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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Tuesday 14 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

Tuesday 14 July 2026

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Health of Children and Young People

1. **Linsey Farnsworth** (Amber Valley) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help improve the health of children and young people. [900993]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mrs Sharon Hodgson): The Government are committed to making this generation of children the healthiest ever, as set out in our 10-year health plan. That is why we are investing £200 million to strengthen healthy baby services through Best Start family hubs, expanding mental health support to nearly 6 million young people in school or college, and using interventions, such as the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026, which we passed, to create the first smoke-free generation.

Linsey Farnsworth: Businesses in Amber Valley are doing brilliant work to improve health outcomes for children and young people. Ferrero in Alfreton is encouraging children to be more active through its “Joy of Moving” programme, while SC Johnson, headquartered in Denby, is launching a hand-hygiene pilot in schools to reduce absences. Will the Minister commit to meeting me to discuss these initiatives, so that we can learn from the excellent work being done in Amber Valley and develop it nationally?

Mrs Hodgson: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting this important work in her constituency. Initiatives such as those by Ferrero and SC Johnson complement the action that this Government are taking on prevention to improve children’s health, including our £1 billion investment in PE and school sport. I commend those organisations on their work in these important areas, and I am always happy to learn more about them.

Sir Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): One of the best ways to improve the health of neurodiverse young people is high-quality attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism assessments. The Government are proposing to cut substantially the amount paid to providers. Will the Health Secretary speak to providers in this area, because this cut could have significant implications for the standard and quality of autism and ADHD assessments?

Mrs Hodgson: As the right hon. Gentleman will be aware, a White Paper on SEND is out for discussion. The Government will be looking at improving assessment, diagnosis and support for all children with special educational needs and disabilities, and that includes autism.

Dr Marie Tidball (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Yesterday I had the pleasure of welcoming the Barnsley-based charity LimbBo Foundation, along with the Limb Loss and Limb Difference UK alliance to Parliament to celebrate Disability Pride Month. The alliance launched its campaign to end the postcode lottery of services and support for people with limb loss and limb difference. While the NHS has a strong policy framework in place, including the 2025 prosthetic service specification, the key issue is not policy, but inconsistent delivery across the country. Will the Minister meet with me and the alliance to discuss how we can secure better access to mental health services, fair and consistent prosthetic provision and lifelong joined-up pathways for people with limb loss and limb difference?

Mrs Hodgson: It was an absolute pleasure to join my hon. Friend at the event yesterday to meet campaigners and to mark Disability Pride Month. We are committed to ensuring that no matter where someone is in the country, they have access to the healthcare and support that they need. Ministers would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this issue further.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Fewer than half of the children in my constituency have seen an NHS dentist in the last two years, exacerbating health inequalities. The supervised toothbrushing programme is being evaluated for its effectiveness, but I hear uptake is low. What other measures does the Minister plan to introduce to tackle oral health inequalities for children? Will she commit to reviewing NHS dental provision in my constituency?

Mrs Hodgson: As I am sure the hon. Lady is aware, the most common reason for children aged five to nine to be admitted to hospitals is tooth decay. That is why since 2025-26, £21.5 million has been allocated to support supervised toothbrushing in schools and nurseries in the most deprived areas in England, and that will include her constituency.

Maternity Services: North-west

2. **Mrs Elsie Blundell** (Heywood and Middleton North) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve maternity services in the north-west. [900994]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Preet Kaur Gill): We know of the devastating impact of failures in maternity care and the courage of women, families and many members of staff. We will reform maternity and neonatal services, translating the recent recommendations of Baroness Amos and Donna Ockenden into a national action plan by the end of the year. We will create a statutory maternity and neonatal commissioner, we are extending Martha’s rule so that the concerns of families are listened to, and we are investing £186 million to improve maternity and neonatal estates.

Mrs Blundell: The publication of Baroness Amos's report on the state of maternity care in England was a sobering moment for many across the country, especially those who still live with the trauma related to failings in maternity and neonatal care. There were so many instances in which women were not listened to, heard or believed. Given those appalling findings, what steps will the Government now take to ensure that the voices of women are heard—including the voices of those in the north-west who have been historically overlooked—and how will that look in practice?

Preet Kaur Gill: I think we can all agree that the report's findings were shocking, and our thoughts are with the women and families who have suffered life-changing loss or harm. Baroness Amos's recommendations will shape a new national action plan by the end of the year, and those families will be at the heart of the taskforce that will help us to get this right. That will include defining the role of the maternity commissioner, who will help us to ensure that never again are women not listened to.

Mr Andrew Snowden (Fylde) (Con): Blackpool Victoria hospital's maternity services have been subject to two inspections by the Care Quality Commission in recent years—in 2022 and 2025—which resulted in findings of "Inadequate" and "Requires improvement". The inspectors cited particular concerns about staffing and the care provided for mothers and babies. We all know how scary it is to go into maternity services, especially for those experiencing challenging pregnancies or health complications. Can the Minister give my constituents some reassurance about the improvements in that hospital's maternity services that the Government are seeking?

Preet Kaur Gill: Of course we want to improve services throughout the country. We are modernising the regulatory framework for UK healthcare professionals, ensuring that we can improve consistency of approach and secure less burdensome regulation. The Secretary of State has met representatives of the General Medical Council and invited them to account for their response to some of the failings of care in Nottingham and beyond. As I have said, it is important for us to ensure that consistency of care is provided, throughout Blackpool and throughout the country.

