reporting that unsafe roads discourage children from playing outside, deter older people from using certain junctions, and blight streets with excessive traffic noise; and further declares that the London Borough of Bromley currently operates a reactive "wait-for-harm" approach, under which measures to improve road safety are only considered after multiple deaths or serious injuries have occurred, rather than in response to near-misses or the lived experience of residents.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to encourage the London Borough of Bromley to adopt a proactive, preventative approach to road safety, in line with the "Vision Zero" principles adopted by comparable London boroughs, and to make full use of the record £7.3 billion of Government funding made available to local authorities for road repair, renewal, and safety improvements.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P003222]

Embodied Carbon: Buildings

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

10.30 pm

Dr Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): The climate crisis is upon us. We in the UK are now in the midst of our third heatwave in less than three months. Communities have endured sweltering conditions that have put huge pressure on our NHS, our infrastructure and our natural environment. Our ambulance service has never been so busy. Tragically, lives have been lost as people have sought relief from the heat in rivers and lakes. Today, we have heard that it is estimated that there were 2,700 excess deaths due to just the May and June heatwaves. In my constituency, dozens of schools have had to close due to overheating. People are sweltering in hospitals, care homes and many other workplaces, and farmers and communities alike are facing critical water shortages.

Extreme heat is no longer an occasional inconvenience, and neither are extreme storms and floods; they are now part of everyday life, and we know that things are getting worse. If we are serious about protecting future generations from climate breakdown, every sector must play its part in reducing emissions. Today I will focus on one sector that is rarely discussed, despite having an environmental footprint unlike any other.

Globally, the construction of buildings contributes more than one tenth of the world's carbon emissions—around four times the footprint of aviation. Here in the UK, the construction sector is responsible for fully 25% of the UK's carbon footprint on a consumption basis. The built environment generates one third of the world's waste—a figure surpassed only by food waste—and consumes nearly half of all the raw materials that we extract from the earth.

Alison Taylor (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for giving such a thoughtful speech, and for leading this debate. As a chartered surveyor, I advised on some of Scotland's first carbon-neutral developments. Does she agree that developers purchasing cleared sites often struggle to get the appropriate building research establishment environmental assessment method accreditation, due to shortcuts being taken by the previous owners of the sites during the demolition process?

Dr Chowns: The hon. Member makes an excellent point from a position of great expertise. That is precisely what this debate is about: we need to recognise that we should be reusing buildings as much as possible. We should be reducing the destruction caused by a failure to reuse. We should ensure that regulations are put in place that enable those who are developing, as well as those who have sites and responsibility for them, to take account of the whole life-cycle carbon assessment in deciding how to deal with a building. Let us take the waste hierarchy—reduce, reuse, recycle—into account in the construction sector, which is such a critical part of our nation's carbon emissions.

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): The hon. Lady is making a very compelling speech about the importance of thinking on a whole-life basis about the carbon in buildings. Does she agree that we should

think about the whole-life carbon impact of new buildings, and does her argument support the view that we have an opportunity to design buildings properly, so that they are cool in summer and warm in winter? Aureus school in my constituency is only 10 years old, but is incredibly hot in the summer.

Dr Chowns: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. Since I entered this place, I have been campaigning for homes and buildings that are truly fit for the future. We need to take this issue into account when we build and design buildings. We do not want to have to retrofit buildings at huge expense later on. We need to recognise that there are so many opportunities to deal with this at the design stage. The materials that we use in construction play a crucial role in reducing the need for active heating and cooling; they can allow us to incorporate passive elements. Measures to address the embodied carbon of buildings can also play a role in reducing the operational carbon impact of buildings. That is an excellent point, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for it.

It is clear that the construction industry has a huge impact on both climate change and biodiversity loss. We rightly spend time discussing how efficiently buildings operate once they are occupied, but we spend remarkably little time discussing the emissions that occur before anybody even walks through the front door of a new building. Those emissions are known as embodied carbon—that is, the greenhouse gases emitted when we extract raw materials, process them into building materials and use them for construction.

According to the UK Green Building Council, embodied carbon accounts for around 20% of the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions and is expected to account for fully half of the built environment's emissions by 2035. Bizarrely, though, it has so far been ignored by central Government policy. Building regulations only set limits on a subset of operational emissions. The Government's new future homes standard ignores embodied carbon and only tackles energy use in new homes, which is a small fraction of the total emissions from the built environment. The standard is silent on material use, construction processes and embodied carbon. These are not marginal omissions—they are large gaps in UK climate policy. The Environmental Audit Committee pointed this out several years ago, as have experts for years and years.

The huge irony is that the construction sector is crying out for UK Government leadership in this area. We know that we have a housing crisis in this country. We need to build more houses—the right houses, in the right place, at the right price—and it is crucial to ensure that when we build, we do so in a way that is genuinely fit for the future, as we have discussed. That means using a whole-life carbon assessment to minimise both operational and embodied carbon emissions. The hugely frustrating thing for the construction sector is that the absence of national regulation in this area is creating more bureaucracy, not less. As a result of the Government failing to provide national direction, local planning authorities are increasingly stepping into the vacuum themselves. Recent research led by the University of Sheffield found that 61% of local planning authorities now reference embodied carbon in their planning policies, and 7% are moving to mandate assessments.

I commend those councils for their ambition—they recognise the urgency of climate action and are taking real, tangible action. However, the consequence is fragmentation. Different authorities are adopting different reporting templates, different thresholds, different assessment requirements and different policy wording. As such, national house builders and developers are being forced to navigate an increasingly complex patchwork of local rules. They have to learn a new set of rules every time they build in a different local authority. Planning officials are duplicating work, and local authorities are developing parallel systems. Everyone is investing time and money in solving the same problem dozens of times over. The Government would not leave local authorities to tackle other aspects that are fundamental to building design, such as fire safety or equality. Those areas have national minimum standards that authorities can build on, so why are carbon emissions not treated the same? Do we not take climate breakdown as seriously as safety or equality?

Lewis Atkinson (Sunderland Central) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. In my constituency, we have the National Glass Centre building—a huge building, built 30 years ago, that unfortunately does not seem viable for its current use any longer. Rather than demolishing that building, as some are seeking to do, the council has been asked to consider article 4, which would remove implied permission to demolish without a full planning inquiry. Does the hon. Lady agree that that is the sort of work councils should be doing to make sure that proper scrutiny takes place, and that all possible alternative uses of a building such as the National Glass Centre have been exhausted before demolition is considered?

Dr Chowns: Absolutely. As we have discussed, we should reduce, reuse and recycle; let us make sure that every part of a building is reused in the best way possible. Demolition should be the absolute last resort, so it sounds like the hon. Gentleman's planning authority is taking the right direction.

Last year, I attended an embodied carbon industry summit, which was held just over the road from this House. At the summit, a simple question was asked of attendees: without Government intervention, will local embodied carbon rules become more consistent or more divergent? The response was absolutely resounding: the rules will continue to diverge without Government leadership. It is clear that national regulation on embodied carbon will reduce complexity for the construction industry, not increase it. It will replace fragmentation with consistency, create a national carbon dataset, and provide certainty for industry, while delivering meaningful carbon reductions. Surely that is exactly the kind of planning reform that this Government should want to achieve.

As the Environmental Audit Committee highlighted in its 2022 report, "Building to net zero: costing carbon in construction", regulating embodied carbon would be "the single most significant policy the Government could introduce" if they wish to tackle the reuse of buildings, the development of low-carbon materials and a reduction in these emissions. Why are we still waiting?

The encouraging news is that the construction sector is not waiting for Government. For more than four years, more than 250 organisations from across the built

[Dr Chowns]

environment sector have supported a campaign called “Part Z”, named after the various other parts of the building regulations. They have been calling for national embodied carbon regulation. Those companies are not asking the Government to invent something entirely new. Indeed, the same experts who developed “Part Z” have now produced the UK net zero carbon buildings standard, a ready-made framework that provides a practical route to compliance. It builds on the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors’ whole-life carbon assessment methodology, one of the most developed embodied carbon methodologies in the world. These documents could form the basis of future regulatory reporting requirements and, in time, a new approved document. The Government do not need to start from scratch; the construction industry has already done much of the hard work.

Indeed, members of this Government used to be in support of such action. When a private Member’s Bill on embodied carbon was debated in 2022, Jonathan Reynolds, now the Government’s Chief Whip, and previously the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, said “We support it”—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. We do not talk about colleagues by their first and second names. We mention their constituencies, and if we are mentioning them, we give them the courtesy of letting them know that we will do so. I say that for future reference, to make sure that it does not happen again.

Dr Chowns: I am so sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. I stand entirely corrected. The aforementioned right hon. Gentleman said:

“We support it. I agree with his proposition that industry would welcome further regulation in this area”.—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2022; Vol. 723, c. 620.]

He was right then, and that statement is right now, because this is not regulation that industry fears; it is regulation that the construction sector is asking for. Industry is calling for this, because it provides a level playing field, creates local green jobs and boosts investment in lower-carbon materials. Good regulation rewards innovation, provides certainty for investment and gives British businesses the confidence to lead.

The rest of the world is moving ahead in this area. The Netherlands has regulated embodied carbon for more than a decade. The EU requires reporting from 2028 and will have limits from 2030. Türkiye is requiring reporting from 2027. Several US states mandate reporting today. Meanwhile, Britain, despite having world-leading engineers, researchers and designers, risks falling behind. This is not simply an environmental issue; this is an industrial strategy issue. It is a planning reform issue and a housing issue. It is about whether Britain intends to lead or follow.

Today, I ask the Minister for one thing above all else: national leadership. I ask for a clear pathway towards national regulation to measure and reduce embodied carbon, aligned with the direction already being taken by many of our international partners and by many in the construction industry. I ask that embodied carbon is finally recognised within national planning policy, replacing

today’s fragmented patchwork with one coherent national approach. I ask the Government to consider using the UK net zero carbon buildings standard as the route to fast-tracking the compliance requirements, finally giving industry the certainty it has been requesting for years. When will the Government finally release their long-delayed circular economy growth plan, which could deal with embodied carbon at its core?

Climate change is not hanging around, as we can see around us all the time, and embodied carbon is only making things worse. We can and must change that. We have the expertise, the methodology and the support from industry. Local authorities are crying out for consistency, and the standards have already been written—the only thing missing is national leadership. I call on the Minister to provide it.

10.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Samantha Dixon):

I thank the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Dr Chowns) for securing the debate, and for the constructive and consistent way in which she has pursued the issue of embodied carbon in buildings. I know that this is an issue of particular interest to her and to many other Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Alison Taylor), the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover) and my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson). I am sure that the hon. Member for North Herefordshire will continue to press the issue and keep it on the Government’s agenda.

I should make it clear at the outset that the Government agree that action on embodied carbon in new buildings is important. If we are to meet our net zero targets, we cannot just look at energy use in occupation. We recently introduced the future homes and buildings standards, which will ensure that new buildings become zero carbon in operation once the electricity grid has decarbonised. However, we also need to understand the embodied carbon associated with materials, construction, maintenance, replacement and end-of-life treatment. As operational emissions fall, embodied carbon will become an increasingly important part of a building’s whole-life emissions.

I know that the issue of embodied carbon in new buildings has been raised in the House before, and the Government are aware of proposals for embodied carbon assessments, approved methodologies, guidance, and central reporting. The Government recognise the aims behind those proposals: better data, more consistent measurement, greater transparency and, over time, a pathway towards reduction of embodied carbon in the country’s new buildings. Those are legitimate aims. Better measurement is an essential first step, because we cannot reduce what we do not understand. However, embodied carbon is not a single, simple number; it depends on a host of design choices, as well as assumptions about lifespan, data quality, construction methods, and end-of-life treatment. Different assumptions can produce different results for the same building, which is why the Government must be careful in considering whether and how to intervene. In July 2025 we published research from AECOM entitled “The practical, technical and economic impacts of measuring and reducing embodied carbon in new buildings”. It identified opportunities for industry to track and reduce carbon impacts, but it also

identified challenges and barriers, including the need for better skills, more consistent methodologies, improved data, and practical tools.

Dr Chowns: As the Minister has pointed out, there is a need for more consistency. Does she not recognise that Government is the institution that can provide exactly the consistency that the sector requires?

Samantha Dixon: What I will say is that despite those challenges, the Government recognise the excellent leadership already being shown by parts of the sector—which the hon. Member has described—in tackling embodied carbon. Parts of the construction supply chain are already working to measure and reduce whole-life carbon, and we saw that momentum at the conference at the end of last year that the hon. Member mentioned earlier. It was attended by officials from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, as well as the hon. Member, alongside industry and professional bodies. That summit highlighted both the appetite for action and the importance of consistency, better data infrastructure, and a phased approach to give industry appropriate time to adapt.

The Government also support the work of the Future Homes Hub on embodied and whole-life carbon in new homes. The hub is developing an industry-led approach to reducing embodied and whole-life carbon, including work on voluntary measurement and disclosure, benchmarking, environmental product data, and practical tools for home builders. However, despite those excellent examples—and there will be many more that I have not mentioned—it would be wrong to assume that the whole construction industry is in the same place already for regulation, as is often claimed.

While larger developers and consultancy teams may have the expertise and tools to carry out robust assessments, many smaller builders, local contractors and clients do not. There can also be varied costs in even assessing the whole life or embodied carbon of a project. The Government are therefore taking time to consider the right approach, but taking time does not mean inaction; it means doing the work properly. Rushed policy could lead to inconsistent assessments, poor-quality data, disputes about methodology, and perverse incentives. It could also drive the substitution of materials without proper regard to their safety, quality, durability or cost.

Members will understand that the Government need to consider these issues in the round. We have ambitious housing delivery targets, and we are committed to making buildings safer. A policy that reduces reported embodied carbon, but which undermines safety, increases defects or slows housing delivery, would not serve the public well. In considering our approach, the Government must look at several areas: the methodology, the quality and coverage of data, the capacity of industry, the sequencing between measurement and reduction, and the economic impacts. A hospital, a high-rise block and a small housing scheme will not have the same constraints or carbon profile, and any future framework must recognise this.

Some have raised the role of planning, which can be an important lever. The planning system provides the freedom for local authorities and developers to carry out carbon accounting. As the hon. Member for North

Herefordshire described, some are already encouraging whole-life carbon assessment, but we must also be mindful of the cumulative demands placed on the planning system.

The Government have recently consulted on proposed reforms to the national planning policy framework and other changes to the planning system. The consultation sought views on a revised framework, which would encourage applicants to reuse existing structures and materials, and give substantial weight to proposed development for existing buildings where this improves energy efficiency. We are analysing the feedback received and will publish our response in the summer. Any approach to embodied carbon must be considered alongside wider planning reform to ensure our policy is coherent, practical, and capable of supporting both sustainable development and the delivery of the homes and infrastructure that the country needs.

Lewis Atkinson: I thank the Minister for the point she is making about the role of local government. I think she heard what I said to the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Dr Chowns) about the National Glass Centre in my constituency. Would she encourage planning authorities, such as Sunderland city council, to fully consider alternative uses for very large buildings as they examine whether planning permission for demolition should be given?

Samantha Dixon: My hon. Friend makes a very persuasive case, and I am sure that Sunderland city council will be listening to what he has said. I endorse his comments.

Building regulations play an important role in setting minimum standards, but when we regulate, we need clear requirements, clear compliance routes and clear enforcement responsibilities. The Government are committed to reducing waste by moving to a circular economy and making significant reductions in carbon emissions. To achieve that, all sectors must play their part. For construction products, this includes increasing the reuse and recycling of products, choosing more sustainable products and improving information about environmental performance. Our construction products White Paper confirms an intention to remain consistent with the EU's revised Construction Products Regulation where this meets our objectives, thereby protecting supply chains and reducing burdens on UK manufacturers. That extends to environmental aspects.

However, reducing embodied carbon is not just about regulation or planning; product innovation, digital tools, professional training, voluntary disclosure and better design practice will all have a role. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is already taking forward work to grow the market for low-carbon industrial products, with an initial focus on steel, cement and concrete. It has committed to developing guidance for buyers and producers of construction products on embodied emissions reporting, product classifications and green procurement approaches. This guidance will help buyers to identify and compare lower-carbon products, and help producers to market them. That matters for buildings, because the choices made by designers depend on the products available to them and on information that they can trust. Better product-level carbon data can support better building-level decisions, but the two systems need to be aligned carefully rather than developed in isolation.

[Samantha Dixon]

The materials we use in buildings must be assessed in the round. Lower-carbon products offer real opportunities, but they must also be safe, durable, suitable for their intended use and supported by reliable information. The Government's work on construction products reform and DESNZ's work on low-carbon industrial products therefore point in the same direction, and are being developed to work together, with better information, greater confidence and a market capable of supporting both safety and decarbonisation.

Let me be clear about what the Government are not saying. We are not saying that embodied carbon is too difficult to address, we are not saying the Government will have no role to play, and we are not saying complexity is a reason to put this issue in the "too hard" box. However, we are saying that complexity matters; unintended consequences matter; burdens on industry, local authorities and consumers matter; housing delivery and building safety matter; and net zero matters. The right policy must hold these objectives together.

I therefore welcome today's debate, and the challenge from Members who want the Government to move faster, but responsible Government sometimes means resisting the temptation to immediately reach for a simple answer to a complex problem. The Government's position is that embodied carbon in new buildings is important. The direction of travel is towards better measurement and reduction. Industry leadership is welcome and necessary, and the Government must take the time to design an approach that is robust, proportionate and deliverable.

Dr Chowns: The Minister has outlined the complexities of regulating in this area as in any other area, and I am glad to hear her say that this does not mean the Government

will do nothing. The Government would not say that fire safety is a complex area, and they therefore will not regulate. However, in this area, as I outlined in my speech, hundreds of industry experts have come together to create a framework that the Government could use as the basis for regulating. Does she recognise that so much of the preparatory work has already been done to address that complexity?

Samantha Dixon: I recognise the hon. Member's point. We are aware of the industry-led Part Z proposal, and setting expectations in this way is one possible approach to addressing the embodied carbon of new buildings. I recognise that there is a great deal of work already taking place across industry, and we are aware that parts of the sector have been coming together to encourage consistency and increase awareness and engagement. We know it is a challenge across the built environment and construction supply chains, and that is why we are considering the next steps very carefully. Ahead of any potential intervention, we want to understand the impacts on the sector. So we have commissioned research to help improve our understanding of the data currently available on embodied carbon, and identify where gaps and challenges lie. We will continue to work with industry, local government, professional bodies, environmental organisations and parliamentarians to consider the right levers for action.

I again thank the hon. Member for securing this debate, and I look forward to continued engagement with her and with Members across the House as this important area of policy develops.

Question put and agreed to.

10.58 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 13 July 2026

[DEREK TWIGG *in the Chair*]

Illegal Immigrants: Offshore Detention and Deportation

4.30 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 737105 relating to offshore detention and deportation of illegal immigrants.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Twigg, and to open this debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. I will speak today in my role as a member of the Committee; in doing so, I am obliged to give not only my own views on the issue, but those of the petitioners and the campaigners who have sought this debate. I will set out what the petition seeks, its merits and some points worth considering further. Of course, I have my own views, which I will share throughout the debate.

I congratulate the petitioner on setting up the petition. Unusually, he is one of our colleagues: the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Rupert Lowe). The petition calls on the Government to

“establish offshore detention facilities for individuals who enter the UK illegally, to process them and arrange their deportation.”

It closed in March with over 720,000 signatures from every part of the United Kingdom, including from a great many of my constituents in Galashiels, Hawick, Kelso, Jedburgh and across the Scottish Borders. The number of signatures that the petition attracted reflects the strength of feeling on immigration.

Let me set out the scale of the problem that has prompted the petition. Each year, tens of thousands of people are entering the United Kingdom illegally, mainly travelling by small boat across the English channel. There is a process for those fleeing war and persecution to seek asylum in this country. The people coming here illegally are not following that process. They are not doing the right thing. They are breaking the law. When they get to this country, it becomes incredibly difficult for them to be removed. Nearly everyone who arrives here goes on to claim asylum, even if their claim is dubious. Even in circumstances in which it is clear that they should not be here, perhaps because of a criminal record, it is challenging to remove those who hide behind the process.

Those abusing the process benefit from the fact that our asylum system is broken. Resolution of asylum claims takes far too long—often years for the initial case, and then potentially far longer on appeal. As of March this year, over 10,000 people were waiting more than a year, and nearly 100,000 people were in asylum accommodation, including more than 20,000 in hotels. As these claims go on, people are housed by the state. The policy of housing asylum seekers in hotels is one of the signatories’ main objections to UK asylum policy. They are correct in their assessment of the moral flaws of the policy. A system has been created that seems to encourage and reward those who make an asylum claim even if they have no real chance of success or fair basis for doing so.

This is not about those who fairly claim asylum, but about those who abuse the system. The practice of using hotels for these people has led to justified public anger. At a time when normal British citizens are struggling to make ends meet and working hard only to pay huge sums in taxes to fund services that are declining, it is grossly unfair that people illegally entering this country are being put up in hotels at the public’s expense.

The Government have started to use dedicated sites larger than hotels, on the basis that concentrating provision is more manageable than dispersing tens of thousands of people across hundreds of hotels the length and breadth of the country. In further information that the petitioner submitted ahead of today’s debate, he argues that if consolidation into larger mainline sites is already accepted as an improvement on hotels, the logical next step is to consolidate provision entirely. Offshoring at a single location with one integrated set of services, including accommodation, healthcare, legal support, translation and case management, would replace the costly current patchwork of provision. It would provide clearer entry and exit controls. Crucially, it is argued that it would have a genuine deterrent effect that dispersed mainland accommodation cannot deliver.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this issue is ultimately about fairness for our constituents, who are paying their taxes and are seeing someone who has come here illegally benefiting from services more than they may be able to, as residents who pay tax? Does he agree that we must absolutely consider offshore detention and consider offshore processing? We must say, “If you come here illegally, you will be deported.”

Derek Twigg (in the Chair): Order. I remind hon. Members that interventions must be short.

John Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is about a sense of fairness. The system is not working in the best interests of our constituents, and I am sure that his 1,138 constituents who signed the petition feel that unfairness.

With the incentive of guaranteed mainland accommodation removed, the numbers requiring processing at any one time would fall to the low thousands, rather than the tens of thousands currently housed. The petitioner has based his argument on evidence such as that gathered by the Public Accounts Committee, which reported last month that the asylum system in the UK is

“under severe pressure, with high costs and persistent backlogs.”

The same inquiry found that repeated attempts at reform had failed to fix long-standing problems, and that short-term fixes had tended to push pressure from one part of the system to another rather than resolve it. More strikingly, the Committee recorded that the Home Office could only say that it knew where “the vast majority” of failed asylum seekers were. The Committee called that “shocking and unacceptable”. The vast majority of British people agree. The Committee’s conclusion was that the current accommodation model is “poor value for money”.

The Government response to the petition says that offshore detention would be “costly and impractical”. On that point, the Government seem to be grasping at straws and to be woefully underprepared. Two words that undoubtedly apply to the current system are “costly”

[John Lamont]

and “impractical”. Offshore detention may well be costly and impractical, but the Government have not proven that point. What is worse, they have not come close to proving that it would be more costly or impractical than the current system, which was found by a cross-party Committee of this place not to provide value for money.

The signatories to the petition would be well within their rights to ask the Government to publish all the relevant figures for the current system, break that system down on a cost basis and let people see how broken it is at every stage. Have the Government assessed the cost to every individual community of providing services to those claiming asylum? The answer is no. They certainly have not come close to doing so—nor do they want to, because the cost to local services is not a simple number. It includes the ongoing cost for already strained local services and the breakdown in community cohesion. Some of it cannot be captured on a simple ledger, but is nevertheless very expensive for our country.

Many in the SNP, Labour and the Greens wish to portray an effective immigration system and a strong deterrent as somehow morally wrong. They regard any policy designed to protect our borders as outrageous. Yet internationally, offshore detention and similar measures have been effective and are increasingly being considered by Governments of all political persuasions. Australia’s move to offshore processing coincided with a sharp fall in boat arrivals from 2001, and the Australian Government maintain that offshore processing is very effective. Other countries, including Italy and Denmark, have brought in similar measures to those that the petitioner seeks. Many others, including Germany, Austria, Denmark and Greece, have considered return hub facilities outside the European Union.

No matter what some politicians think, those policies are not far right. It is right that they be properly considered. This Government have not done so appropriately. They have not seriously considered an approach that other countries have implemented successfully and that others are now looking at. They dismiss the views of the signatories to the petition and the huge number of people across the country who support it. Their analysis is short on detail and long on assumptions about costs that do not seem credible.

The truth of the matter is that our immigration system is broken beyond belief, and the British people know all about it. I represent a rural constituency in Scotland, but this issue fills my postbag and comes up time and again on doorsteps and in my advice surgeries. It comes up because my constituents, far from the English channel, can see that they are paying and that our country is suffering for this broken system. They see that we struggle to deport even serial criminals. That is why more than 700,000 people have signed the petition. They deserve to be heard, and they deserve to hear from this Government that all the substantive and reasonable options must be put on the table to fix this broken immigration system.

This is not the time to dismiss, for political or ideological reasons, proposals that are grounded in evidence and that seek to provide a real solution to one of our country’s biggest ongoing issues. The Government should take the petition seriously. They should consider a new

approach to immigration. They must consider establishing offshore detention facilities for people who enter the United Kingdom illegally.

4.41 pm

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Twigg. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and I am grateful to the 1,744 people in Hartlepool who signed the petition. That is a significant number of my constituents, and their concerns deserve to be heard and taken seriously.

Let me begin by saying something very clearly. The people of Hartlepool are entitled to be angry about immigration. They are entitled to expect secure borders. They are entitled to expect that those with no right to be in this country are removed. They are entitled to expect fairness in the asylum system and fairness for the communities that feel they have carried more than their fair share, and I share in those expectations. I have supported the Home Secretary’s measures to reduce illegal immigration, strengthen border security and increase returns, and I will continue to support this Home Secretary, including on the measures that will be laid before the House later today, which I hope this House will pass in full.

The truth is that progress is being made. Net migration has fallen dramatically from the peak under the previous Government’s Boris wave: it is down 82%, delivering the reduction that was promised for years but never achieved. Indeed, the figures are now entering the tens of thousands that Conservative Administrations promised for so long. Small boat crossings are down 41% this year, while deportations of those arriving by small boat are up 16%. In Hartlepool, the number of asylum seekers living in dispersed accommodation has fallen by 14% since the general election.

The new immigration and asylum legislation will further strengthen the powers available to remove those with no right to be here and deter those attempting to enter illegally. That is the serious work of Government. It requires law enforcement, international co-operation, proper returns agreements, faster decisions and a system that can distinguish between genuine asylum claimants and those who have no right to remain.

I fully understand why people sign a petition like this. They see boat crossings in the channel. They see asylum accommodation in their communities. They see the pressure on housing, schools, public services and community cohesion. They feel that for far too long the broken system—broken by the Conservative party—has not worked, and they want action. They are right to expect it, but we also have a responsibility in this place to be honest. Offshore detention is something that I support in principle, but it is not a magic answer. It is expensive, it is legally complex and it does not remove the need for returns agreements, effective administration and tackling the criminal gangs who profit from human misery—but I reiterate that if we can make it work, in principle I support it.

More importantly, the language we use matters. It affects how people view their neighbours, it affects how communities feel and it affects people’s lives. That brings me to a point that I want to make very clearly.

A constituent, Jasvir Singh, came to see me a couple of weeks ago after experiencing repeated racial abuse in the community where he has lived and served for almost 30 years. He owns a local business and has paid his taxes; he has contributed to Hartlepool and built a life there. He has done exactly what we say we value, yet he came to see me because the rhetoric around immigration has made his life harder. Jasvir is not an illegal immigrant, and he is not a criminal; he has every right to be here and he is part of our community, yet a small minority accuse him of being an illegal immigrant, of having arrived on a small boat and of having no right to be here, and they do so for one reason alone: the colour of his skin.

When politicians blur the line between voicing legitimate concern about illegal immigration and using language that encourages suspicion of people because of their background or their skin colour, it is people like Jasvir who pay the price. That is why the rhetoric we use matters. There is a line between wanting secure borders and stirring up hostility; there is a line between removing those with no right to remain and portraying whole communities as a threat; there is a line between legitimate concern and racist dog-whistle politics, and it is my view that that line has been crossed repeatedly by the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Rupert Lowe).

When that happens, the consequences are not confined to Westminster Hall. They are felt by people like Jasvir. They are felt by families in Hartlepool. They are felt by children who hear abuse on their way to school. Words spoken in this place do not stay here. They travel into communities and workplaces and on to social media. That does not mean that we should avoid the issue—quite the opposite. We must continue to reduce illegal immigration, we must continue to strengthen our borders, we must remove those with no right to remain and we must dismantle criminal gangs and restore public confidence, but we must do so in a way that is serious, lawful and above all decent.

Hartlepool understands the pressure that the issue creates. One of my first actions on being elected as MP for Hartlepool was to meet Mears, the company responsible for asylum accommodation locally, because Hartlepool carries more than its fair share compared with neighbouring areas. I made clear that the system had to be fair, that responsibility could not simply fall on communities already facing significant challenges, and that local people deserved answers. Following those conversations, new asylum accommodation in Hartlepool was halted and numbers fell.

I will continue to raise this issue with Ministers because fairness matters. Hartlepool is a proud and welcoming town that believes in fairness. Fairness means secure borders and removing those who have no right to be here, but it also means standing up for the people who belong here and ensuring they are not made to feel like strangers because of the colour of their skin or the sound of their name. That is the balance we need: strong borders, faster removals, proper enforcement, serious government and politics that does not make innocent people pay the price for failures in the immigration system.

The people who signed this petition deserve answers, and my answer is this: I will continue to support firm action to reduce illegal immigration, I will support strengthening our borders and I will support practical measures that work, but I will not support rhetoric that puts my constituents at risk, I will not support language

that turns legitimate concern into racial hostility, and I will not stay silent when people who have lived in, worked in and contributed to Hartlepool for decades are made to feel that they no longer belong.

We can have secure borders without losing that most fundamental of British values: common decency. We can have firm immigration controls without attacking decent people based on their skin colour, and we can tell the truth about illegal immigration without turning on our neighbours. We will not import Trumpian politics into our country. That is not the British way.

4.49 pm

Sarah Pochin (Runcorn and Helsby) (Reform): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Twigg.

For three decades, successive Governments have promised to get tough on illegal immigration, yet according to Home Office figures, in the last seven years alone around half a million people have claimed asylum in the UK; of those, 200,000 came in on small boats and most of the others were visa overstayers. In that time, around 60% of all asylum claimants have been granted refugee status, including those granted after appeal, and it is estimated that 66% of adults with refugee status are now claiming universal credit. That means that since 2019 up to 300,000 people who illegally entered or remained in the United Kingdom have been granted refugee status, and most could now be claiming benefits, including housing benefit. By 2030, that number could be over 400,000—a city the size of Coventry, composed almost entirely of people who should have never been allowed to stay in the United Kingdom.

What is frightening about these numbers, going back decades, is that we have no real idea of just how many illegal immigrants and visa overstayers are in this country, living under the radar in our communities. Poor record keeping by the Home Office means that the population of people with no right to remain in the United Kingdom is highly likely to be over 1 million. Thousands go missing every year, and the Government still fail to monitor properly whether migrants leave the UK after their visas expire. Labour says it is tackling the problem, but it is simply increasing the speed at which illegal immigrants are granted asylum. The Government have increased legal aid for appeals by 30%, to over £60 million a year, and a record 80,000 appeals are under way. Since the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) has been Prime Minister, there have been more than 72,000 small boat arrivals, with no serious attempt made to stop them.

Why is all this such a problem? It is a problem because their presence corrodes the rule of law, costs billions in accommodation and welfare, distorts low-wage labour markets, and signals to the world that Britain's borders are open. Illegal immigrants from some countries have a medieval attitude to women and girls. Sexual assault and rape by migrants from certain countries is far higher than among our indigenous population, and it is 20 times higher for those from Afghanistan. There are documented examples of illegal immigrants loitering outside schools, filming children, following girls and trying to engage with them for sex. Let me give hon. Members some specific, harrowing examples.

Sheraz Malik, an illegal immigrant of Pakistani origin who had been in the UK less than 12 months, raped a vulnerable young girl in a park in Sutton-in-Ashfield.

[Sarah Pochin]

Deng Majek, an illegal immigrant of Sudanese origin, arrived in the UK in July 2024; by October 2024, he had stalked and murdered 27-year-old Rhiannon Whyte. Abdulla Ahmadi, Ibrahim Alshafe and Karin Al-Danasurt, illegal migrants of Iranian and Egyptian origin, arrived in the UK in June 2025; by October 2025, they had targeted a young vulnerable woman on a night out in Brighton, beaten her, choked her and gang-raped her. I could go on—there are pages of examples. The safety of women and girls in this country is at risk because of our immigration policy.

Furthermore, we know that criminals are entering our country on small boats, bringing with them contacts into ruthless organised crime gangs that operate on our high streets, laundering money, dealing drugs, and selling illegal vapes and cigarettes to children, yet no DNA is taken on arrival. Why not? What about our homeless veterans, or British citizens on housing lists who find themselves being pushed aside and left behind in favour of illegal migrants who are housed instead of them?

The total annual cost of the asylum system is over £8 billion and rising. We cannot sustain this; we are not a food bank or a hotel for the world. Illegal immigration is helping to bankrupt this country. Our high streets are being overrun by crime, our women and girls are under attack, and our culture is under threat. Why does anyone think that that is okay?

We need to detain and deport every illegal immigrant who lands on our shores, and we need to put the Navy in the channel to stop illegal immigrants from landing on our shores. Those who are here illegally need to be moved offshore, processed and returned to their country of origin. We need to leave the European convention on human rights to put an end to the years of appeals that result in hardly any illegal immigrants ever being deported. We need to stop the invasion of our country by those who have no right to be here, and who come because they know they will get a free house, free food, benefits and medical treatment ahead of our own citizens. And no one who has come here illegally or remained here illegally should ever be granted British citizenship.

To summarise, we need to detain, we need to deport and we need a zero-tolerance policy. It is about a Government having the will to do so. Other countries have secured their borders; if we are to survive, we must do the same.