Social Prescribing

3. **Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD):** What steps his Department is taking to support social prescribing. [900995]

The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock): The social prescribing service is a vital part of the shift from hospital to community, and from sickness to prevention. We are funding social prescribing link workers in primary care to connect patients with preventive community support, and we are granting £3 million to the National Academy for Social Prescribing to support staff training and local infrastructure. Social prescribing will also be at the heart of our neighbourhood health service, so that community-led care can really transform lives.

Caroline Voaden: I agree that social prescribers do a fantastic job. I recently met members of Veterans Outdoors near Totnes, and visited the Vounder Therapy Garden at the Eden Project through the parliamentary knowledge

schemes. Those organisations are doing incredible work, turning lives around, particularly for those with mental health challenges, but their projects receive absolutely no funding, although the National Academy for Social Prescribing has identified a return of up to £8.56 for every £1 invested. How does the Department expect them to survive and broaden their reach without funding? Given their cost-effectiveness, will the Government commit themselves not just to funding the link worker and the social prescriber, but to encouraging integrated care boards to fund those amazing projects?

Stephen Kinnock: I am sure that the hon. Lady welcomes the £3 million that we are granting to the National Academy for Social Prescribing. Social prescribing needs to be commissioned locally by integrated care boards, and I am confident that as and when it delivers valuable services, those services will continue to be commissioned by ICBs.

Chris Evans (Caerphilly) (Lab/Co-op): To provide treatment for alcohol and drug dependency, charities such as Change Grow Live need to use the NHS electronic prescription service, which has been unavailable to them until recently. The Government have agreed to allow access, but have provided no timetable. Will the Minister provide one today?

Stephen Kinnock: We are absolutely committed to electronic prescribing. I think my hon. Friend is referring in particular to pharmacy services. We are launching new initiatives in respect of the shift from analogue to digital, and I should be happy to meet him to discuss the details of his question a little further.

NHS Workforce: Sickness Absence

4. **Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con):** What steps he is taking to reduce sickness absence in the NHS workforce. [900996]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (James Murray): This Government are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of our hard-working NHS staff, and we have set an ambition to reduce sickness absence to its lowest recorded level. As part of meeting that ambition, we have launched new staff standards to improve their working lives, and we will introduce staff treatment hubs to focus on the biggest causes of sickness absence.

Gregory Stafford: As the Health Secretary is a numbers man, perhaps he will be interested in these figures. Research from Policy Exchange shows that sickness absence in the NHS costs £6 billion and removes 8 million clinician days from the frontline. What will the Secretary of State do to get staff back to work, to get patients treated, and to get this ridiculous level of staff absence down?

James Murray: The 10-year health plan committed to our ambition to reduce sickness absence from 5.1%, which it was in July 2025, to the lowest recorded level in the NHS, at approximately 4.1%. As I set out in my earlier remarks, staff standards cover health and wellbeing, line management, flexible working, tackling violence and racism, and championing sexual safety. The staff

treatment hubs that I mentioned, which will be rolled out in 2027, will focus on mental health and back conditions, which are the main reasons for absence.

Mike Reader (Northampton South) (Lab): We know that sickness absence and stress are often related to people's workplaces. With £17 million now invested in Northampton general hospital for a new urgent treatment centre, and enhanced A&E opening this summer, does the Secretary of State agree that this is proof again that this Labour Government are investing in the infrastructure that our staff need to keep them safe and keep us safe too?

James Murray: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right to point to the record investment that this Labour Government are putting in, not just for the day-to-day running of the health service, but the critical capital investment, after the capital budget was starved for so many years under the Conservative party.

NHS Trusts: Digital Infrastructure

5. **Andrew Pakes** (Peterborough) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to improve access to digital infrastructure for NHS trusts. [900997]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (James Murray): This Government will invest up to £10 billion in NHS technology and transformation by 2028-29. That includes ambient voice technology, which supports doctors to write up notes more quickly so that they can focus on patient care, and the single patient record, which will bring a patient's health data into one secure system, limiting repetition across services. We will use technologies like these to free up staff time, so that they can spend more time on care and less on administration.

Andrew Pakes: It is welcome that the Government are making progress on digital infrastructure and the single patient record, which is good news for patients and for the NHS, but patients in Peterborough risk missing out on some of the benefits because of the poor state of the local hospital and the North West Anglia NHS foundation trust's IT. I thank the Secretary of State and those on the Front Bench for engaging with me on this issue previously, but what reassurance can he give that the Department will work with the NWAFT to ensure that we have the infrastructure we need in Peterborough, so that patients in my constituency benefit the most?

James Murray: I put it on the record that my hon. Friend has been a most determined advocate for patients and staff at the North West Anglia NHS foundation trust, who clearly deserve better IT systems. We have agreed plans to replace the trust's electronic patient record system and supporting infrastructure. We will go on to provide practical support and guidance, including help with costs, and we will pair the trust with other NHS organisations that have overcome similar issues in the past.

Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con): I spent a day last week with the palliative care team at William Harvey hospital in Ashford, which serves a large chunk of my constituency, and I was amazed by how much time they

spent gathering and sharing information. They were clicking through on really old systems, all on pdf, which takes up a huge amount of time that they could instead be spending on clinical care, especially given how technology is evolving. When are we going to get past the situation in which every single time a doctor sees a patient, it is like the whole interaction with the NHS is happening for the very first time?

James Murray: The hon. Lady makes a very compelling case for the investment that we are putting in to transform digital infrastructure in the NHS, because the single patient record—introduced through the Health Bill that is currently going through Parliament—will enable systems across the NHS to be linked up so that people will no longer have to repeat their stories time and again to different clinicians or people from whom they seek care. It also means that people will have their health records linked up when clinicians decide how to treat them. It is a win-win for patients and for clinicians when they are looking at the opportunities that the new technology provides.

General Practice Partnership Model

6. **Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the partnership model in general practice. [900998]

The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock): We remain absolutely committed to the GP partnership model, which supports continuity of care, efficiency and innovation. Where it is working well, it should of course continue, but what is important is that patients are getting the care they need, regardless of the model. The GP patient survey shows that 77% now rate their experience as good. Step by step, this Government are getting the front door of the NHS—general practice—back on its hinges.

Greg Smith: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer, but GP partnerships across rural areas such as mine in Mid Buckinghamshire face considerable uncertainty as the Government review the model for practice funding. Can the Minister be really clear about when the next steps review of the Carr-Hill formula will be published, and that rural areas such as Buckinghamshire that are facing incredible housing pressure from other Departments under this Government will not be disadvantaged?

Stephen Kinnock: The Carr-Hill review is ongoing and will be published very soon. On access right across the country, we have invested an extra £1.6 billion in general practice, recruited over 2,000 more GPs and extended online services throughout core hours, helping deliver 12.7 million more appointments compared with last year. More than three quarters of people now say it is easy to contact their GP, up from a very disappointing—I am sure the hon. Member will agree—61% in July 2024. When we entered office, general practice was on its knees, but we are rebuilding it, and I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved over the last two years.

Sarah Coombes (West Bromwich) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Government for all they have done to improve the NHS. On the different models of GPs, I have a local NHS trust chain of GPs called Your

Health Partnership, some of which, particularly in Oakham, have struggled to provide the right care for communities. Luckily, the Oakham surgery and its staff have done a good job to improve services. Could the Government look carefully at the different types of models for GPs to ensure good care for all constituents across the country?

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend is a tireless advocate for her constituents, and she is absolutely right that the outcome for patients is far more important than the model. GP practices are of course regulated by the Care Quality Commission, and we expect the local ICB to take action if services are not meeting the reasonable needs of patients. I am sure she will assiduously continue to ensure that those high standards are delivered.

Rishi Sunak (Richmond and Northallerton) (Con): I know the Minister appreciates that access to GPs in rural settings is incredibly important. There was great concern when my Yorkshire dales community faced the closure of the Reeth medical practice. After a concerted effort by many, thankfully a solution was found to maintain services at Reeth. Will he join me in thanking all of those involved, especially Lynn Irwin, the Central Dales practice and everyone at the Richmondshire primary care network? Will he also welcome the ambition to in fact expand services at Reeth as a result of the collaborative partnership that the new approach has put in place?

Stephen Kinnock: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. I am sorry to see him on those crutches, but I hope that he will make a speedy recovery and I am sure that, under this Government, he will be greatly helped to do so.

I also pay tribute to Lynn and the team that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned. It sounds like they are doing absolutely sterling work. That is the vital role that the front door of the NHS plays. Our general practice is such an important part of our community, and he is assiduously championing its cause.

Lewis Atkinson (Sunderland Central) (Lab): The GP patient satisfaction survey results are out, and I am really proud that the Sunderland Central and Sunderland East PCNs show a satisfaction rating of 83%—notably higher than the national average. Will the Minister join me in thanking everyone who works in primary care in Sunderland? Equally, does he recognise that there is more to do, and what does he believe is the role of primary care at scale in that? We have the Sunderland GP Alliance working across Sunderland as a whole. What is his policy intent for primary care at scale in further improving access?

Stephen Kinnock: I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating the team, and it sounds as though they are providing an absolutely outstanding service. He is right to point to primary care at scale as a way in which we can genuinely deliver the shifts from hospital to community and from sickness to prevention. That is the level of ambition we have in our 10-year plan, and it is thanks to teams such as the one he so brilliantly champions that we are going to deliver on what we said we would deliver in that plan.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): The previous Health Secretary told *The Times* before the election:

“I’m minded to phase out the whole system of GP partners altogether and to look at salaried GPs working in modern practices alongside a range of other professionals.”

He later clarified, saying he would “sort of” phase it out over time. He has now gone, but is that perspective shared by the new Health Secretary?

Stephen Kinnock: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my previous answer. We remain absolutely committed to the partnership model, but we are also absolutely committed to quality and standards for patient outcomes. It is about delivering the outcomes that patients need. The way in which we do that is of secondary importance to the actual delivery of quality outputs and outcomes for patients.

Mr Speaker: I call Steve Darling. [*Interruption.*] Oh, I am sorry—I do apologise—but there is a second question from Dr Luke Evans.

Dr Evans: I am very grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for giving the time. I thank the Minister for his answer, but he did not quite clarify the position. I have asked him this question before, in a Westminster Hall debate. He said:

“I do not think it is right to say that there are any specific plans to change the partnership model, but we recognise that there are a number of other ways, and we will always keep the way in which the contract is delivered under review.”—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2025; Vol. 769, c. 293WH.]

Given the profession is looking at balloting for a plan B for general practice akin to NHS dentistry, will the Minister clarify whether this model is under consideration by the Government?