4.55 pm

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Twigg.

First, I will acknowledge that although I disagree with the premise of this petition, I recognise the strength of feeling among the hundreds of thousands of people who signed it. However, I cannot support calls for offshore detention or processing centres, and nor will I support calls to immediately deport those who enter this country through irregular routes, because seeking refuge and safety is not illegal, and many safe and legal routes do not actually exist.

I strongly believe that Members who support what this petition calls for are not being honest with the wider public about what it would cost, how it is a risk and what the true problems are. Of the people who

enter the UK via an irregular route, 95% submit an asylum application. That means that we, as a signatory to the 1951 refugee convention, have a legal duty to assess their claim and place them under the care of the state while that process is ongoing. If their application is rejected, the state's duty to them persists until the appeals process is exhausted. If that takes too long, it is inefficient, which is on us.

Human Rights Watch and a number of other organisations have confirmed what most of us believe to be true, namely that holding asylum seekers in offshore detention is in contravention of our obligations under international human rights and refugee law. Regardless of whether a person's application is deemed to be legitimate, they cannot be held in an offshore site until their asylum claim and subsequent appeals have been denied.

The petition that we are debating today raises the issue of asylum seekers being held in hotels and temporary accommodation. I certainly agree that that is unacceptable; I have seen for myself the diabolical conditions in such accommodation. The Home Office is paying millions each day to house asylum seekers, but that is not the fault of the asylum seekers themselves. It is the fault of the Home Office and the private contractors who seek to make a profit off the backs of vulnerable people.

I do not dismiss the views of those who support the petition, but the public debate does not provide accurate information. It regularly conflates the number of legal migrants and so-called illegal migrants. Indeed, migration and asylum are among the most misrepresented issues in public debate. The UK receives far fewer asylum claims per capita than countries such as Germany, France and Cyprus. Also, in most cases asylum seekers are barred from working here, so claims that they are taking jobs or living off benefits do not actually recognise the fact that asylum seekers are desperate for the right to contribute but are trapped in the system. In addition, the language of "swarms" and "invasions" is just inflammatory, racist and dehumanising, and it continues to cause problems throughout the discourse and debate on this subject.

While we are discussing how much things cost, which again is a huge concern, we must realise that offshore detention can never be a cheaper alternative than the current system. It is far more costly—as was proved by the last Government, with their failed Rwanda scheme that cost £700 million but under which only four people were voluntarily transferred. Other examples of offshore processing centres operated by Australia, Italy and Denmark show how costly they can be. They are not meeting those countries' aims, but are causing huge problems and perpetuating those countries' engagement in really awful rhetoric about migrants—just as we are, while the costs increase again and again.

I want us to be able to talk about asylum seekers with some humanity and not to cast off those in our communities who have come here to seek support from us. As I have said again and again, we have a duty to them under the refugee convention and a moral duty to them. The conversation about funding that we keep on having is completely missing the point: it misses the Home Office backlog and the continuing engagement in negative rhetoric of politicians here. When we look at the issue of offshore detention, we have to be realistic with the country about how much it is going to cost and about the fact that it will not solve the issue at hand.

5.1 pm

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Twigg. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) for moving the motion and to the vast number of people—720,000, including 1,093 from my constituency of Tatton—who signed this important petition and prompted this debate calling for offshore detention and deportation of illegal immigrants.

According to Home Office data, just under 77,000 illegal immigrants have arrived by small boat since Labour took charge in July 2024. The average number of daily arrivals under Labour has been about 104, some 94% higher than under the previous Conservative Government—an extraordinary increase. On Friday just gone, 10 July, another shameful record was set: the highest number of illegal immigrants on a single dinghy, 128, arrived in the UK. A total of 225 arrived in three dinghies on that day.

That has happened under a Government who pledged to reduce illegal migration, promising to “smash the gangs”—but those promises turned out to be smoke and mirrors. I say it was just to secure a general election victory, because reducing immigration is just not in Labour’s DNA. A fleeting search online is enough to reveal images of Cabinet members clutching “Refugees Welcome” signs. Without doubt, one of the biggest mistakes that the Prime Minister made, in a strong field, was to cancel the Rwanda scheme—an offshore processing centre and permanent resettlement programme.

We know that deterrence is an important component in tackling organised immigration crime. As Steve Rodhouse, director general of operations at the National Crime Agency, told the Home Affairs Committee in 2019, the

“people willing to make the journey”

across the channel know

“that there is a very low risk that they will be returned.”

I am sure that that is more true today than it was even then.

The Rwanda agreement would have tackled the issue head on. It would have allowed for the forceful relocation of asylum seekers, people who had already been refused asylum, and those who made unauthorised illegal journeys to the UK. Rwanda would then have granted them asylum or permanent residence. The National Crime Agency described the scheme as a deterrent; in fact, we were starting to see dinghies from France heading to Ireland and other countries. There was a drop in illegal channel crossings in 2023, after the plan was announced: they went from 45,000 in 2022 to 29,000 in 2023—a 35% decrease. Without the Rwanda plan or deportation to another country, we have been left with no way to remove illegal immigrants—those who destroy their documents to hide their country of origin.

Like much of this Government’s foreign policy, the weaknesses of this Labour Government have become opportunities for other countries. The United States has signed agreements with 34 countries to allow for third-country deportations, and, according to the Migration Policy Institute, the US Government have plans to contact at least another 50 countries about similar agreements, including—you guessed it—Rwanda. The model has expanded across Europe, too. The EU is now in the process of adopting legislation permitting EU member

states to reach agreements with non-EU member states for the establishment of return hubs. Those are logical decisions and policies. But the Government failed to see that; as a result, illegal immigration has soared.

As the petition rightly points out, the

“current use of hotels and temporary accommodation is unsustainable, costly and dangerous.”

We simply cannot have people breaking into our country and being rewarded for their criminality with hotel accommodation, healthcare, travel, translation services, recreational facilities and more, costing British taxpayers billions of pounds a year. We have seen just how dangerous that can be, as horrific case after horrific case has shown: the brutal and frenzied murder of Walsall hotel worker Rhiannon Whyte by a Sudanese illegal immigrant who had just arrived by small boat three months previously; Haybe Nur, a Somali national, walked into a bank and stabbed a father of three dead; Hadush Kebatu arrived by boat and was then convicted of multiple sexual assaults; and Ahmad Mulakhil was found guilty of raping a 12-year-old. That is the reality of not knowing who is coming into our country.

These policy failures are not only putting communities in danger; it is downright unfair on society to prioritise illegal immigrants in this way. Look at the plan for Stoke Heath in Shropshire, where the Home Office was all set to move immigrants into brand-new housing. That was a kick in the teeth for local families, who were told that that estate would offer affordable or social housing for them—many had been waiting on the housing list for years. What about veterans? Where is their brand-new housing? Where are we housing them? Thankfully, the Stoke Heath community seems to have stopped the plan in its tracks, having put up fierce opposition to the Government. The Home Secretary now tells us that new-build estates like that will “never be considered again”; we can only hope that that is true.

Labour has not “smashed the gangs” as it promised, but it is certainly succeeding in smashing our local communities, which are forced to play host to a sudden influx of illegal immigrants. This Government talk tough, but that is all they do: talk tough without action. The reality is that until the Government develop a spine, reinstate the Rwanda scheme, take the UK out of the ECHR and repeal the Human Rights Act 1998, we have no chance of deporting those who come here illegally.

5.8 pm

Rupert Lowe (Great Yarmouth) (Restore Britain): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Twigg. First, I want to thank the 720,772 British men and women who signed our petition demanding the mass deportation of illegal migrants—a policy position that has moved from the so-called mad fringe to the acceptable mainstream in less than two years. The question is no longer whether Britain has a problem. We know the problem; it has been well documented. Now we need solutions. Restore Britain is the first and only political party to publish a comprehensive plan not just to stop future illegal immigration but to remove those who have no legal right to remain in this country. All of them—every man, woman and child—must be deported. A Restore Britain Government will do exactly that.

I am not going to stand here and outline the problem; we all know what is wrong. I will tell this Parliament exactly how we can remove millions of illegal migrants.

[Rupert Lowe]

As we have seen time and again, deportation is routinely frustrated by a carefully designed maze of legislation, international treaties and legal challenges. A Restore Britain Government would repeal or amend the domestic legislation that prevents swift deportation; repeal the Human Rights Act; withdraw from the European convention on human rights; and remove the refugee convention from domestic immigration law.

We would also introduce what we call the great clarification Act, reaffirming that we in these buildings have the final say on immigration policy and allowing Parliament to overturn court rulings that obstruct the democratic will on immigration—not activist judges, but elected politicians held to account by the British electorate.

Legal reform would just be the start, setting the scene for the most ambitious set of deportations ever seen. The real question is this: how can we remove all those with no legal right to be in Britain? The answer is making illegal residence impossible to sustain—as we call it, the “hostile environment”: no legal employment, no legal tenancy, no access to public services and no banking facilities. That single reform would become the backbone of our immigration enforcement, making life so incredibly uncomfortable and unsustainable that many would simply depart themselves.

Employers must face real-time right-to-work checks. The gig economy, construction, hospitality and other sectors with persistent illegal working would face regular audits. If Uber Eats, Deliveroo and the rest were found to be employing illegal migrants, they would be fined, prosecuted or even shut down. The farce of young Sudanese illegal migrant men on mopeds delivering spring rolls and pepperoni pizzas in every British suburb would end. The Government must lead by example. Every company bidding for public contracts would have to demonstrate strict compliance with immigration law before receiving any taxpayer money—environmental, social and governance regulations, but for mass deportations.

Housing enforcement would change completely. Every landlord would be required to carry out right-to-rent checks at the beginning of every tenancy. Those who knowingly rented properties to illegal migrants would face severe financial penalties, and persistent offenders could face asset seizure and prosecution. Owners of houses in multiple occupation who imposed gangs of feral illegal men on quiet British villages would be prosecuted. Public officials who knowingly placed dangerous and unvetted migrants near schools and nurseries would be sent to prison. Homelessness legislation must also be amended so that illegal migrants are no longer recycled through local authority housing systems but instead enter the immigration enforcement process. We would not house illegal migrant tramps; we would deport them. It is really that simple.

Healthcare would no longer operate as a loophole. So-called “safe surgeries” must end. Proof of lawful status must become a requirement for routine NHS access. Illegal migrants in hospitals would be reported to immigration enforcement, as they should be now. We are not evil: emergency care would be provided, but they would be deported as soon as it was medically safe for that to happen.

Government Departments would finally begin sharing data across the Home Office, His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, the NHS, local councils, the Department for Work and Pensions and banks. Instead of operating in silos, the Government would work as one system to identify those with no legal right to remain. The full power of the British state would be directed to implement this one policy: mass deportation. Financial enforcement would become another powerful tool. Banks would verify immigration status before accounts were opened. Existing accounts without lawful status would be frozen or closed. The hostile environment measures would force out hundreds of thousands; a concurrent programme of enforced deportations would be implemented alongside that to remove the rest.

Restore Britain proposes a major expansion of immigration enforcement, recruiting thousands of additional officers, drawing on former police officers, military veterans and experienced investigators. A specific recruitment campaign for military veterans would be implemented, drawing former soldiers into field enforcement roles. Detention capacity would be expanded dramatically, including through the use of purpose-built detention facilities capable of holding thousands awaiting removal. Commercial airlines would continue to be used where appropriate. Dedicated charter flights would become routine. Military transport aircraft would also be available where operationally necessary. Time would not be wasted.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): I would like to understand the point about detention centres. How many places would be required, and over what period? How does the hon. Gentleman think that this is even feasible, given that the previous Government managed to build only one new prison in 14 years?

Rupert Lowe: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention. I am not going to go into detail; it is all in this policy document. I will give her one to take away.

Specialist detention facilities would be constructed near airfields to hasten the process. Britain would negotiate far stronger bilateral return agreements while working with allies to create a deportation NATO—a coalition of like-minded countries applying co-ordinated diplomatic and economic pressure on Governments that refused to accept back their own citizens. That would include harmonised visa sanctions, co-ordinated suspension of visa issuance, foreign aid suspension, targeted trade measures and tariffs, remittance and dividend controls and taxation, and a rapid response returns taskforce. Pakistan would be the first country to feel the full force of those measures.

Sanctions from a single country are easier to absorb, but a unified bloc of economies and travel markets creates systematic and severe pressure. Co-ordinated restrictions would also close loopholes whereby nationals bypass one state’s measures by moving to another jurisdiction. All that would be delivered alongside the credible and proven threat of action. Do it once, hard enough, and it would not be required again.

We must also revoke all asylum grants awarded following illegal entry and retrospectively revoke protection so that those individuals are also removed. If someone arrived in Britain illegally on a small boat, they would be deported,

regardless of what their current status may claim. People ask whether this is achievable. Restore Britain says yes, but only if the Government finally demonstrate the robust political will required.

What about cost? Britain is already paying billions: billions every year on accommodation, billions on asylum, billions on public services for illegal migrants, billions supporting people who have no legal entitlement to remain here. In the short term, ending those long-term costs would offset the expenditure required to carry out removals, with estimated annual savings of more than £12 billion once the programme was complete. Put simply, mass deportation pays for itself.

This policy is popular, cost-effective and possible. I have just one question for my fellow MPs: what are we all waiting for? This is a costed, comprehensive and legally sound plan that would, as those 720,772 British patriots demand, remove the illegal migrant population. We have outlined exactly what needs to happen, in excruciating detail. It can be done. It must be done. It will be done. I invite Members to help themselves to a “Mass Deportations” policy document on their way out. It makes glorious reading.

5.19 pm

James McMurdock (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Ind): It is a pleasure and an honour to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Twigg. I thank the 1,673 South Basildon and East Thurrock constituents who took the time to sign the petition.

When discussing illegal migration, we must begin with a simple truth: a nation that cannot control its borders cannot fully control its future. Offshore detention and processing centres are not a perfect solution, but they can be an effective one. Their primary benefit is that they function as a deterrent. If individuals know that arriving illegally will not guarantee entry into the country, the incentive to make dangerous journeys is significantly reduced.

That matters not only for border security, but for saving lives. Every year, criminal gangs profit from putting vulnerable people into overcrowded boats and sending them across some of the world’s busiest shipping lanes. We should be focusing on that. I thank the hon. Members who have leaned into the importance of being considerate to all people. On top of the need for gentle language, I might advise them that we should really be protecting those people and keeping them safe by enforcing laws properly so that they do not risk their lives at sea.

Offshore processing could also restore confidence in the immigration system. Most people are compassionate and willing to support those with genuine claims for asylum. However, public confidence is undermined when the distinction between legal and illegal routes becomes blurred. A system that is firm, fair and consistently enforced is ultimately in the interests of both citizens and legitimate refugees.

Critics raise a number of concerns, which deserve to be taken seriously. The first is cost. Offshore facilities can be expensive. However, the answer is not to abandon the policy, but to ensure that it is designed efficiently, with clear agreements, streamlined processing and a strong focus on rapid decisions rather than prolonged detention.

The second concern is humanitarian welfare. Nobody should be subjected to poor conditions or indefinite detention, and offshore centres should be subject to independent inspection, proper healthcare provision, legal oversight, and strict maximum time limits on processing. The objective should be swift assessment and resolution, not warehousing people for years, as they effectively are when they are in this country and unable to work. Of course, we cannot allow them to work, because that creates a further incentive and pull for more illegal migration.

The choice facing policymakers is not between offshore processing and an ideal world, but between policies that deter illegal migration and those that leave criminal gangs and smuggling networks free to operate. If implemented properly, offshore detention and processing could strengthen border security, reduce dangerous crossings, restore public confidence and save lives while maintaining high standards of humanity and the rule of law. This is a balanced approach: firm on illegal migration, fair to genuine refugees and responsible to the taxpayers who expect their Government to control their nation’s borders.

5.22 pm

Mr Will Forster (Woking) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Twigg.

The Liberal Democrats believe in a fair and controlled approach to immigration and asylum and a system that treats people with fairness and compassion. My constituency of Woking has a proud and long history of supporting those fleeing persecution. It was home to the Ockenden Venture, a trailblazing charity founded in the 1950s that helped to resettle refugees from post-war Europe, Vietnam and beyond. Humfrey Malins, the former Conservative MP for Woking, even set up a national immigration service. More recently, Woking has seen how life-changing a functioning immigration system can be. Since 2015, my town has welcomed hundreds of refugees from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine. Those people arrived fleeing conflict and persecution. They have been welcomed by my town and added to our economy and cultural vitality. I am pleased that we have helped them to rebuild their lives in Surrey.

In 2026, it is right that we uphold Britain’s humanitarian traditions while having control of our borders. That starts by bringing an end to asylum hotels, stopping unsafe channel crossings and ensuring that criminal gangs cannot profit and that they face justice. We need safe and legal routes for asylum seekers and refugees. Ukrainians did not cross the channel in dangerous small boats, because this Government provided a safe and legal route for them. We know that safe and legal routes work. We need more of them, not fewer, yet safe and legal routes are not in the Immigration and Asylum Bill that will be debated in the House later today. Arrivals via safe and legal routes are at their lowest level since 2023 as a result.

Before the Brexit referendum, there were almost no recorded small boat crossings, but since we left the European Union, more than 190,000 people have come here in small boats. The fact that we are not in the EU has been a pull factor causing that crisis. People who have arrived on small boats have literally said the word “Dublin”. They are playing the system against us. Asylum seekers are coming to the UK, having failed the first time in Europe.

[Mr Will Forster]

By not being in the EU or working with neighbouring countries, we are creating more work at great expense to the British taxpayer. Following Brexit, the Conservatives implemented disastrous immigration policies that have led to a huge rise in net migration. Past Governments have introduced five immigration Acts since 2020. We need a watertight arrangement with the EU that would mean everyone arriving by small boat is at risk of being returned. That is how we ensure that the gangs do not have a viable business model, and that there is a proper deterrent to stop people making money in the first place.

A key requirement for tackling this issue is ensuring that the Home Office improves. At the moment, it makes slow and bad decisions. We need to process claims quickly. We need to open Nightingale-style processing centres and double the number of asylum caseworkers to clear the backlog. The Refugee Council estimates that, because of bad decisions made by the Home Office, we are spending at least £974 million—maybe up to £1.2 billion—supporting people currently in the appeals backlog who will have their initial refusal overturned. Is the Minister looking into that in order to improve decision making?

I believe that the people who signed the petition would welcome a swift and humane return for anyone with no right to be here, but would want us to welcome genuine refugees. The Liberal Democrats have consistently set out changes required to restore control and compassion to the immigration and asylum system. We did that during the passage of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act 2025 with the previous Ministers, we are doing it with the current Ministers, and we will continue to do it as the Government change next week.

5.27 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Twigg. I thank Members for their contributions and the more than 700,000 people who signed the petition, including more than 1,000 in my constituency of Bexhill and Battle.

This is a very real issue in my part of East Sussex. The Government forced on us the Crowborough asylum camp, just over the border in the constituency of Madam Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Sussex Weald (Ms Ghani), but very close to my own. We met the Minister just last week, alongside local residents and councillors, and heard at first hand about groups of young men gathering in this small rural town to drink on the streets, smuggling alcohol back into the detention centre and working illegally, and all the distress that that is causing. I am not surprised that the Government targeted Wealden for a camp, considering that it is run by Lib Dems and Greens, with their refugee asylum safe haven policy.

At the heart of this debate is a question of control: whether the state and the people on whose behalf it operates have control of our borders or not. For the nation state to have meaning, a country must be able to remove people from within its borders who have no right to be there—whether to send them to offshore processing or detention, or to deport them entirely—and at scale.

I welcome the opportunity to set out the overwhelming rational and moral argument for ending small boat crossings and the illegal people-smuggling trade, which

is at the forefront of the petition. Whatever opponents of strong border controls say, and however much they attempt to demonise and caricature those of us who want to see control returned, I know not only that is this what the vast majority of the British public want, but that it is the right thing to do.

We have to be clear-eyed about the status quo. Right now, not only is our asylum policy effectively determined by people's ability to pay to get here, but the trade itself is putting money directly into the pockets of criminal gangs that are also involved in other crimes, such as drug dealing and violence. Whether someone makes the crossing is not a measure of their need, their comparative level of desperation or fear, or their vulnerability. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Small boat crossings favour the able-bodied, those with sufficient money to pay for the journey and those closest to Europe. They are not based on anything that Parliament or the Government have decided, nor are they a reflection of humanitarian crises.

We know for a fact that every single person making the crossing from France—because they are coming from France—is not fleeing directly from a war-torn country where they are at risk of persecution. Decent, caring and compassionate constituents of mine say to me all the time, “They are safe; they’re in France.” People may have a preference—a desire—to be here instead of in France, but that is not what the asylum system was set up for. That is not what the laws and protections were intended to enshrine and make sacrosanct. However much defenders of those laws and regulations choose to ignore that, the British public can see through it.

The first retort to those criticisms of the status quo is to say, “Well, that’s our fault. That’s our responsibility for forcing them to cross the channel”—as the spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Woking (Mr Forster), said. But proponents of that argument entirely fail to play through the consequences of the safe and legal routes that they advocate for. I will do so now, in the hope that people might actually consider the matter.

If we set up places whereby people can apply in third countries easily, what would happen? First, those places would themselves become a focal point for potentially large numbers of people seeking asylum, as there are quite literally millions of people living under conditions that would qualify them to seek asylum here in the UK. However much people pretend otherwise, we clearly would have to refuse some of those applications. Of course, the Green party advocates open borders and no restrictions, so maybe it would not refuse any, but let us assume we would not take everybody who applied by a safe and legal route. What would happen then? Would those people simply turn around and say, “Oh well, I tried to get in. I tried to use the safe and legal route; I’ll leave it there”? Of course they would not. Those people would then turn to exactly the same people-smuggling gangs and illegal crossings, and we would be right back to square one, only then they would be coming on top of the ones granted asylum through safe and legal routes.

Even the most humanitarian-minded person would have to accept that there would be limits. If there are limits, we have to say no, and for “no” to mean anything, it has to be enforceable, or the whole thing collapses. Those opposed to deportation for those coming here illegally have no answer to that moral and logical question,

so what must we do? We must make it absolutely clear that if someone comes here illegally, they do not get to stay—no ifs, ands or buts. Everything else, in terms of control and having a system that works, is underpinned by that. If we do not have meaningful control—because taking years to deport people will achieve nothing—then all the rest of the policies collapse.

To stand any chance of actually delivering that, we have to come out of the European Court of Human Rights. Anyone who has studied the expansion of the powers of that Court cannot reasonably argue that it is fulfilling the same function intended for it. Some may argue that they are happy with that and welcome it, but it is impossible to say that it is operating as envisioned by its creators. Let us take one example: article 3 of the European convention on human rights, which gives the right to be protected from

“torture or...inhuman or degrading treatment”.

That right was constructed in the wake of world war two, in which, as well as being murdered, Jews, political prisoners, homosexuals and other minorities were subject to the most horrendous treatment imaginable: medical experimentation, starvation, death-inducing slave labour.

How is that article 3 right now interpreted? It is now used by potential deportees to successfully oppose their deportation if the standard of healthcare in the country they would be returned to is not sufficient to meet their medical needs—the same standard of healthcare that is all that is available to millions of their fellow citizens in the countries that we would seek to deport them to. When did a right to be protected from torture or inhumane or degrading treatment become a right to access a particular standard of healthcare?

We know that the convention has now gone as far as to be applied to questions of whether a particular Government is doing enough to tackle climate change. That is why even some of our most senior and respected jurists, such as former UK Supreme Court Justice Lord Sumption, are clear about the need to leave. I recommend anyone sincerely interested in this topic to listen to his 2019 BBC Reith lectures on it. He explains clearly how human rights laws are increasingly used in place of the practice of politics, democracy and elections. They have increasingly become questions of balancing. They always were, of course, but the balancing has become finer and more nuanced, and at their heart, those questions are societal and political, not legal.

We should ask how it has come to this situation. It has come about because, at its core, in its willingness to expand its remit and take expansionist interpretations of the law, the European Court of Human Rights is fundamentally misconceived. The law does not exist in isolation. In the nation state, there is an interplay between the courts and judges, the parliaments, the executives, and the people. They balance each other out. Courts are, of course, operationally independent, but if they act intolerably, and if they consistently and gravely make rulings out of keeping with the views of the public they serve, Parliament can step in, as the body accountable to the public. However much in very many ways we want our courts to be independent, it is vital that in the end, ultimately, they are not independent of the people.

This delicate interplay secures legitimacy for each actor in the system, and there is no such interplay in the European Court. That is how it has found itself so

clearly removed from the expectations and views of the millions of people of the member states it seeks to advocate for. We can see, over many years, member states seeking to oppose the Court's expansionist rulings; it has ignored them to its own detriment. We also see other countries—Canada, Australia and New Zealand—that are able to manage fair and balanced rules of law with rights for individuals without the need to be part of any supranational body.

Anyone who argues against these ideas must be careful what they wish for, because the patience and generosity of the majority of the public is at its thinnest, if not exhausted entirely. If we do not respond to that, others with views that we are more widely unhappy with will take control, and the Government who have failed to secure it will be as much to blame as anybody else.

As our current Prime Minister completes two years of his premiership, I hope that Members can reflect honestly. The promises of the Government to take control of our borders and to smash the gangs have undoubtedly been a failure. They gave the impression that tweaks could be made to significantly alter the number of crossings, but that has proven simply not to be the case, and they now have very little time left. The only country with a proven track record is Australia, and it implemented a policy of not allowing people to stay.

Tweaking will not help. One in, one out with France will not help. The sooner the Government realise that, the better for the taxpayer, the better for those who want to be compassionate but do not want to be exploited, and the better for the crime agencies fighting the people-smuggling gangs. Virtue signalling will not achieve anything. Doing whatever it takes to actually regain control of our borders is the only thing that will, and the Government must get on and deliver it.

5.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mike Tapp): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Twigg. I thank the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) for clearly and comprehensively articulating the key facets of the petition that has resulted in us all being here on this sunny afternoon. I am grateful to him, to the petitioners and to all other Members who have spoken. We have heard a wide range of views. I have listened with interest to the arguments advanced and the various points raised, and I will seek to respond to as many as possible in the time available.

Before I get into the detail, I must do two things. First, I assert again this Government's unshakeable commitment to tackling illegal immigration. I am sorry to have to remind Members of the situation we inherited, but it was so dire that, two years on, the legacy of past failures remains. When we took office, smuggling gangs saw this country's borders as a soft target. The enforcement of basic rules had ground to a halt. The system was in disarray.

We have worked hard since July 2024 to turn things around, and our efforts are having an impact. Over 44,000 channel crossings have been stopped in partnership with the French. Under our landmark returns agreement with France, those arriving can face immediate detention and removal. Removals and deportations of illegal migrants and foreign criminals have gone up, as have illegal working

[Mike Tapp]

visits. We have more officers tackling organised immigration crime, and disruption of OIC is at record highs. Asylum costs, meanwhile, are down, as is the number of hotels being used to accommodate asylum seekers.

We are reducing the pull factors, and we will do whatever it takes to secure effective returns co-operation with our international partners. We will use every lever available to return those with no right to be in the UK. In November, we threatened visa penalties against Angola, Namibia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Within weeks, my Department had successfully negotiated new arrangements and it is now conducting returns on that basis. My message is clear: if foreign Governments refuse to accept the return of their citizens, they will face the consequences. That is just the start of our action. Countries that do not co-operate on returns cannot expect a normal visa relationship with the UK.

We do all of that and more, because the Home Secretary has said from day one that we must do whatever it takes to restore order and control to our borders, but we also know that there is much more to do.

Dr Mullan: Let us say that in a year from now, all this stuff has not worked and the Home Secretary has committed to doing whatever it takes. Does “whatever it takes” include withdrawing from the ECHR?

Mike Tapp: We must remember that the ECHR, which I will say more about later in my speech, underpins many of the exact returns agreements that we rely upon to deport and remove people.

Dr Mullan: Does the Minister really think that Canada or Australia do not get to deport people? Those countries are not in the ECHR, but they have deportation agreements with third countries, so in no way is it a necessity to be in the ECHR to have deportation agreements.

Mike Tapp: It is an absolute fact that many of our returns agreements are underpinned by our membership of the ECHR. I will now make some progress.

That is why we are embarking on the most significant set of asylum reforms in a generation. Under our plans, the UK will continue to play its part in helping the world’s most vulnerable people. However, to meet the challenges of today, we must address the fact that this country is more attractive to asylum seekers than other countries in Europe, so we are acting, including through the introduction of new legislation, to build a new fair but firm asylum model, based on contribution, integration and respect for UK laws.

Of course, the reason I mention all that is that it goes to the heart of the problem that this petition seeks to answer, which is the arrival of illegal migrants and their continued presence in this country. We understand why people are frustrated after years of chaos and crisis. That is why we are taking concerted and decisive action to restore order and control.

I will now move on to my second point, which is to address the specific thrust of this petition, namely that the Government should seek to establish offshore detention facilities for individuals who enter the UK illegally.

We have been clear that we will continue to work with international partners to tackle the global challenge of irregular migration. However, interventions must work in practice, they must offer value for money and they must comply with the UK’s international obligations. The Government are doing whatever it takes to secure our borders, including the introduction of the most sweeping asylum reforms in a generation.

The petition also refers to deportation, to which I would reply that more people with no right to be here are being removed from British soil under this Government than at any time in years. Since the election, we have removed or deported nearly 70,000 people who were here illegally.

I turn now to some of the specific points made by Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Brash) made an absolutely fantastic contribution. I agree with him wholeheartedly that it is important that we get the rhetoric right and that it is our responsibility—the responsibility of all of us in this Chamber—to ensure that we do not pitch neighbour against neighbour. Unity is British; division is not.

I turn to the contribution of the hon. Member for Runcorn and Helsby (Sarah Pochin). She made a good point about visa overstayers; they do make up a large proportion of those who are here illegally. We have paused the health and social care route and we have also paused automatic family reunion. We are imposing stricter measures on universities to ensure that that route is not abused, and we have already seen the number of those who are seeking to claim asylum after signing up to a university drop significantly. But of course, we are looking to go further across the board on legal migration and overstayers.

The hon. Member also talked about rapists and paedophiles. Everyone here agrees that if a rapist, a paedophile or a criminal has come to this country, they should not be here, and it is important that we make changes to the ECHR—a process that is ongoing at this time—to deport and remove those people.

Dr Mullan: But we do not deport all rapists and paedophiles, because some of them make successful ECHR claims and get to stay in the country. Again, unless the Government are willing to tackle that, they will not get to do the things that the Minister has so much rhetoric about.

Mike Tapp: The hon. Member’s party had 14 years to make changes, but they absolutely failed. We inherited their open borders and their broken system, but we are working hard behind the scenes, as we speak, to make the ECHR more fit for purpose.

Let me move on to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Clapham and Brixton Hill (Bell Ribeiro-Addy), who made very good points about the cost of some of these proposals. Everything that we do in the Home Office must be costed and must be affordable to the British taxpayer, and of course we have a duty to protect those who are fleeing war and persecution, which is one of the things that makes Britain so great.

The right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) made a good point about the single dinghy having more individuals on it over the weekend. The reason is that we are attacking the supply chains and taking boats out

of the supply chain, which means that more people are being forced on to these boats. We acknowledge that that is dangerous, which is why we are working hard with our international partners to stop these boat crossings. Disruptions of boat crossings are now at around 44,000.

Esther McVey: The average daily arrivals of illegal immigrants under this Labour Government are 94% higher than under the previous Government, so can the Minister tell me exactly which policies are working?

Mike Tapp: I thank the right hon. Member for her passionate intervention. We took on her Government's open borders. Over the last year, we have seen a reduction of around 41% in small boat crossings. It is not something that we celebrate, because we know that we are only seven months into the year, but we are working hard with our international partners. I have already given the stats on the number of disruptions.

I will move on to the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Rupert Lowe), who I know has been a voice behind this petition in the media and on social media. I have never referred to anybody who cares about this topic as on the mad fringe or as a racist. It is about people's own perceptions; it is for them to decide whether they are racist or mad-fringe. Having these concerns is absolutely valid, in general, but I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool that we must mind our rhetoric, because the public do listen to what we say in this place.

I have not eaten much today, and the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth talked about some fine-sounding snacks being delivered by Deliveroo. He is absolutely right that we must crack down on that issue, and we are making efforts to do that. Arrests are up about 81% on illegal working, but that is by no means finished, and we will continue to work hard on it.

I have talked about the ECHR already. The hon. Gentleman has produced a large book; he did say that he would not go into detail, but maybe there is some in there. I respect that sort of work going into policy development, but as I say, we have to make sure that we maintain our British values throughout.

Rupert Lowe: I think the British public have had enough of Labour blaming the Tories and the Tories blaming Labour. Meanwhile, this national emergency continues to get worse. Does the Minister accept the fact that just playing "he said, she said" is not good enough? We need to change that attitude.

Mike Tapp: I respect the intervention. I did say that I apologised for having to raise this again, but it is a fact that we inherited a completely broken system. It does take time to fix a broken system, and we are working hard to do so.

Esther McVey: How much time, exactly? The Government have had two years in office and have already changed Prime Minister.

Mike Tapp: I am absolutely fed up of being lectured by the Opposition, who gave us this problem. It is like being lectured by the arsonist on putting out the fire. I will go absolutely no further with that.

I turn to the speech of the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (James McMurdock). It is absolutely right that we must remove the pull factors. We have to ensure that there are deterrents for people looking to come over. When we came into the Home Office, the fact is that there was asylum shopping going on across Europe, because the offer that we gave to those seeking asylum was better than many others, so we have brought ourselves in line with the rest of Europe. That will make it less attractive to come here.

We are also moving individuals out of hotels and into larger sites, removing one of the pull factors. I have already mentioned that immigration enforcement, when it comes to illegal working, is up 81%, which is removing another pull factor. But of course compassion is essential; that is what makes us great. Looking at safe and legal routes to be introduced in due course is another part of the solution.

The hon. Member for Woking (Mr Forster) made a good point about our duty to help those who are fleeing persecution and war. Capped safe and legal routes will ensure that we do our bit to help people. He talked about decision making; the speed of our initial decision making is up 71%, and there is still further to go. We have reallocated and employed more caseworkers to ensure that we get through that, but our initial decision making is up.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): The hon. Member for Woking (Mr Forster) made a point about the Dublin agreement and its impact on increased arrivals. I think that he was right to make that point, but wrong to associate it with the EU, as countries such as Norway and Iceland are signatories. Has any consideration been given to joining multinational returns agreements to speed up decision making in the UK?