Stephen Kinnock: Well, thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving the hon. Gentleman the opportunity to ask that second question. I am absolutely delighted that you did that. [*Laughter.*]

Missing from both of the hon. Gentleman’s questions were any congratulations on the Government’s outstanding achievement. When we came into office, 61% were satisfied with access to their GPs. That now stands at a stunning 77%. I am still waiting for the words of congratulation from the hon. Gentleman. As I say, there is no attempt to change the model. There is a partnership model that works, but where it is not working, we of course look at other options. He seems to be obsessed with the inputs to the system, rather than the quality of the outcomes we deliver. That perhaps explains why there was so much neglect and incompetence over 14 years of Conservative government.

NHS Buildings: Extreme Heat

7. **Steve Darling** (Torbay) (LD): What plans his Department has to increase the level of resilience of NHS buildings to extreme heat. [900999]

19. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of recent heatwaves on hospitals. [901013]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mrs Sharon Hodgson): Heatwaves place additional pressure on hospitals, and we commend NHS staff for their continued professionalism in recent weeks. Our 10-year capital plan committed to renew our focus on climate resilience, and we are investing £6.75 billion on the most serious safety risks, including risks to cooling and ventilation. We are also ensuring that heat resilience is a key part of future building design.

Steve Darling: Torbay hospital is the third oldest estate that celebrates being part of the NHS. In heatwave conditions, the tower block is like an oven and that has a massive impact on patients, staff and even equipment. Does the Minister think it is time to acknowledge that buildings are time-expired, and that in the light of that we need to accelerate investment in Torbay hospital?

Mrs Hodgson: The new hospital programme's standardised design is incorporating climate adaption plans. All new build neighbourhood health centres will be required to undertake a climate change risk assessment. The hon. Gentleman mentions Torbay hospital. He will be aware that it is in wave 2 of the new hospital programme, as set out in the plan for implementation. Construction is expected to commence between 2032 and 2034, but I hear what he says about bringing that forward. I cannot commit to that at this stage, but we have heard his point.

Kerry McCarthy: I appreciate the Government's plans to upgrade the NHS estate, but the heatwaves are happening now, and staff and patients are enduring unbearable conditions: wards without air conditioning, temperatures of more than 30°, radiotherapy machines and MRI scanners failing, IT servers overheating, and so on. And that is all happening alongside many more hospital admissions. What are the Government currently doing to ensure that safe patient care can still be provided this summer and that staff are able to do their jobs properly, too?

Mrs Hodgson: My hon. Friend is right that health infrastructure must be equipped to deal with these heatwaves, which are not just happening on the odd occasion—they definitely look like they are here to stay. We are investing record sums and setting clear design standards to ensure that the NHS estate can adapt to all forms of risk, including heat, and providers are supported by guidance from the UK Health Security Agency under the adverse weather and health plan.

Dr Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): Heatwaves, which are becoming more frequent and more severe due to the climate crisis, create a health crisis. We see that in excessive temperatures in our hospitals and other health buildings, and we see it in the huge, unprecedented demand on ambulance services. First, will the Minister support my colleague Hannah Spencer's private Member's Bill to set a maximum workplace temperature to help keep people healthy during heatwaves? Secondly, what conversations is the Department having with the Cabinet Office to ensure that we have a Government-wide adaptation and resilience plan to deal with the effects of climate breakdown?

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind Members not to use each other's names, but to refer to others using their constituencies in future.

Mrs Hodgson: All employers have a legal duty to ensure a reasonable temperature for indoor workplaces. The Health and Safety Executive is planning to consult on proposed changes to the approved code of practice for the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, including those relating to workplace temperatures. As I am sure everyone is aware, 1992 is a long while ago, and the heatwaves that we are seeing now are becoming more and more prevalent, so this work is very much needed. We are investing record capital to ensure that the estate is fit for the future and that NHS staff have the safe, modern workplaces that they deserve.

Jen Craft (Thurrock) (Lab): On a visit to Basildon hospital last week, I was told by staff how dealing with the unprecedented demand due to the heatwave was compounded by working in a building that is fundamentally unfit to cope with extreme heat, not least with A&E working above capacity, with absolutely no windows. Will the Minister work to make capital funding available for hospitals such as Basildon to allow them to adapt to the 21st century, particularly given that the east of England is the region most impacted by a changing climate?

Mrs Hodgson: All NHS trusts and adult social care providers are required to have robust business continuity plans in place to respond to adverse weather events. The Department of Health and Social Care works closely with NHS England, the UK Health Security Agency and the rest of the Government to plan for extreme heat. I cannot recall in my time ever having had as much discussion around this issue; going forward, this is obviously something we are going to have to look at in more detail.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): The recent heatwave has also caused an increase in A&E corridor care, something that NHS emergency departments were not built to cope with—let alone the corridors. In May this year, 69,504 instances of corridor care were recorded, increasing to 72,955 in June. Corridor care is dangerous in its own right, but there have also been reports of temperatures up to 40° in British hospitals. One Surrey consultant was reported in *The Guardian* as saying:

"This heatwave has pushed patient care into concerning territory. In the heat, corridor care has become more serious and more unsafe."

No one should be treated in an inhumane space, so will the Secretary of State consider Liberal Democrat plans to end corridor care for good and ensure that the hospital building programme is accelerated?