Mike Tapp: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We saw the start of the boat crossings crisis only after we left the EU; of course, the Dublin agreement provided some sort of deterrent. However, reopening the Brexit wound is not something I want to do, which is why we are looking at introducing more returns agreements, so that we can deport and remove more people.

Dr Mullan: I do not know whether hon. Members know this, but just for the record, we took more people than we sent back under the Dublin agreement. It did not act as any deterrent, because a person was more likely to get to the UK on the basis of the Dublin agreement than they were to be sent away.

Mike Tapp: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention, which is now on the record. I would be keen to discuss why he thinks the numbers went up, and why we saw about 180,000 people cross after 2018. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps that is something to discuss outside this room.

I will now move on to some broader points. I have tried to get around everybody who spoke; my apologies if I have missed anybody.

Esther McVey: I thank the Minister for being generous with his time. Can he clarify a point? The Secretary of State was trying to stop some of the pull factors, and I welcomed the extension from five to 10 years in the

qualification period for indefinite leave to remain, but it seems that the incoming Prime Minister will now water those new policies down. Is that the case?

Mike Tapp: The Home Secretary made it clear at Home Office oral questions that the announcement on the five to 10 years absolutely stands. We opened a large consultation and had 200,000 responses that are still being worked through. Announcements on transition arrangements and so on will be made in due course—around the autumn, we expect.

Let me move on to small boat arrivals more broadly. They are unacceptable, and we have made a commitment to restore order and control by making it less attractive to come here and easier to remove people. We have also been working with international partners, and we have seen small boat crossings go down 41% in the last year.

In March, we extended the duty to deport foreign national offenders who have been given suspended sentences of 12 months or more. FNOs who have a prison sentence, a suspended sentence or a community order are referred for deportation. Foreign national offender removals are now up by 36%, and we will continue to remove those who should not be here. Progress is being made to end the use of hotels, which is something that we will achieve by the end of this Parliament. Hotel use is down from 213 in July 2024 to fewer than 170 today. Asylum support costs are down 15%. I have already covered illegal working a number of times in response to interventions.

Small boat crossings are down, decisions are up, hotel use is down, deportations and removals are up, and net migration is down by 82%. This is not an overnight fix and there is no silver bullet, but two years in, this Government are heading in the right direction with a solutions-based approach, which includes safe and legal routes and increased deportations and removals. This does not have to sit anywhere on the political spectrum; it is about finding solutions, and that is what we are doing.

I will conclude there, with thanks again to all who participated in today's debate. I know that the strength of feeling around these issues is significant on all sides. This debate and the original petition are further evidence of that. Although we may disagree on how best to respond to the very significant challenges that this country faces from illegal migration, I think we are mostly united in believing that those challenges must be addressed if we are to be the strong, secure nation that

the people we serve rightly demand. As I have set out, this Government are taking more and stronger action than any in recent memory to restore order and control to our borders. That is the task, and in that task we will be unrelenting.

Derek Twigg (in the Chair): I call John Lamont to wind up.

5.55 pm

John Lamont: I am not used to having 90 minutes to speak, but I promise not to detain colleagues long. I thank all Members who took part, particularly the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Rupert Lowe), who was the petitioner, and the hon. Members for Hartlepool (Mr Brash), for Runcorn and Helsby (Sarah Pochin), for Clapham and Brixton Hill (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) and for South Basildon and East Thurrock (James McMurdock), my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) and the various party spokesmen.

I have been on the Petitions Committee since the last election, and it is quite telling that this petition has had, I think, the second or third highest number of signatures. I am surprised that more MPs are not participating. Is this an example of where Parliament is disconnected from what our constituents are telling us? I know that 2,500 constituents of my constituency neighbour the hon. Member for Carlisle (Ms Minns) signed the petition, the second highest number in the UK. I have been at other petition debates here and there has not been enough space for all the MPs who wanted to participate. That is telling.

Part of the problem, with the greatest respect to the Minister, is that although we hear all the achievements that he thinks the Government have achieved, the reality is that people out there in society do not see or feel those achievements. They feel the pressures in their society because of the broken immigration system. In the 12 months between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, 43,806 illegal arrivals took place in the UK, and that was up on the previous year. That is why our constituents feel so frustrated and why so many people signed this petition.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 737105 relating to offshore detention and deportation of illegal immigrants.

5.57 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 13 July 2026

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Trade Negotiations

The Minister for Trade (Chris Bryant): The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Swiss Confederation (Switzerland) have concluded negotiations on an enhanced Free Trade Agreement. Building on the existing goods-focused agreement, itself based on the EU-Switzerland agreement signed in 1972, this enhanced deal modernises and deepens the trading relationship with one of our closest economic partners.

The UK is a services superpower, and this agreement is estimated to increase UK services exports to Switzerland by £5.2 billion annually in the long run. It will make it cheaper and easier for businesses and professionals to travel to and supply services in the Swiss market, providing certainty for our trading arrangements with a key European partner for years to come.

Economic growth is the No. 1 mission of this Government and international trade plays a key role in creating opportunities for businesses, supporting jobs and driving investment across the UK. This FTA builds on the agreements we have secured with the United States, the European Union, India, the Gulf Co-operation Council and the Republic of Korea, strengthening the UK's position as an open, outward-looking trading nation.

Switzerland is the UK's sixth-largest services export market, with bilateral services trade in 2025 amounting to over £30 billion. The agreement builds on this relationship, helping to support jobs across the UK—including the 171,400 already sustained by exports to Switzerland. Furthermore, Swiss-owned businesses employed around 150,000 people in the UK in 2024 and total bilateral trade reached £53 billion in 2025 and bilateral foreign direct investment stood at £87 billion at the end of 2024.

This is the most significant trade agreement for services concluded by the UK, as it includes the UK's most ambitious digital chapter and most comprehensive business travel commitments in an FTA, along with high-ambition outcomes across services and investment. It helps reinforce the UK's position as one of the world's leading services exporters and will help unlock new opportunities in key industrial strategy sectors including finance, professional services, life sciences, creative industries and digital technologies.

The UK has also secured the most comprehensive digital chapter ever agreed by Switzerland in an FTA. With over 70% of UK-Swiss services trade delivered digitally, the agreement guarantees the free flow of data while maintaining existing privacy protections. It modernises the digital trading environment through commitments on electronic contracts, signatures and invoicing, prevents customs duties on electronic transmissions and has the strongest commitments to prohibit unjustified data localisation requirements.

The FTA delivers long-term business certainty for UK services firms, a key ask from stakeholders throughout the negotiations. The UK and Switzerland have agreed that future improvements to access in certain sectors are locked in. This provides UK firms with a more stable and predictable business environment, which will give them the confidence to plan and invest for the long term. The agreement also permanently secures the rights of UK lawyers to provide advisory services in foreign and international law in Switzerland without requiring requalification.

The agreement complements the wider framework of UK-Swiss co-operation, including the Berne financial services agreement and the UK-Swiss recognition of professional qualifications agreement.

The UK and Switzerland are global leaders in life sciences. The UK's ambition is to become Europe's leading life sciences economy by 2030, and the FTA will support this vision. The UK and Switzerland will commit to maintaining existing balanced intellectual property protections for pharmaceuticals. This goes beyond any prior UK or Swiss FTA. The deal will commit the UK to maintaining our existing 10-year period of regulatory data protection, consisting of at least eight years of data exclusivity and 10 years of market exclusivity—sometimes known together as “8+2 years” of regulatory data protection. The FTA will also commit the UK to maintaining up to five years of protection for supplementary protection certificates, with the flexibility to increase the maximum term available. These standards support the discovery and development of new medicines. This does not change UK legislation or practice. It maintains the existing balance between supporting pharmaceutical innovation and the NHS's access to lower-cost generic medicines.

Switzerland has announced that UK nationals will soon be able to use e-gates at Swiss borders, in line with Schengen requirements. They will be able to exit via e-gates at Zurich airport from as soon as the end of 2026. Switzerland is also working towards allowing entry via e-gates, particularly at Zurich, Geneva and Basel airports, and will set out a timetable shortly.

The enhanced FTA permanently secures the commitments contained in the temporary UK-Swiss services mobility agreement, currently due to expire at the end of 2029. This protects an estimated £700 million in UK services exports annually in the long run. British professionals will continue to be able to provide services in Switzerland for up to 90 days each year without requiring a work permit, while new provisions improve certainty for business visitors, inter-corporate transferees and graduate trainees.

We have also made it easier for UK businesses to access Swiss talent and expertise temporarily in certain specific services sectors. This is for up to three months through a bespoke, visa-free, short-term service supplier route.

Switzerland has also ensured contracts by UK service suppliers in key sectors such as legal, architecture and engineering can be delivered for several months. To encourage inward investment and support UK growth, Switzerland has agreed commitments on investor mobility for the first time in an FTA, facilitating business establishment and expansion for UK and Swiss businesses.

The opportunities from this agreement will be felt across all nations and regions of the United Kingdom. It will support services firms ranging from major financial and professional services employers in London and Leeds to specialist small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This is also the first UK FTA to include specific coverage for Gibraltar from day one by ensuring that Gibraltar's businesspersons will continue to be able to supply services in Switzerland for up to 90 days a year without a permit.

The UK and Switzerland also intend to include bilateral surcharge-free international mobile roaming arrangements. This would allow UK travellers to use mobile services in Switzerland without incurring additional roaming charges, reducing costs for consumers and businesses alike.

Small and medium-sized enterprises, start-ups and scale-ups will benefit from streamlined administrative requirements, simplified licensing and qualification procedures, digital payment options and new paperless trading arrangements. The deal also provides greater certainty by preventing a range of future restrictions on how UK businesses can operate, grow and manage investments in Switzerland, giving firms the confidence they need to navigate the market.

Finally, the agreement establishes a dedicated innovation working group, bringing together business, academia and Government to identify future opportunities and address emerging challenges. It is designed to evolve alongside new technologies, including artificial intelligence, and changing global conditions, ensuring the bilateral relationship remains future-focused. Alongside its commercial benefits, the agreement strengthens co-operation on climate change, development and gender equality, reflecting our shared commitment to a modern and inclusive partnership.

Alongside services, the agreement preserves tariff-free access across 99% of existing goods trade, ensuring continuity and long-term certainty for UK exporters.

We will now begin the process of preparing the treaty for signature and implementation, and the Department will update the House further in due course.

[HCWS223]

CABINET OFFICE

Intergovernmental Relations Engagement Dashboard

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Ward): This Government's commitment to working in genuine partnership with the devolved Governments is demonstrated by the frequency and consistency of our engagement.

This is essential to tackle our shared challenges and build a United Kingdom that works for everyone.

Between October and December 2025, UK Government Ministers held 112 meetings with their counterparts in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, across formal intergovernmental structures and direct bilateral engagement.

This level of engagement was in line with the same period in 2024, demonstrating the steady and frequent nature of UK Government ministerial engagement with devolved Government counterparts.

Beyond formal forums such as the British-Irish Council and the Interministerial Standing Committee, Ministers and their devolved counterparts met across a wide range of policy areas—from health inequalities to public safety, election security, digital innovation in justice, and violence against women and girls. This breadth of engagement demonstrates that collaborative working is now embedded across Government.

This pattern of engagement reflects a clear principle: that the most effective solutions for people across the United Kingdom are found when Governments work together, drawing on the knowledge and priorities of each Government.

The publication of this dashboard demonstrates this Government's continued commitment to the devolution settlements and genuine partnership with the devolved Governments—working together to deliver for people in every part of the United Kingdom.

Amendment to previous dashboard publications:

We have made minor amendments to previous publications following updates from Departments, with these changes outlined clearly within the relevant quarters on the dashboard itself.

[HCWS214]

TREASURY

Finance Bill 2026-27: Draft Legislation and Tax Documents

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Dan Tomlinson):

The Government are today publishing draft legislation ahead of inclusion in the next Finance Bill. This allows for technical consultation on the application of tax policy in legislation. The Government are also publishing some new consultations and a number of responses to consultations on tax policy which have concluded.

The final contents of Finance Bill 2026-27 will be decided by the Chancellor at the next Budget.

Modernising the tax system

The Government are committed to modernising the tax system so that it is fit for our 21st-century economy and provides sustainable revenue to fund our public services into the future.

Electric vehicle excise duty: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to implement eVED, a new mileage charge for electric and plug-in hybrid cars, which will come into effect from April 2028. Drivers will pay for their mileage alongside their existing VED. The Government have also published a summary of responses to the eVED consultation which confirms the Government decision on aspects of the tax's design and implementation.

Oil and gas revenue levy: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation for the new permanent levy to tax exceptional oil and gas revenues in times of high prices. This had previously been referred to as the oil and gas price mechanism. Today, the Government confirm it will be legislated for as the oil and gas revenue levy. The OGRL will take effect when the energy profits levy ends at the end of

March 2030, or earlier if the energy security investment mechanism is triggered. It will apply to upstream oil and gas companies operating in the UK or on the UK continental shelf, ensuring that companies continue to pay their fair share of tax in times of high prices. The OGRL will apply at a rate of 35% to revenues from oil and gas sales above specified thresholds. For 2026-27, these thresholds will be set at \$90 per barrel for oil and 90 pence per therm for gas and will be adjusted annually in line with the preceding December's consumer prices index. The measure aims to provide a stable and predictable fiscal environment, supporting investment and jobs while capturing windfall revenues of energy companies.

Reform of the foreign permanent establishment exemption: as announced on 21 May 2026, the Government are publishing draft legislation to exempt profits and losses attributable to foreign PEs from UK tax. This measure protects the UK's corporation tax base by preventing losses from foreign activities being used to reduce UK tax liabilities. The draft legislation builds on an existing elective regime to mandate that amounts of profit and loss allocable to foreign PEs are excluded from the CT computation. The provisions will have effect for accounting periods beginning on or after 1 January 2027. The legislation prevents changes to the length of accounting periods delaying the operation of the provision. The draft legislation includes a provision to counteract avoidance arrangements by making adjustments to assessments, this will apply to businesses with foreign PEs who enter into arrangements on or after 13 July with a main purpose of obtaining a tax advantage and where the arrangements circumvent the operation of the principal measure.

Stamp taxes on shares modernisation: as previously announced, stamp duty and stamp duty reserve tax are due to be replaced with a single tax on transfers of securities. The securities transfer tax, which will be a modern, digital, self-assessed tax, will be introduced in 2027, with an update on the commencement date to be provided this Autumn. The Government are today publishing draft legislation and a summary of responses to the consultation on the 1.5% charge on certain overseas transfers of UK securities.

Removal of the landfill tax exemption for stabilisers added to dredgings: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to remove the landfill tax exemption for stabilisers added to dredged material before disposal at a landfill site from April 2027. As a result of this change, only the dredged material itself will remain exempt. Any additional material used to stabilise dredgings, such as air pollution control residues, will be subject to landfill tax at the relevant rate. The change is intended to limit the amount of hazardous stabiliser used and to encourage the recycling of materials such as APCr. The Government are confident that there are alternative practical and cost-effective methods of stabilising dredged material.

Mandatory reporting of benefits in kind from April 2027: as announced in June 2026, the Government are publishing draft primary legislation to introduce mandatory payrolling of benefits in kind from 6 April 2027, as part of wider reforms to modernise the tax system and improve the accuracy and timeliness of reporting of BIKs. The draft legislation sets out the framework for the mandatory reporting through real-time information, alongside provisions to ensure a proportionate approach to penalties

during the initial years of implementation. It provides powers to ensure that certain benefits will remain outside mandatory payrolling where real-time reporting is not yet practical. The Government will continue to engage with stakeholders, including employers, payroll professionals and software providers, to support design and implementation.

Reforms to civil tax information and inspection powers and to modernise the definitions about computer records: as indicated at the 2026 tax update, the Government are publishing draft legislation on a number of reforms which will improve HMRC's ability to carry out compliance checks by meeting OECD global forum standards on information exchange related to deceased taxpayers and cryptoasset-related businesses. This will be achieved by improving the administration and record-matching of an information notice that requires the identification of a taxpayer, by allowing flexibility in publishing reporting data, and by modernising definitions about computer records to ensure that HMRC can effectively access and process information in a modern, digital economy.

Pillar 2 side-by-side package and further amendments: as announced on 7 January 2026, the Government are implementing the pillar 2 side-by-side package into UK legislation in line with administrative guidance published by the OECD-G20 inclusive framework on base erosion and profit shifting in January 2026. The Government are now publishing draft legislation for both the side-by-side package and technical updates to the UK's pillar 2 rules. These updates are being made in response to stakeholder feedback and to maintain consistency with the commentary and administrative guidance to the pillar 2 rules developed by the UK and other members of the inclusive framework.

The taxation of stablecoins: the Government are publishing draft legislation in relation to the tax treatment of eligible stablecoins. For individuals and trustees, disposals of eligible stablecoins will be exempt from capital gains tax and certain interest-like returns in respect of eligible stablecoins will be treated as savings income. For companies, the tax treatment of particular transactions involving eligible stablecoins will be based on amounts recognised in their accounts. The Government are publishing a summary of responses to the call for evidence, which ran between 26 March and 7 May 2026.

Cryptoasset loans and liquidity pools: the Government are publishing draft legislation for individuals and trustees in relation to cryptoasset loans and liquidity pools. This will treat certain disposals as being "no gain, no loss", which defers capital gains tax until an economic disposal of the cryptoasset and better aligns the tax outcome with the economic substance of these arrangements.

Closing the tax gap

The Government are determined to close the tax gap and make sure that everyone pays the tax that they owe.

Publishing details of deliberate defaulters: following announcement at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation that aims to strengthen the PDDD policy. The new legislation will allow HMRC to publish more information about the deliberate non-compliance that led to the defaulter's details being published. In addition, the threshold for publication is being increased to £50,000 potential lost revenue. The reforms aim to increase transparency of HMRC's compliance work and strengthen PDDD's effect as a deterrent to deliberate non-compliance.

Modernising the correction of errors: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to modernise the correction of inaccuracies in returns or documents provided to HMRC. It introduces an explicit obligation on taxpayers to take reasonable action to correct errors once they are identified. It also gives HMRC a new power to issue a customer correction notice, which requires the taxpayer to check their position, and either correct the inaccuracy or explain why no correction is needed. This will help resolve simple, common issues more quickly and proportionately and improve consistency and fairness by setting a clear expectation that customers self-correct errors.

Alcohol duty penalty reform: the Government are publishing draft legislation to align alcohol duty penalties with wider penalty reform. This change affects producers of alcoholic products who submit monthly alcohol duty returns and payments. A new points-based system replaces the old penalties for alcohol producers who have missed the monthly deadlines. This new system is simpler and fairer, helping producers meet their monthly requirements. With the points system, not every mistake will lead to a financial penalty. Producers will only receive a penalty once a points threshold is reached after repeated late submissions.

Individual savings accounts, and introduction of a new compliance framework for ISA managers: as announced in June 2026, the Government are publishing draft primary legislation to enable the introduction of a new ISA manager compliance framework. It will provide clarity to ISA managers on their obligations, including meeting deadlines and reporting information accurately. It will strengthen protections for investors, while also supporting the move to digital ISA reporting.

Withholding of tax for rewards received under the strengthened reward scheme: the Government are publishing draft legislation on the tax treatment of rewards received by informants under the strengthened reward scheme, which launched at Budget 2025. This scheme increases the rewards paid to informants who provide HMRC with high-value information. For cases where tax over £1.5 million is recovered, HMRC will pay rewards up to 30% of the additional tax collected that would otherwise have gone unpaid. This legislation simplifies the tax payment process for recipients of the reward as income tax due is deducted at the source. This change will take effect from Royal Assent of the Finance Bill 2026-27.

Simplifying the tax system

The Government are simplifying the tax system to ensure that the system works effectively for all taxpayers and to make it easier to get tax right first time.

VAT provisions for drink deposit return schemes: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to introduce new VAT accounting rules for supplies made under a deposit return scheme. The new rules are designed to simplify VAT accounting. Under current VAT legislation concerning a DRS, the producer or importer who first supplies the drink in the UK is required to account for VAT on deposits relating to containers that are not returned. Under this measure, instead of VAT being accounted for by producers and importers, the deposit management organisation—the body with statutory responsibility for operating the DRS—will be required to account for VAT on deposits that are not refunded because containers are not returned.

As a result, no business in the supply chain will need to account for VAT on the deposit element of the price at each stage. Instead, the VAT liability on unreturned deposits will rest centrally with the DMO.

Enterprise management incentives, and removal of the grant of options notification: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to remove the requirement for a company to submit a separate notification of a grant of EMI options. Instead, a company will be required to report details of the grant of options through the existing EMI end-of-year return. The change supports companies by simplifying the process to grant EMI options and reducing administrative burdens. These changes will apply to options granted on or after 6 April 2027.

Defined benefit pensions, and surplus extraction tax regime: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to introduce a new authorised payment from defined benefit pension schemes, allowing surplus funds to be paid directly to members. Under current rules, surplus payments to members are treated as unauthorised and subject to a tax charge. This measure will create a new category of authorised member payment, enabling schemes to distribute surplus to members as pension income, taxed at the individual's marginal rate. This reform forms part of wider changes to modernise the defined benefit pension system and support the effective use of surplus assets, while maintaining appropriate safeguards and trustee responsibilities. Decisions to distribute surplus will remain at the discretion of scheme trustees and subject to scheme-specific circumstances. The legislation will take effect for payments made on or after 6 April 2027.

Corporation and income tax, and profits from exploration and exploitation rights: the Government are publishing draft legislation to ensure that profits from exploration and exploitation rights relating to oil and gas activities are defined in a clear, consistent and internationally aligned way when the UK's domestic rules interact with the UK's double taxation agreements. The update has effect in relation to accounting periods beginning on or after 1 April 2027 for corporation tax purposes and will have effect from 6 April 2027 for income tax purposes. The measure is expected to have a negligible impact on compliant businesses and is not expected to impose any significant additional administrative burdens.

Stamp duty land tax, and local government pensions scheme reform relief: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation which provides a time-limited relief from stamp duty land tax for certain property acquisitions made by local government pension scheme pooled investment vehicles from LGPS administering authorities. This will apply from Budget day 2026, ceasing on 31 March 2032. It will enable the LGPS to reduce operating costs, become more competitive and attract investment by helping drive consolidation and strengthening the management of LGPS investments. This supports the Government aims to promote growth and increase investment in the UK.

Cultural gifts scheme: as announced at tax update 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to reform the cultural gifts scheme by removing the restriction on jointly owned objects and allowing tax credits to be used more flexibly. This will simplify the scheme by making it more accessible and improve take-up. The changes will come into effect from April 2027.

Making the tax system fairer

The Government are committed to ensuring that the tax system is fair and sustainable.

Reforming the customs treatment of low-value imports into the United Kingdom: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to reform the customs treatment of low-value imports, delivering on its commitment to modernise the handling of high-volume, low-value goods entering the UK. This measure will remove the £135 LVI relief, making LVIs subject to customs duty, and introduce a new set of customs arrangements designed to support fair competition and improve compliance. The Government are also publishing a consultation response document for LVIs. The document provides an overview of stakeholder views and detail on how the LVI reform will operate, including: standard import customs arrangements, new LVI customs arrangements and tariff treatment, alongside indicative detail on applying an additional fee on LVIs and aligning the VAT treatment with the new customs arrangements.

Soft drinks industry levy: the Government are publishing draft legislation to give effect to the changes to the soft drink industry levy announced at Budget 2025. From 1 January 2028 the Government will reduce the threshold at which the SDIL applies from 5 grams to 4.5 grams of sugar per 100 ml and remove the exemptions for milk-based and milk substitute drinks with added sugar. This technical consultation is to confirm that the legislation works to deliver the policy as set out in the Government consultation response.

Air passenger duty, and extension of the higher rate: as announced at Budget 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to extend the scope of the higher rate to all aircraft of 5.7 tonnes or more used as a private jet, to ensure the tax is applied consistently and that those who can afford to fly privately make a fair contribution. The change will take effect from April 2027.

Vehicle excise duty exemption for search and rescue vehicles: as announced at Budget 2025, and following consultation with stakeholders, the Government are publishing draft legislation to support the vital work of search and rescue charities. From 1 April 2027, eligible search and rescue vehicles operated by these charities will be exempt from vehicle excise duty.

International student levy: as confirmed in September 2025, the Government are publishing draft legislation to introduce an annual levy on higher education providers for their registered international students. The revenue raised will be fully reinvested into the higher education and skills system, including funding the reintroduction of maintenance grants for disadvantaged students. The levy will be set at £925 per international student, commencing from 1 August 2028 for the 2028-29 academic year. The Government intend that the levy amount will increase each year in line with inflation, that payments will be made by the registered provider in arrears the following academic year, and that each registered provider will be given an annual allowance of 220 international students that are not subject to the levy. Alongside this draft legislation, the Government are also publishing a Government response to the technical consultation on the levy that ran from 26 November 2025 to 18 February 2026.

Other consultations

Removing national insurance contributions debt from the scope of the Limitation Act 1980 and aligning processes with other forms of taxation: as announced at the 2026 tax update, the Government are publishing a consultation on proposals to remove national insurance contributions debt from the scope of the Limitation Act 1980 and to align NICs recovery processes more closely with other forms of taxation. This was a recommendation from the Office of Tax Simplification in their report “The closer alignment of income tax and national insurance” published in 2016. The proposed changes aim to simplify the tax system by ensuring greater consistency in how debts are treated across taxes, reducing complexity and administrative costs associated with current recovery processes. The consultation seeks views on how best to modernise and streamline those arrangements while maintaining appropriate safeguards.

Simplification of withholding tax on interest: the Government are publishing a consultation on simplifying the administration of treaty relief on withholding tax on payments of interest. The consultation seeks genuine and meaningful simplification to make it easier for taxpayers to obtain relief to which they are already entitled, while maintaining robust safeguards against avoidance. The Government’s aim is to ensure that the relevant processes provide adequate protection without imposing excessive administrative burden on either taxpayers or HMRC.

Land remediation relief: the Government are publishing a consultation seeking views on potential reforms to make land remediation relief more accessible, better targeted, and more closely aligned with the practical realities of brownfield development. The consultation seeks views on changes to the timing of the relief, aligning eligible contamination expenses with planning processes, and how to define and provide relief for long-term derelict land. The Government will work with industry to test the viability of these reforms and will only implement them if it is certain they offer meaningful cost-effective support to the sector.

Tax treatment of predevelopment costs: the Government are publishing a consultation on the tax treatment of predevelopment costs, meeting the commitment set out in the corporate tax road map. The consultation seeks views and evidence from stakeholders on the types of costs incurred, their treatment under the current rules, and the impact on investment decisions.

[HCWS221]

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Government Plan for Music

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): Music is the shared language that connects us. It crosses boundaries, bridges divides and helps us understand one another. In a time when it feels too many of us have lost the ability to understand one another, music matters more than ever.

It is woven into the fabric of our national life. In the UK, a live gig or concert takes place every 137 seconds. It accompanies our celebrations and our sorrows, marks our milestones and brings people together.

We are rightly proud that the UK is one of the world's three largest exporters of music producing artists who light up the world. Music is not simply one of our greatest success stories; it matters deeply to who we are as a nation. That is why, today, we are publishing "Turn It Up: Our plan for music": <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/turn-it-up-our-plan-for-music>

But music's value cannot be measured only by chart success or export figures. It is a civic space—as important as any high street or town hall—where communities come together, where young people discover confidence and creativity, and where new ideas flourish. When someone is excluded from a life animated by music, we all lose. Our culture is poorer, our communities are weaker, and we miss the talent that might otherwise have enriched so many lives.

That is why this plan is rooted in one simple principle: music belongs to everyone. It is broad and inclusive. It should never be the preserve of those whose parents can afford lessons or instruments. Every child deserves the chance to experience the richer, larger life that music can bring.

Nowhere is that more important than for children in care. We are their corporate parents and we should be as ambitious for them as every parent is for their child. Like sport, art, dance and drama, music can be the lifeline that sustains them at the most difficult moments of their lives. We owe it to them to ensure those opportunities are not the exception but the expectation.

We celebrate the artists who represent Britain on the world stage: Ed Sheeran, Adele, Harry Styles, Stormzy, Dua Lipa and so many others. But great artists do not emerge by accident. No man—or woman—is an island. The success of every great artist rests on the support of someone who believed in them—a teacher, a parent, another artist or a friend—great venues, communities who back them, audiences who care.

Every headline act started somewhere, often in the grassroots music venues where they learned their craft. Yet those foundations have come under increasing pressure. In the last decade, creativity has too often been pushed out of classrooms and communities. The number of young people taking arts subjects at GCSE has fallen dramatically. Grassroots venues have struggled to survive, leaving too many towns and cities without the places where musicians develop their skills and audiences discover something new.

As Paul Simon once sang,
"every generation throws a hero up the pop charts".

But pop is getting posher, and that must change. We are not short of talent, but while talent is everywhere, opportunity is not. So after a decade when culture and creativity were erased from the classroom and the community, we have wasted no time putting music back at the heart of the curriculum, investing in creative careers and rebuilding opportunities for young people in every part of the country.

Through this Government's new programme, Every Child Can, we will stop at nothing to ensure that every child can find their spark through new measures such as

turning our incredible network of libraries into music lending libraries and a creative mentoring programme for children in care. We are strengthening the ecosystem that supports talent from schools to grassroots venues and from rehearsal rooms to recording studios because success depends on every part of that journey.

Thriving music depends on thriving places. These places and spaces are, for us, an integral part of our civic inheritance that should be protected, nurtured and defended. In my town, Wigan, that gave us brass bands, northern soul and The Verve, almost all the venues that bands cut their teeth in have disappeared. This cannot be right. We were the first Government to back a voluntary grassroots levy to support our venues, but we will do more, whether it is defending our venues against noise complaints or reforming the system so more money flows to the grassroots.

To everyone who makes music happen—this Government are on your side. And to the fans who make the UK music scene the best in the world, this plan is for you. We will stamp out ticket touts who are causing misery in the industry and we will always have your back.

Because when everyone has the chance to make, perform and enjoy music, we do more than create great artists. We build stronger communities, broaden opportunity, strengthen our national story and ensure that Britain's music continues to light up the world for generations to come.

[HCWS227]

DEFENCE

Ukraine Support Loan Initiative

The Secretary of State for Defence (Dan Jarvis): Today I am informing the House that the UK has signed a contractual agreement with the European Union for the UK to participate in the EU's €90 billion Ukraine support loan initiative.

This will help to ensure that Ukraine continues to receive the military capabilities it needs to defend itself, deter future aggression, and secure a just and lasting peace. It will enable Ukraine to procure a broad range of capabilities from UK industry, including artillery ammunition, air defence systems and long-range precision strike missiles. This complements the UK's existing military support and demonstrates our unwavering commitment to Ukraine's defence.

The contract will also create valuable opportunities for the UK's defence industry. By providing UK companies with the opportunity to agree contracts funded through the scheme, including as a UK prime contractor and in EU-based primes' supply chains, it will help to sustain highly-skilled jobs, investment and industrial capacity across the United Kingdom, while delivering world-class capabilities to Ukraine, where they are needed most. The UK will make a fair contribution to the cost to the EU of providing the loan, proportionate to the value of the contracts awarded to the UK's industry, thereby helping to share the burden of Europe's collective security. If no contracts are awarded to UK companies, the UK will not be required to make a financial contribution to the loan.

Just as importantly, this is a step forwards in the UK's defence industrial relationship with the EU. It is a demonstration of the UK and the EU working together pragmatically and effectively on our shared security challenges. At a time of increasing threats, defence industrial co-operation is not a zero-sum exercise: by combining our expertise, technology and industrial capacity, we can deliver greater security for Europe and greater support for Ukraine. The contract reflects the closely interconnected and interdependent nature of the UK and EU defence industrial bases, which already work together to develop, manufacture and support many of the capabilities that underpin our collective security.

Following the signature of the contract, the Council of the European Union will now be asked to approve the necessary implementing measures to ensure that Ukraine can begin accessing UK capabilities as soon as possible.

European security is strongest when allies stand together. This contract is good for Ukraine, good for British industry and good for the security of our continent. It is a clear demonstration of our shared commitment to Ukraine and our determination to strengthen European security together.

We look forward to building on this co-operation.

[HCWS226]

EDUCATION

Education Otherwise than at School: Consultation

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Bridget Phillipson): The Government's consultation, "SEND reform: putting children and young people first" set out our plan to ensure that every child and young person benefits from high-quality and inclusive education. For those who need specialist support, we will ensure that they receive it promptly, and with dignity and care. Children and young people whose needs are supported through "education otherwise than at school" provision are no exception. We want them to be in a learning environment that best supports their education, wellbeing and long-term outcomes, and we launched a consultation on how to deliver this on Friday 10 July.

Through our ongoing engagement on special educational needs and disabilities, including the SEND reform national conversation, we have heard from many families about having to fight to have their child's needs recognised and met, going long periods without suitable support, and being offered provision unsuitable for the complexity of their child's needs. For some families, this can lead to a gradual breakdown in their child's relationship with education—one that starts long before the child or young person is moved on to arrangements where education is delivered outside a school or further education setting. Parents often describe feeling responsible for holding together their child's education because of a failure of adequate support, creating significant emotional and practical pressures. These children and young people have been badly let down by an unresponsive system, causing significant distress for them and their families. The increasing number of children and young people relying on EOTAS arrangements is a reflection of these

wider challenges. For some, EOTAS becomes necessary not only because of the complexity of their needs, but because effective support was not available early enough or because support was not effective enough to prevent difficulties from escalating.

Our first priority is therefore to create a system that identifies and responds to needs at the earliest opportunity, so that more children and young people receive the right support before EOTAS arrangements become necessary. For most children and young people, this support should be available through mainstream and specialist settings that are welcoming, inclusive and able to meet children's needs effectively. However, we recognise that some children and young people with the most complex needs will continue to require EOTAS arrangements at times, where their needs cannot be best met in a school or further education setting.