Mrs Hodgson: We are the first Government in history to commit to publishing data on corridor care. In order to know what needs to be done, we need to know the size of the problem. We have committed to ending corridor care by the end of this Parliament.

Support for Bereaved Parents

8. Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing funding to organisations that support bereaved parents. [901000]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Preet Kaur Gill): Losing a child is devastating, and no one deserves to experience such losses alone. I know that my hon. Friend is a keen supporter of the charity Love, Jasmine in her constituency, which provides vital support to families who have suffered child loss. We are making sure that local NHS services provide easily accessible bereavement support, and local integrated care boards should make sure that service provision is tailored directly to the needs of grieving families in their communities.

Paula Barker: The death of a child seems to violate the natural order of things, leaving parents shocked, grieving and in unimaginable pain. The charity Love, Jasmine in my constituency was founded by Rob and Kathy Lapsley in 2016 after the death of their daughter Jasmine to support other bereaved parents on Merseyside through counselling, support groups, advocacy and practical advice.

Since then, it has helped over 900 families and received a constant stream of NHS referrals but without any commissioned NHS funding. It now faces a funding crisis after the loss of its National Lottery funding due to new criteria, which has left it operating a limited service and under threat of closure, while families face longer waiting times for support elsewhere that is less designed to their needs. Will the Government consider carefully the strong case for NHS commissioned funding for the kind of specialist support for bereaved parents that Love, Jasmine offers, so that this service—so trusted by the NHS across the north-west—is not lost?

Preet Kaur Gill: I commend the work of Rob and Kathy Lapsley. Having been through a terrible loss themselves, they have provided support to parents across Merseyside who face such tragic circumstances. It is vital that bereavement support is available and offered with sensitivity, choice and respect for what each person needs. Integrated care boards must ensure that there is sufficient provision for bereavement, and that includes working with the voluntary community and social enterprise sector. We are investing £25 million to enhance bereavement facilities, and maternity and neonatal services. I thank my hon. Friend for championing the charity Love, Jasmine.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Dorothy House runs spaces called bereavement help points, where people who are grieving can meet others who are grieving. The service relies entirely on volunteers. The trauma of baby loss can last a lifetime, and a charity like Dorothy House cannot cover all the need. Does the Minister agree that this service should be not a “nice to have” but an essential part of trauma care?

Preet Kaur Gill: I absolutely agree; all parents should have choice and respect in what is a very sensitive and difficult time. As of January this year, all integrated care

boards in England have indicated that trusts in their areas offer a bereavement service seven days a week across maternity settings, so that support is available when families need it most. I would be happy to talk to the hon. Lady if she has any further concerns.

NHS Accountability

9. Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South and Walkden) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve accountability in the NHS. [901002]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (James Murray): The Health Bill, which is going through Parliament now, will restore clear accountability to the NHS. By abolishing NHS England, we are ending the confusion created by having two separate centres. Responsibility for national decision making will be brought back to Government, while local leaders will be empowered to deliver for their local communities.

Yasmin Qureshi: Accountability in the NHS must run down to the patient as well as to Parliament. Local Healthwatch organisations provide an independent voice when services fall short. What safeguards will the Secretary of State put in place to ensure that, as their functions are moved to the integrated care board and local authority, patients in Bolton South and Walkden will retain a genuine independent route to raise concerns? As the Local Government Association has warned, we cannot leave the NHS to mark its own homework.

James Murray: I think it is fair to say that while Healthwatch has in some areas played an important role, it has fundamentally separated those listening to patients from those who have the power to make changes. Our reforms in the Health Bill will put patient voice at the heart of shaping services. Those responsible for commissioning services will hear directly from patients, service users and local people.

ICBs will be required to publish an annual statement of how they have gathered feedback and what actions they have taken, while the new patient experience directorate in the Department of Health and Social Care will ensure that patient insight directly shapes national policymaking.

Sir Jeremy Hunt (Godalming and Ash) (Con): The Secretary of State knows of my concern about the lack of accountability to bereaved parents, because trust lawyers advise trusts to ignore their duty of candour when there is the prospect of legal action. I was hoping to get this addressed through an amendment to the Public Office (Accountability) Bill, but it looks like that amendment will not be voted on. Will the Secretary of State address this issue in the Health Bill so that parents know that they can be sure that trusts will always tell the truth after a tragedy?

James Murray: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising that important point. While I understand that the amendments he tabled will not be voted on today, they raise an important issue that I will continue to look further into. With the Hillsborough law now due to have its Commons stages completed today and then go over to the Lords, I very much hope that it will be in law as soon as possible, which means that we can apply the

duty of candour to future maternity services reviews such as those in Leeds and Sussex. The situation that we had in Nottingham, where senior leadership refused to take part in the inquiry under way, was totally unacceptable and must never happen again.

Access to NHS Dental Services

10. **Sam Rushworth** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve access to NHS dental services. [901003]

The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock): We are improving access to NHS dentistry with reforms to prioritise those in greatest need and by creating an urgent care safety net throughout the country. I am proud to say that we are on track to deliver 2.5 million additional treatments and that survey data released last week shows that 81% of patients in the last two years were able to get an appointment, but we will go further with fundamental reform in this Parliament.