Where EOTAS provision is required, we want to ensure that it is consistently high quality, focused on outcomes, and supported by a broad and ambitious curriculum, and that it helps children and young people make meaningful progress. We also want to provide greater confidence and clarity to parents that decisions are being made in their child's best interests, and that children receive the most appropriate support.

To help deliver this ambition, we have today launched a consultation on the future use of EOTAS provision as part of our wider SEND reforms. We are seeking views on how EOTAS should operate within the reformed system from 2029-30, when we anticipate new legislation coming into effect, on how children and young people currently receiving EOTAS should be supported during transition, and on how quality of provision and accountability within the system can be strengthened.

For children and young people entering the reformed SEND system, we are seeking views on a new approach that would align EOTAS with specialist provision packages for children with the most complex needs. Under this model, responsibility for overseeing EOTAS arrangements would sit closer to the child or young person through a named school or further education setting—typically a specialist or alternative provision setting. Local authorities would retain an oversight role drawing on their expertise about need and local knowledge of provision. We are also seeking views on how best to support transitions into and out of EOTAS arrangements, on how decisions around EOTAS can be challenged, on how accountability should operate, and on how quality assurance arrangements can be strengthened so that all children and young people receive high-quality provision that supports positive outcomes.

We want to ensure that children and young people already on EOTAS arrangements have stability while also having the opportunity to benefit from our wider reforms to mainstream and specialist settings. We are seeking views on whether we should take a different approach depending on the age of the child or young person. We propose that those who are secondary school age and above should be able to continue with their existing arrangements, protecting stability foremost. For the small number of children on existing EOTAS arrangements at primary age or below, we propose to reassess their needs at the end of primary phase. They would then either be supported through one of the new specialist provision packages, which could include EOTAS, or through a supported transition arrangement, overseen

by an alternative provision school, with a return to a school facilitated where appropriate and achievable. There would be no time limit on such transitional arrangements.

We are also seeking views on how to support children with health needs who require alternative provision to remain engaged in education. This includes children with complex physical health conditions, undergoing medical treatments or with recovery needs that significantly affect their ability to attend school, as well as children with mental health needs which can create an emotional barrier to attendance. We are also consulting the use of accredited online education providers by schools and local

The consultation has been published at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/send-reform-education-otherwise-than-at-school and runs until Friday 18 September.

[HCWS219]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Zane Gbangbola Inquiry

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Reynolds): Today I am announcing the appointment of Dr Sandie Okoro OBE as chair of the independent, non-statutory inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Zane Gbangbola.

Zane Gbangbola tragically died at the age of seven in February 2014 at his family home in Chertsey, Surrey. The Prime Minister and I have both met with Zane's family, and we listened carefully to their concerns about what happened, the response of public bodies at the time, and the treatment they received in the years that followed.

We have decided to commission an independent inquiry to examine the circumstances surrounding Zane's death. This will include how public services and relevant authorities worked together during and after the incident, and how Zane's family were treated by those organisations. It will be forward-looking in its approach, identifying any lessons that can be learned and making recommendations to improve practice in the future.

The chair will act independently of Government and will be supported by access to appropriate subject matter and technical expertise. The Government expect all public bodies and individuals engaged by the inquiry to co-operate fully, openly and candidly. Once in force, the Public Office (Accountability) Bill—otherwise known as the Hillsborough law—can be drawn upon by all live inquiries, including this one.

The inquiry's full terms of reference will be published shortly, and I will place a copy of these in the House Library at the earliest opportunity. The Government are committed to responding publicly to any recommendations made by the inquiry.

I would like to place on record my heartfelt condolences to Zane's parents for the loss of their beloved boy, Zane. I also wish to thank them for their continued engagement

and reaffirm my commitment to ensuring that this inquiry is conducted thoroughly, independently, and with the seriousness and care that this tragedy deserves.

[HCWS216]

State of Climate and Nature

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): I will be making an oral statement on this subject later today.

[HCWS225]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

State Threats Response

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Yvette Cooper): For years Iran's intelligence services have planned and conducted dangerous, potentially lethal, operations in the United Kingdom and across the world, targeting innocent citizens and undermining our sovereignty. Despite our clear warnings to Iran that this activity is reprehensible, the Iranian threat to the UK persists.

Between March and May, across Europe and in the UK, there were a series of attacks against Jewish communities, journalists and Israeli interests. The criminal group Islamic Movement of Companions of the Right, otherwise known as Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiyah, have publicly claimed seven attacks at UK locations linked to Jewish and Israeli communities, and Persian-language media, including the antisemitic arson attack on four Hatzola ambulances in Golders Green on 23 March.

Sitting behind IMCR were members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Force who almost certainly directed IMCR attacks across Europe.

The repeated targeting of innocent individuals and communities in the UK and across Europe is deplorable and shows the desperate lengths to which Iran is willing to go to intimidate and silence those it sees as opponents.

We have consistently raised unacceptable attacks directly with the Iranian authorities, who have denied our claims and given no credible justification or alternative explanation. Given the range of growing and evolving threats from states and state-backed groups, we have strengthened the powers available to our world-leading police, security and intelligence agencies through the National Security Act 2023.

Last March we went further to tackle the Iranian transnational threat, placing the entire Iranian state, including the IRGC and Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security, on the enhanced tier of HM Government's new foreign influence registration scheme. We also strengthened policing and intelligence responses, as well as sanctioning more than 550 individuals and organisations linked to the Iranian regime.

We will continue to ensure that our police, security and intelligence agencies have the powers and tools they need to stay ahead of those who seek to threaten the UK's safety and security. The National Security (State

Threats) Act 2026 received Royal Assent on 8 July 2026. By implementing the recommendations of the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation in the report I commissioned as Home Secretary, this landmark legislation provides law enforcement and the intelligence agencies with additional powers to disrupt and deter foreign power threat activity directed against the UK and its interests.

Alongside our international partners, we remain committed to calling out and countering Iran's hostile activities here in the United Kingdom swiftly and forcefully. We have summoned the Iranian ambassador to raise this issue in the strongest terms, and will be setting out further measures in the coming days.

The protection of the United Kingdom and its citizens is our foremost responsibility. We will not tolerate threats to our security or to the safety of those who live here. Iran's actions are irresponsible and unacceptable. They will not be tolerated.

[HCWS220]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Tobacco and Vapes: Packaging, Appearance and Display

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mrs Sharon Hodgson): The UK Government have published our consultation "Tobacco and Vapes: packaging, appearance and display" on behalf of all four nations of the UK. A copy will be deposited in the Library of the House.

People deserve to live in a fairer UK, where everyone lives well for longer. The 10-year health plan for England sets out our ambitious plans to shift the dial from sickness to prevention. As part of this, we are committed to creating a smoke-free UK and protecting future generations from the harms of tobacco and risks of nicotine addiction. This consultation is the next step in delivering on our commitments.

Tobacco is a uniquely harmful product and there is no safe level of consumption. Smoking remains the single biggest preventable cause of ill health, disability and death in England and costs the country £21.3 billion per year. While vaping is less harmful than tobacco products and can be an effective way for adult smokers to quit, they are not risk-free. The long-term health impacts of these products remain unknown. For these reasons, the Government advice is clear: children, and adult non-smokers should never vape. It is therefore deeply concerning that, as of 2025, around 20% of 11 to 17-year-olds—over 1 million children—had tried vaping.

Evidence suggests that vapes appeal to children for many reasons, including packaging, product appearance, flavours and being easy to access. There are also growing concerns about the appeal of nicotine products, such as nicotine pouches, to children, and the increasing awareness and use among young people.

The Tobacco and Vapes Act, which became law on 29 April 2026, delivers on our core manifesto commitment. From 1 January 2027, our landmark smoke-free generation policy will come into effect, protecting anyone born on

or after 1 January 2009 from the harms of tobacco. On 1 June 2027 we intend to bring into effect a comprehensive advertising and sponsorship ban for vapes and nicotine products. Earlier this year, we consulted on proposals to extend smoke-free restrictions to certain outdoor places and to introduce vape-free and heated tobacco-free places—on these we are currently considering responses.

Alongside the 2026 Act, the Government have taken further action. On 1 June 2025 we banned the sale and supply of single-use vapes, and at the autumn Budget 2024 the Government confirmed the introduction of a new vaping products duty from 1 October 2026, accompanied by a one-off increase in tobacco duty.

The forthcoming consultation is the next step in this programme of work. It proposes ways in which the packaging, flavour descriptors, device appearance and retail display of vaping and nicotine products can be restricted to reduce their appeal and availability to young people, while still allowing vapes to be effective quit aids for adult smokers.

Specifically, the consultation proposes that vaping and nicotine products should be in plain white packaging, with limited imagery and branding, and that the colour of vape devices should be restricted to only white, black or grey, to reduce their appeal to children. It also proposes to restrict flavour descriptors to a single, recognised flavour—for example, "Apple"—and restrict the use of names that appeal to children, such as references to confectionary, desserts or alcohol.

Additionally, the consultation seeks views on introducing new regulations to align existing tobacco packaging requirements across all tobacco products, herbal smoking products and cigarette papers, as well as on restricting the appearance of heated tobacco devices. It also proposes aligning retail display restrictions across these products and removing the bulk tobaccoist retail display exemption, to ensure a consistent approach to reducing visibility of tobacco products. Under these proposals, the display of tobacco products in bulk tobaccoists, including duty-free areas, would now be more restricted.

We are seeking views from a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- Members of the public
- Health organisations
- Industry
- Retailers
- Local authorities.

The consultation will be open for a total of 12 weeks and will close on 2 October 2026. We are publishing draft impact assessments alongside this consultation. Responses will be critical in informing what final decisions are taken with regard to the future regulation of tobacco, vaping and nicotine products. These final decisions will be outlined in a response, which we will publish once analysis of responses to the consultation is complete.

The proposals in this consultation relate to all four nations of the UK. We hope that many people will take the time to respond to the consultation. I will provide an update to the House on the response to the consultation in due course.

[HCWS215]

NHS Pension Scheme: McCloud Remedy

The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth): On 21 May 2026 I issued a written statement to update the House on progress on delivering the McCloud remedy for affected members of the NHS pension scheme. The delivery of the remedy in the NHS pension scheme is a hugely complex undertaking across the public sector to address the age discrimination that the previous Government admitted in 2018.

In the NHS, over 1.1 million pension scheme members are affected by the McCloud ruling, around 450,000 of whom have already retired. The Department has asked the NHS Business Services Authority, as the scheme's administrator, to prioritise, where possible, delivery of the McCloud remedy to around 49,000 retired members who are likely to receive higher benefits following their McCloud choice. By 24 June, statements to enable McCloud choices had been sent to 13,982 of these members. Work to calculate and send statements to the remaining members facing detriment is progressing, with a current forecast completion date of December 2027, as set out in my statement on 21 May 2026. Members who have not yet retired will all receive a personalised statement and choice, either when they retire or retrospectively.

I also confirmed in May that the NHSBSA had developed detailed delivery plans for providing remedy choices to all members, including those higher earning members whose pension tax position is affected by McCloud. The NHSBSA has already issued remedial pension saving statements—RPSSs—to 122,036 members and is continuing work to complete the particularly complex statements for 19,694 members whose RPSS remain outstanding. The current forecast for completion of this work is March 2027.

I noted in May that these forecasts and the plan overall were subject to several critical dependencies highlighted by the independent review of NHSBSA's McCloud functions. These dependencies include procuring external suppliers to supplement the NHSBSA's capacity to manually calculate remediable service statements, and the release of software to automate statement production wherever possible. In my previous statement I expressed expectations that those dependencies would have advanced sufficiently so that I could issue new statutory deadlines for the issuance of remediable service statements—RSSs—with confidence before summer recess.

The NHSBSA has made progress in maturing those dependencies, including launching an invitation to tender to bolster calculation capacity for RSS and progressing testing on new IT systems that are being developed to automate some elements of statement production. I am pleased to report a positive market response to the invitations to tender. The NHSBSA is consequently taking the time needed to fully scrutinise bids and engage with constructive feedback in relation to the design of the second contract. The automating software has now entered its testing phase and its timetable for delivery will be dependent on the outcome of this testing. I have therefore concluded that further time is required to reduce the uncertainty in the plan timings to a level at which I am comfortable in setting new statutory deadlines. When the current work is sufficiently progressed I will set new RSS deadlines that are realistic and

achievable and that protect delivery of normal pension service operations, which continue to run in parallel to remedy activity. I will also publish the independent review's report and place a copy in the Libraries of both Houses.

Irrespective of when new deadlines are set, delivering the McCloud remedy remains a priority, particularly for those members who are likely to be facing financial detriment. The NHSBSA continues to issue remediable service statements and remedial pension saving statements to scheme members affected by McCloud, in line with the delivery schedule I set out in May. Data is now published monthly by the NHSBSA on the number of remediable service statements issued and remedy choices enacted. This is available at:

<https://opendata.nhsbsa.net/dataset/public-service-pensions-remedy-mccloud-remedy-remediable-service-statements-rss-delivery>

[HCWS228]

People with a Learning Disability and Autistic People: Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Preet Kaur Gill): Today I acknowledge the publication of the ninth annual report on “Learning from Lives and Deaths: People with a Learning Disability and Autistic People”, which looks at deaths reviewed in 2024. A copy of the report has also been placed in the Library. LeDeR is a service improvement tool for integrated care boards to reduce health inequalities. This independent report, published by King's College London, highlights continued inequalities, including that adults with a learning disability die on average 19 years younger than the general population—this remains unacceptable.

The Government are committed to improving outcomes for people with a learning disability and autistic people. Early intervention and ensuring people receive the right care at the right time are central to lasting change. We are taking significant action through the continued roll-out of the Oliver McGowan mandatory training on learning disability and autism across health and adult social care staff; improving identification of people with a learning disability on GP registers, and increasing uptake of annual health checks and health action plans; and the continued piloting of annual health checks for autistic people. NHS England is also rolling out a reasonable adjustment digital flag for all disabled people to ensure that adjustments are recorded and shared appropriately in care records.

I recognise that today's findings are stark and I want to provide reassurance that we take them seriously. This includes the finding that 78.8% of adults with Down syndrome died before the age of 65. Through the implementation of the Down Syndrome Act 2022, we are striving to improve life outcomes for people with Down syndrome, to raise awareness and understanding of their needs, and to break down barriers to opportunity that they, and other disabled people, face.

The most common category of cause of death for autistic adults without a learning disability remains suicide, misadventure or accidental death. We recognise that autistic people can face barriers to getting the right mental health support at the right time. We are committed

to delivering the suicide prevention strategy for England, which aims to reduce the number of lives lost to suicide and highlights the need to provide tailored, targeted support to priority groups including autistic people. The mental health needs of autistic people will also be reflected in the new mental health strategy, including consideration of how services can provide more equitable access to support and make appropriate adjustments.

Over the past year, NHS England has worked with clinicians, people with lived experience, charities and ICBs to improve the LeDeR review process. The revised approach seeks to strengthen a focus on service improvement, and better incorporates LeDeR into local processes. For example, for each death notified to LeDeR, a revised review format will prompt reviewers to reflect on modifiable factors, including barriers to the person living a long and healthy life, and any safeguarding or quality concerns.

As part of this transition, this LeDeR report is the final national academic report.

LeDeR data will be incorporated within a new patient level dataset, which will bring together data on health outcomes for autism, ADHD, and people with a learning disability, including Down syndrome, in England. Using the General Practice Extraction Service, it will aim to address limitations of current data sources and link with wider datasets such as hospital episodes and mental health activity. This marks a transformative opportunity to better understand disparities, and inform targeted local and national solutions. I am committing to the publication of this dataset and will share further details in due course.

This Government are committed to learning from good and poor practice, and to driving improvements at all levels to secure better outcomes for people with a learning disability and autistic people. The action we are taking will build a more complete picture of people's lives and deaths, informed by what we have heard from people, families and carers.

We remain dedicated to tackling avoidable deaths and expect local areas to continue prioritising LeDeR as part of their actions to reduce health inequalities in their populations.

[HCWS224]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Natalie Fleet): I am today announcing the award of a new £25 million national contract for the independent child trafficking guardianship service, which provides specialist support to potential and confirmed child victims of trafficking, modern slavery and exploitation in England and Wales.

Following a robust procurement process, the contract has been awarded to Barnardo's. The service will provide independent advocacy and support to children referred into the national referral mechanism, alongside specialist advice and expertise for the professionals working with them. Drawing on expertise in child trafficking, modern

slavery and exploitation, independent child trafficking guardians strengthen multi-agency safeguarding responses, help protect children from further harm, support their recovery, reduce the risk of re-trafficking and ensure that their best interests are central to decisions affecting their care and future.

Since its introduction in 2017, the ICTG pilot service has expanded in phases and now operates across two thirds of local authorities in England and Wales. The service has played an important role in strengthening safeguarding arrangements and supporting children's recovery. However, phased expansion has resulted in uneven access to support and the absence of a consistent national offer.

The need for specialist support is clear. In the year ending March 2025, the ICTG service received 2,730 referrals of potential child victims of modern slavery—an increase of 10 % on the previous year. More than half of those referrals involved UK national children, demonstrating that trafficking and exploitation is affecting children and communities across the country.

The new contract will build on the success of the existing model and support the delivery of a nationally consistent service. Working alongside local authorities, the police and other safeguarding partners, it will ensure that all children identified as potential or confirmed victims of trafficking, modern slavery and exploitation will have access to this specialist service.