Sam Rushworth: I thank the Minister for that answer. In the area that I represent, we have a problem. NHS dental practices in Shildon and in Bishop Auckland closed in the year before the general election, and recently another practice in West Auckland has been writing to patients to say that it cannot provide NHS care. While I respect and really appreciate the work the Government have done on emergency dental treatments, for primary care dentistry it is still simply not good enough. I know that the Minister knows that as we have talked about it. Will he commit to continuing reform of the contract at pace and recognise that we need to better fund NHS dentistry? Will he or his officials meet me to discuss what we can do to help the affected patients in my constituency?

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend is a tireless advocate for his constituents. Integrated care boards are responsible for commissioning NHS dental services to meet the needs of their local population. Where a dental practice decides to close, NHS England and the relevant ICB work together to ensure that its patients have access to dental care. However, I absolutely accept his point that we still have a long way to go to get NHS dentistry back on its feet. I would be more than happy to meet him to discuss that further.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth) is right about dentistry. We have had no clarity from the Minister as to the vision for the future. What should people expect? Is it the plan that most people should go private and not be able to access NHS dentistry? When I chaired a Holderness Health meeting on Friday, the ICB told me that just 39% of people were able to access NHS dentistry within two years. That is the reality for people in rural Beverley and Holderness today. What we would like to hear from the Minister is the vision for the future. What can we expect by 2029-30? Right now, all we get is words and no real clarity.

Stephen Kinnock: I have a lot of respect for the right hon. Gentleman, but I have to say it is a bit rich to be given lectures from the Conservative party, which had 14 years to fix NHS dentistry and did absolutely nothing

about it. Our ambition remains to deliver fundamental reform before the end of this Parliament. It is a complex issue—there are various contract models involving capitation, blended capitation and care packages—and we need time to get it right for both dentists and patients, but I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we are working on it and the public consultation will be launched soon.

Health Inequalities: Staffordshire

11. **Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to help tackle health inequalities in Staffordshire. [901004]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mrs Sharon Hodgson): The health inequalities that exist in our country, including in Staffordshire, are an intolerable injustice. The Government are taking action to tackle them. From the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 to the new heart disease and strokes plan through the 10-year health plan, we are tackling the root causes driving ill health.

Adam Jogee: Audley health centre in Newcastle-under-Lyme is the fifth worst practice for asthma prevalence in our ICB and the rural practice with the highest number of people living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Local GP Dr Richard Page puts that down to the prevailing wind blowing pollution from the M6 on the west side of the practice area, and notes that if green-belt land is released for the AB2 development, pollution will only get worse.

It is excellent to see my hon. Friend the Minister at the Dispatch Box. Will she set out what the Government are doing to ensure that the people of Audley—and anyone else living in areas with high levels of pollution—are not disproportionately affected by respiratory diseases? Will she meet me to discuss that?

Mrs Hodgson: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and his good wishes. Improving air quality is a core part of the Government's shift from treatment to prevention in our 10-year health plan. I know that my hon. Friend is very committed to cleaner air in his Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency, and I commend him for all his hard work in campaigning on Walleys Quarry—I know that his constituents will be grateful. With the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, we have introduced a new duty on strategic and combined authorities to have regard to improving population health and reducing health inequalities, and it specifically references air quality as a factor for their consideration. If time allows and I am still in post, I will be happy to meet my hon. Friend.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): One measure that can be helpful in tackling inequalities across the country is independent feedback. Currently, Healthwatch collects independent feedback right across the country. Does the Minister agree with this Government's plans to abolish Healthwatch, or does she share the concerns of the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) that it will reduce the independent voice?

Mr Speaker: In Staffordshire.

Mrs Hodgson: As the hon. Lady knows, we are putting the patient voice right at the heart of the health service, so although she may say that we are scrapping something, we are actually going to make it better.

Dr Johnson: I am not sure that it is just Opposition Members who are saying this. In Staffordshire and right across the country, more doctors can help to reduce inequalities, and many Labour Members, from the Cabinet to Back Benchers, promised that this Government would double the number of medical school places. The former Secretary of State and the current Minister for Care repeated that promise at the Dispatch Box. We were then told in a ministerial correction that the Government had never committed to doubling the number of medical school places. How can this be accurate? Is it Government policy to double the number of medical school places, or is this a promise that they intend to break?

Mrs Hodgson: I know that the hon. Lady has asked me about the 10-year workforce plan on many occasions, and it will be out shortly. In that plan, she will see that we are prioritising British graduates entering the workforce.

Mr Speaker: I call Mike Kane.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Question No. 12 please.

Mr Speaker: You need to stand up to say that. Exercise those knees. He's getting old.

Mike Kane: It's the football, Mr Speaker—it's Tuesday. Sorry.

Lung Cancer Screening Programme

12. **Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What progress his Department has made on ensuring that incidental findings from the lung cancer screening programme are followed up. [901005]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mrs Sharon Hodgson): The lung cancer screening programme is already making a difference by helping to find lung cancers earlier, when they are easier to treat. By focusing first on areas with the greatest need, it is also helping to narrow the gap in lung cancer outcomes. The programme can also identify other serious health conditions. Clear NHS protocols are now in place so that these findings are followed up and patients can get the right care as quickly as possible.

Mike Kane: Mr Speaker, if there is a five-a-side doctor in the House, I would be most grateful.

Following the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jodge), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is one of the big killers in my constituency of Wythenshawe and Sale East. Chiesi, a company based in my constituency, is leading the fight in early diagnosis. What assessment has the Minister made of the Frontier Hull programme in tackling this, and will she commit to exploring scaling this up nationally to improve patient outcomes and save our NHS money?