The Government remain firmly committed to independent child trafficking guardians, with this commitment reflected in the measures set out in the Immigration and Asylum Bill. This £25 million investment underscores our determination to tackle modern slavery and safeguard vulnerable children, supporting the objectives of the violence against women and girls strategy.

The Home Office will closely monitor delivery of the contract and has committed to independent evaluation to ensure that the service delivers positive outcomes for children and value for money for the taxpayer.

[HCWS217]

National Security: State Threat Designations

The Minister for Security (Dame Angela Eagle): The Government are today laying before Parliament draft regulations under the National Security Act 2023, as amended by the National Security (State Threats) Act 2026, to designate three bodies: the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Islamic Movement of Companions of the Right, and the main intelligence directorate of the general staff of the armed forces of the Russian Federation Volunteer Corps, or GRU VC. If approved by Parliament, these will be the first designations made under the new regime.

The National Security (State Threats) Act 2026 provides law enforcement and the intelligence agencies with an additional tool to disrupt and deter foreign power threat activity directed against the United Kingdom and its interests. The Act provides a power for the Home Secretary to designate bodies involved in foreign power threat activity, where it is necessary to protect the safety or interests of the United Kingdom.

Designation introduces new criminal offences relating to supporting, assisting, or obtaining material benefit from a designated body. Where an individual engages in

espionage, sabotage or foreign interference for, on behalf of, or with the intention to benefit the designated body, they may also be charged under the National Security Act 2023. The maximum penalty for these offences reaches life imprisonment.

For a body to be designated, the Home Secretary must reasonably believe that it is, or has been, involved in foreign power threat activity and must consider that designation is necessary to protect the safety or interests of the United Kingdom. Having considered the available evidence and taken advice from across Government and operational partners, the Home Secretary is satisfied that the statutory test is met in respect of the following three bodies.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

The IRGC is a central component of the Iranian state's security apparatus, answerable directly to Iran's supreme leader. Its role extends far beyond that of a conventional military force. It encompasses intelligence activity, the use of proxy actors, and the projection of influence designed to advance Iranian state objectives.

The IRGC Qods Force and IRGC Intelligence Organisation, together with the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, form the Iranian intelligence apparatus. IRGC Qods Force maintains and operates covert intelligence networks around the world and plays a central role in extending Iranian influence across the middle east and beyond.

The United Kingdom has identified activity linked to the IRGC involving threats to life and intimidation on UK soil. In January 2024, the UK announced sanctions targeting Iranian officials responsible for threat to kill on UK soil and criminal gangs who do the regime's bidding overseas. The Iranian officials designated under these sanctions were members of IRGC Unit 840, which was exposed in relation to plots to assassinate two Iran International TV journalists in the UK.

In 2022, the National Cyber Security Centre issued an advisory alongside international partners exposing malicious activity. The advisory highlighted the threat from cyber proxy actors affiliated with the IRGC targeting a broad range of entities, including entities across multiple US critical infrastructure sectors as well as Australian, Canadian and UK organisations.

The Islamic Movement of Companions of the Right

Between March and May 2026 there were a series of attacks and attempted attacks targeting Jewish communities, journalists and Israeli interests in the United Kingdom and across Europe. These incidents including acts of arson and intimidation, have caused real fear and distress, and have had a profound impact on those communities affected.

The Islamic Movement of Companions of the Right, otherwise known as Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiyah, has publicly claimed seven attacks at UK locations linked to Jewish and Israeli communities, and Persian-language media, including the antisemitic arson attack on four Hatzola ambulances in Golders Green on 23 March.

Sitting behind IMCR were members of Iran's IRGC Qods Force, which almost certainly directed IMCR attacks across Europe.

While the IRGC has already been sanctioned in its entirety by the UK, designation of both IMCR and IRGC under this framework will strengthen our ability

to disrupt and take enforcement action against those supporting or facilitating this type of activity, and reinforces the UK's position that these malign actions are unacceptable.

Main intelligence directorate of the general staff of the armed forces of the Russian Federation Volunteer Corps (GRU VC)

The Government assess that the GRU Volunteer Corps forms part of a network of volunteer and proxy formations that are controlled, co-ordinated and overseen by the main directorate of the general staff of the armed forces of the Russian Federation (GRU), Russia's military intelligence service. The GRU has a long-standing record of state threats activity directed against the United Kingdom and its allies, including the 2018 Salisbury nerve agent attack, and wider sabotage and intelligence activity across Europe.

In 2023, the Russian Ministry of Defence introduced reforms that mandated that volunteer formations fighting in Ukraine should be brought under formal contractual arrangements with the GRU and the Russian Ministry of Defence. Since these reforms, the GRU has directly supervised and funded these volunteer formations, using them as recruitment and deployment mechanisms in support of Russian military and intelligence objectives. This includes elements of the former Wagner Group, which has conducted sabotage activity in the UK, and which now receive direct GRU tasking and supervision.

These arrangements are part of a broader model by which the Russian state combines conventional military capabilities with irregular and deniable forces, intended to project Russian power abroad and undermine European and NATO security.

As such, the Government assess that the GRU Volunteer Corps is involved in foreign power threat activity, including sabotage and other activity directed against the UK and Europe. This designation will strengthen the United Kingdom's ability to disrupt activity linked to these formations and protect UK national security.

Having carefully considered all the evidence, the Home Secretary has concluded that there is sufficient basis to reasonably believe that each of these bodies is engaged in foreign power threat activity, and that each designation is necessary to protect the safety and interests of the United Kingdom.

[HCWS218]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Social Housing: Awaab's Law

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): Every social housing tenant has the right to live in a safe and decent home, receive services that meet their needs, and have their complaints promptly addressed. Yet far too many still live in social homes that are not well maintained or managed and struggle to secure adequate redress. That is why the Government are acting to drive a transformational and lasting change in the safety and quality of social housing.

Awaab Ishak was just two years old when he died in December 2020 as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in the social home his family rented from Rochdale Boroughwide Housing. Awaab's death was wholly avoidable. His parents raised concerns about their living conditions time and time again, but their landlord failed to take any action to treat the dangerous mould present in their home.

In the wake of his untimely death, Awaab's parents, Faisal Abdullah and Aisha Amin, tenaciously and courageously fought to secure justice, not only for their son but for all of those who live in social housing. I pay tribute to them once again for their passion and persistence.

In response to their campaign, new powers were introduced through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 enabling a new legal duty to be placed on social landlords to investigate and address serious hazards within clear and enforceable timeframes.

Awaab's law is vital legislation that empowers social tenants to hold their landlords to account using the full force of the law if they fail to investigate and fix hazards within their homes within set timescales. It also allows tenants to access the Housing Ombudsman if their landlord does not adhere to strict timelines for action.

While progress is also dependent on a more fundamental change in the culture and values of social housing providers, Awaab's law will play an integral role in ensuring that all social landlords take complaints about hazards seriously, respond to them in a timely and professional manner, and treat tenants with empathy, dignity and respect. It is also the Government's sincere hope that, over time, it will build trust between landlords and tenants.

Per the written ministerial statement made on 6 February 2025 (HCWS423) the Government are implementing Awaab's law through a phased approach to ensure this landmark reform will be effective, proportionate and of lasting benefit to social housing tenants.

Phase 1, which came into force on 27 October 2025, introduced a requirement for landlords to respond to damp and mould hazards that pose a significant risk to health within set timescales, alongside a requirement to respond to all types of emergency hazard within 24 hours.

As promised, we have taken a "test and learn" approach to implementing this policy. Working closely with social landlords, tenants, regulators and representative bodies, we have closely monitored and evaluated the impact Awaab's law is having in practice and the effectiveness of the processes put in place to implement it. This has provided invaluable early insights into the operation of the requirements and has enabled us to refine the policy to ensure that it is proportionate, effective and deliverable.

Today, I am confirming the next phase of the implementation of Awaab's law. From 30 November 2026, we will extend the requirements to the following significant hazards: excess cold and excess heat, falls, structural collapse and falling elements, fire and explosions, electrical safety, and hygiene. We are also publishing new guidance to support social landlords as they prepare for Awaab's law to apply to expanded range of hazards.

In addition to expanding the range of hazards within scope of Awaab's law, we are making changes to ensure that the policy works as effectively as possible.

Clarifying thresholds for the types of hazards covered by Awaab's law

We have updated the definitions of "emergency" and "significant" hazards that fall within the scope of Awaab's law to help landlords make their assessments. This will support more consistent application of the requirements and help tenants more easily identify when landlords must act.

Avoiding duplication with existing fire safety rules

Where fire risks relate to parts of buildings that are already covered by existing fire safety legislation—communal areas, for example—these will be managed under those rules rather than being duplicated under Awaab's law.

We will continue to take a "test and learn" approach as phase 2 is implemented. Building on the evidence gathered through phases 1 and 2, we remain committed to extending Awaab's law in 2027 to the remaining hazards as defined by the HHSRS (excluding overcrowding).

[HCWS222]

JUSTICE

Legal Services Board: Public Bodies Review

The Minister for Courts and Legal Services (Sarah Sackman): I am announcing today the conclusion of the review of the Legal Services Board as a public body, led by independent lead reviewer Richard Lloyd. The summary and findings can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-legal-services-board-independent-public-bodies-review>

It is important that Departments regularly review their public bodies to provide assurance to both Government and the public that these bodies are operating effectively, that their functions remain useful and necessary, and that there is clear accountability without unnecessary duplication. In the context of legal services regulation, effective and proportionate oversight plays an important role in supporting high professional standards across the legal sector and maintaining public confidence in the legal system. This review considered the LSB's statutory remit, strategic clarity, governance and accountability arrangements, and organisational capability. The review's focus was on the operation of the LSB as a public body within the existing statutory framework established by the Legal Services Act 2007, rather than on wider legislative reform. That is a subject for another day.

The conclusions of the report are stark. The LSB has, in some respects, lost its way and must take steps to refocus on consumer protection and strategic oversight. Richard Lloyd's report recognises that there have been a series of regulatory failures across the system which have resulted in significant consumer detriment and are not acceptable. It concludes that decisive action is needed to address these shortcomings and identifies an opportunity to strengthen and support the legal services sector through a more collaborative and effective approach to regulation, supporting both public confidence and the sector's long-term success. The report identifies this as a critical moment for a reset, driving improvement and renewed focus across the system. It sets out an action-focused programme of recommendations aimed at strengthening oversight of the sector, improving clarity of priorities

and accountability, and supporting a more effective, proportionate, outcomes-focused and risk-based approach to oversight and assurance, while maintaining the LSB's operational independence.

We recognise in the report's recommendations, which I have discussed with Richard Lloyd, a proactive role for the MOJ as the sponsoring Department to provide clear and robust oversight of the legal services framework while respecting the LSB's independence. There are already indications of progress at the LSB under its newly appointed leadership, including organisational changes that are aligned with the direction of the review's recommendations. Going forward we will work with the LSB leadership to ensure their role is effective and that the LSA regime is delivering for consumers of legal services across the country.

The report highlights that consumer protection should remain at the centre of legal services regulation. That includes a greater emphasis on access to justice, effective redress, underserved consumers and emerging risks associated with technology and AI. It sets out recommendations on how the regulatory framework can evolve in a way that maintains public confidence, supports a strong and resilient legal sector, and ensures that lessons are learned and embedded across the system.

I am grateful to Richard for undertaking this review and for his careful consideration of these important issues. It is clear that prompt action is needed, and I will work with my officials and the LSB to consider the report's findings. I will set out the Government's response in due course.

[HCWS213]

Petition

Monday 13 July 2026

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

National strategy for motor neurone disease

The petition of residents of the constituency of Coatbridge and Bellshill,

Declares that motor neurone disease is a devastating, fast acting, terminal illness that currently has no cure; and further declares that the UK Government must act to create a national strategy for MND that:

- is led by clinical and research experts, in partnership with patients and their families, and patient organisations;
- introduces a national taskforce to drive forward delivery of key objectives;
- supports MND research with enhanced access to participation in clinical trials;
- accelerates novel drug discovery, drug repurposing, and access to innovative treatments;
- improves diagnostic waiting times and specialist multidisciplinary care;
- ensures equitable support, equipment, and palliative services across the UK;
- co-ordinates health, social care, and research through a single national plan.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to work in partnership with the devolved administrations to deliver a national strategy for motor neurone disease with emphasis on finding effective treatments and a cure, supporting research, enhancing access to clinical trials, and improving co-ordination of social care.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Frank McNally, *Official Report*, 16 June 2026; Vol. 787, c. 804.]
[P003208]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mrs Sharon Hodgson): The Government recognise the significant and life-limiting impact that motor neurone disease has on those affected and their families, and the importance of timely diagnosis, co-ordinated care, and access to high-quality support.

While there is currently no single national strategy for MND in England, the NHS is expected to provide person-centred care for people with complex neurological conditions, including access to multidisciplinary teams, specialist support, and palliative and end-of-life care services where clinically appropriate.

Responsibility for the commissioning and delivery of services, including equipment provision and community-based care in England, rests with integrated care boards. These bodies are expected to assess local population need and ensure that services are accessible and responsive, although the Government acknowledge that variation in provision can occur and continue to support efforts to improve equity of access. NHS England continues to work to reduce diagnostic delays and improve pathways for neurological conditions through service improvement programmes and workforce development.

The Government 10-year health plan for England, published last year, is focusing on strengthening community-based, integrated care for people with long-term

conditions in England, including improving access to co-ordinated multidisciplinary support closer to home. While not condition-specific, these reforms are intended to benefit all those living with complex conditions, such as MND, by improving the consistency and responsiveness of services.

The Government also recognise the importance of effective co-ordination between health and social care services. Work is ongoing to strengthen integration through local systems, with the aim of delivering more joined-up care for people with complex, long-term conditions such as MND.

The independent commission on adult social care, chaired by Baroness Casey, is currently considering how to improve the quality, consistency and sustainability of social care services, including better integration with health services and more personalised support. Its work will help inform longer-term reform to ensure that people with complex and progressive conditions such as MND are able to access appropriate care, equipment and support in a more co-ordinated and responsive way, reducing unwarranted variation and improving outcomes for individuals and their families.

The Government are committed to fast-tracking care and support for people with MND, in line with Baroness Casey's recommendation to introduce a fast-track "passport" for people diagnosed with MND. This passport will ensure immediate access to a full package of care and necessary home adaptations.

We want a society where every person, including those who have MND, receives high-quality, compassionate care from diagnosis through to the end of life, and can be supported to be cared for and die in their preferred place if possible.

The Government are developing a modern service framework for palliative care and end-of-life care. An interim update has been published in the form of a written ministerial statement, which is available online at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2026-06-04/hcws88> accompanied by a "Further Information for Interested Parties" letter.

The MSF is a clinically led, evidence-based framework to support sustained improvement in outcomes for patients and carers, including by systematically identifying, measuring and reducing health inequalities, and reducing unwarranted variation in access, experience and outcomes. Our goal, which is being developed with partners, is that every person who needs palliative care or care at the end of life will have equitable access to high-quality support, shaped by what matters to them, their families and carers.

We are working closely with stakeholders to identify where the current system can work better for people with MND, ensuring that support is timelier, better co-ordinated, and focused on what individuals and families need. We will set out more information on this in due course.

Through the UK neuro forum, the Government work closely with the devolved Administrations, who are responsible for health and social care services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to share best practice and improve outcomes across the UK. Collaboration also extends to supporting research efforts to better understand MND, develop effective treatments and, ultimately, find a cure.

This Government are continuing to invest in MND research across all areas through the National Institute for Health and Care Research and UK Research and Innovation, which includes the Medical Research Council.

Government funding for the MND data catalyst is driving collaborative activities to ensure that the MND research community can leverage existing data infrastructure, to accelerate progress in MND research and innovation across the UK. This work includes support for the MND register.

We continue to enable novel drug discovery and repurposing for MND through investment in the MND translational accelerator and NIHR-funded Experts-ALS trial. The NIHR and UKRI continue to welcome funding applications for research into MND, with no upper limits on funding available.

Through continued investment in research, service improvement and personalised care, the Government remain committed to improving outcomes, quality of life and support for people living with MND and their families.

Written Correction

Monday 13 July 2026

Ministerial Correction

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Draft Batteries (Placing on the Market) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2026

The following extract is from the Seventh Delegated Legislation Committee, on the Draft Batteries (Placing on the Market) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2026, on 8 July 2026.

Mary Creagh: The early signs are encouraging, because 8 million vapes were sold in 2023-24, but the figures for '24-25 show that it has already gone down to 6 million,

which is accounted for by the regulations coming into effect in June '25—so that is only a half-year reduction. I am therefore optimistic that sales will come down even lower from that 8 million.

[Official Report, Seventh Delegated Legislation Committee, 8 July 2026; c. 14.]

Written correction submitted by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Coventry East (Mary Creagh):

Mary Creagh: The early signs are encouraging, because 8 million vapes **a week** were sold in 2023-24, but the figures for '24-25 show that it has already gone down to 6 million, which is accounted for by the regulations coming into effect in June '25—so that is only a half-year reduction. I am therefore optimistic that sales will come down even lower from that 8 million **a week**.

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**not later than
Monday 20 July 2026**

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