Mrs Hodgson: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the excellent work of Hull University teaching hospital and Chiesi. The NHS has delivered spirometry tests in community settings, including community diagnostic centres, to diagnose COPD missed in the pandemic, and the lung cancer screening programme also refers patients to primary care, including for COPD.

Mr Speaker: Two Members had been standing before, so obviously there has been a bit of intimidation on the Benches. I call Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Never intimidation, Mr Speaker; I am not strong enough for that. My colleague and friend, the hon. Member for Runcorn and Helsby (Sarah Pochin), has kindly let me ask this question.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on respiratory health, I want to ask this question. The lung cancer screening programme has been an enormous success, and the Minister knows that the low-dose CT scan regularly identifies clinically significant incidental findings, so what progress has her Department made in ensuring that incidental funding is followed up? When will the national guidance be issued on this, preferably as part of a modern service framework for respiratory health?

Mrs Hodgson: The NHS lung cancer screening programme has clear national protocols and quality assurance arrangements to ensure that clinically significant incidental findings are reported, followed up and acted on appropriately to help ensure that patients receive timely assessment and treatment through established NHS pathways.

Topical Questions

T1. [901020] **Sarah Pochin** (Runcorn and Helsby) (Reform): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (James Murray): As you know, Mr Speaker, the Minister for Secondary Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), is not here this morning as she is attending the graduation of her son Will. I am sure that the whole House will join me in congratulating Will on his achievement.

Since I last updated the House, we have opened a new meningitis B vaccination programme for 1 million young people, committed to extending Martha's rule across all maternity services and resolved a long-running dispute with resident doctors. We have not wasted a second in strengthening and improving our health and social care system for people across the country, and in building an NHS that is fit for the future.

Sarah Pochin: Now that the capital spending plan has been published, can the Minister confirm whether Warrington and Halton will receive funding for a desperately needed new hospital? The existing hospital estate has not been substantially upgraded since the 1960s and no longer has the capacity needed to serve the growing local population. Will he commit to delivering a modern hospital for the next generation, including the residents of Runcorn and Helsby?

James Murray: We want to improve the NHS estate across the country, and that is why we are increasing capital investment to £15 billion a year by 2028-29. I am happy to write to the hon. Lady with further details on the specific investment in her constituency.

T2. [901021] **Alex Mayer** (Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard) (Lab): The Houghton health hub, which I recently visited, is very well located in the town centre next to a library. It is owned by the council and leased by NHS Property Services, which in turn is paid by the integrated care board for the modern clinical rooms, which are on the right as people go in. So far, so good. The problem is that those clinical rooms are empty. Public money is going around in circles but is not creating any health provision or helping patients. Will the Minister meet me to see whether this sorry saga can be sorted out?

James Murray: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the situation. Clearly, we should ensure that NHS rooms are being used for the benefit of patients. On that specific case, I understand that Central East ICB is developing a plan to reoccupy the Houghton Regis health centre this month, but I am happy to discuss the detail with her.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Stuart Andrew (Daventry) (Con): Is the number of patients waiting for admission for an operation or procedure today higher or lower than when this Government took office?

James Murray: I am proud of the fact that the waiting list for NHS services is more than 340,000 less than when we took office two years ago. People are being treated faster than ever before, satisfaction with GP services is increasing and we are making progress for people across this country. There is a lot more work to do, but we have laid the right foundations and are moving in the right direction.

Stuart Andrew: Well, that was clearly no answer to my question, so let me give it: the Government's own figures show that the number is higher. Additionally, in response to concerns that I have raised, the Office for Statistics Regulation confirmed that the published figures do not clearly distinguish between patients who are treated and those who are removed from waiting lists without treatment. With consultants now taking strike action and the situation potentially getting worse, how can the Secretary of State prove that patients are actually being seen faster, rather than that statistics are being massaged?

James Murray: The vast majority of people who come off the waiting list do so because they are receiving the care they need. I am confused: is the right hon. Gentleman advocating that people should stay on the waiting lists when they no longer need NHS care? Are the Opposition advocating that we should spend NHS resources chasing people who no longer need care, or should we keep the waiting lists up to date, as previous Governments have done, and ensure that everyone who needs care gets it?

T4. [901023] **Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Middleton South) (Lab): The waiting time to see a cardiologist in the Manchester University NHS foundation trust is an unacceptable 66 weeks. What will the ministerial team do to reduce that waiting time?

James Murray: We are determined to reduce waiting times across the country. Where there are cases of individual hospitals or trusts like the case my hon. Friend mentioned, we will send in teams from the national health service to help improve the service provided in local areas. It is also important that where trusts or hospitals have done well and have solved problems, their expertise goes to help other trusts and hospitals who need their support, because we want to ensure that the improvement in the NHS happens right across the country.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): The NHS Resolution annual report for the year to March 2026 shows that maternity made up almost £35 billion of the £60 billion set aside for future negligence payments, and £1.3 billion—or 40%—of the total clinical negligence payments last year. The Secretary of State has promised to put in place an action plan by the end of the year, but the recommendations of Baroness Amos and Donna Ockenden have already been published. Will he accelerate implementing those national recommendations and putting in place a maternity commissioner, because mothers cannot afford to wait and neither can the taxpayer?

James Murray: As the hon. Lady will know, I have committed to introducing a maternity and neonatal commissioner. I will meet the national taskforce, which I chair, later this afternoon to discuss the scope of the role to ensure that the taskforce has discussed it and is content with it. We will then ensure that we get that on a statutory footing as quickly as possible—I hope through the Health Bill, though that will be subject to discussions with the Commons and Lords authorities. But I want to ensure that the role is statutory and in place and can help us drive change through maternity services across the country.

T5. [901024] **Rachel Taylor** (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): The average wait for an endometriosis diagnosis is more than nine years, often because women and girls are not listened to when they experience really painful periods. My constituent Insha waited for over a decade, only to be told that she could face a three-year wait for specialist surgery. What plans do the Government have to reduce diagnosis times, provide better training for GPs and improve access to specialist endometriosis care for all women and girls in North Warwickshire and Bedworth?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mrs Sharon Hodgson): Women have been dismissed for far too long, and that must change. The renewed women's health strategy commits to redesigning clinical pathways for heavy periods and pelvic pain in order to reduce repeat appointments, unnecessary referrals and long waits. Menstrual problems, including endometriosis, will be prioritised through NHS Online in 2027, which will give people across the country the choice of getting the specialist care they need from home.

T3. [901022] **Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): Studies show that iodine deficiencies in pregnant women can result in complications for their children, including impaired foetal growth and psychomotor development. Recent studies have shown that iodine levels among women of reproductive age in the UK are only 82 micrograms per litre, with 30% of women recording levels below 50, but World Health Organisation guidance says that pregnant women are iodine deficient if they have less than 150 micrograms. The last governmental review into iodine deficiency was in 2014. Will the Secretary of State ensure that a new review is urgently commissioned?

James Murray: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that important point and drawing attention to the impacts that iodine deficiency can have. I am happy to look into the matter further and respond to her in writing.

T7. [901026] **Chris Hinchliff** (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): Our NHS is heavily reliant on penicillin-based antibiotics for many of its core functions, but close to 90% of global manufacturing capacity of an essential component of those antibiotics is now concentrated in China. The risks to our NHS are obvious. What steps are Ministers taking across Government to reduce our NHS's dependence on these highly concentrated supply chains?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Preet Kaur Gill): Medicine supply chains are global in nature, but we are taking steps to strengthen resilience by exploring opportunities to diversify supply chains, reduce reliance on single sources and undertake targeted monitoring of vulnerable supply chains. We also hold stockpiles for pandemic and serious infectious disease scenarios, including of antibiotics.

T6. [901025] **Bobby Dean** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I listened to the Minister's answers earlier on the dentistry contract, and he said that the Government need time to get it right and that a consultation will be launched soon. My local dentists are desperate to take on NHS patients. This has been a known issue for a number of years. Is it not wholly unacceptable that the Government do not yet have a proposed solution, let alone are implementing one?

The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock): The fundamental problem is that dentists have not been incentivised to do NHS work. When we came into office in July 2024, we had a crazy situation where there was a £392 million underspend. We have sorted that now; the underspend is right down at about £30 million. As a result, we have delivered 2.5 million additional courses of treatment in NHS dentistry.

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): South Norfolk is one of the fastest growing constituencies in the United Kingdom, but that population growth is putting increased pressure on local GP services like the Humbleyard Practice. Given the Government's ambition to expand neighbourhood health provision, will the Department consider funding a neighbourhood health centre or community diagnostic centre in Long Stratton and Hethersett?

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend is a doughty champion for his constituents. We are working with local NHS systems to identify the most appropriate places for new community diagnostic centres based on local need and health inequality. We are rapidly working to deliver our commitment of 120 NHCs by 2030 and 250 by 2035. ICBs submitted their centre proposals in May, and we have now completed the initial review.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): Quality and consistency of care are vital in improving cancer outcomes. How will the cancer manuals support earlier diagnosis, and will they include specific guidance to improve outcomes for children and young people?

Mrs Hodgson: The national cancer plan has a dedicated chapter on children and young people, as the hon. Member is aware, recognising the unique challenges they face. Cancer manuals will set out clear quality standards to reduce variation in care, and we are developing criteria for specific tumour types within those manuals.

Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab): The public must have confidence that where there is clear misconduct, action will be taken by medical regulators. However, freedom of information requests that I submitted to the General Medical Council found that only 6% of doctors accused of rape were suspended or erased from the register. My FOI request to the Nursing and Midwifery Council found that about a quarter of those accused of rape or sexual misconduct were suspended or erased from the register. Does the Minister agree that the priority for regulators must be patient safety and not protecting their registrants?

Preet Kaur Gill: I commend my hon. Friend for his campaigning in this area. He is absolutely right: where serious misconduct takes place, action must be taken. That is why our programme of regulatory reform will enable regulators, starting with the GMC, to act more swiftly. We are consulting on proposals that will give the GMC a duty to remove registrants convicted of murder, rape and many other sexual offences without going through a fitness-to-practise process.

David Reed (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): Air ambulance charities like Devon Air Ambulance are vital to easing pressure on ambulance trusts and A&E, yet they receive no direct Government funding and rely almost entirely on public donations. Their operational costs are rising—fuel duty alone adds over £200,000 a year to what they will now need to find. Does the Minister agree that services delivering NHS-level care should not depend on public generosity to survive, and will he commit to assessing how to support their continued sustainability?

Preet Kaur Gill: Air ambulance charities are a lifeline to communities across the country, and I want to celebrate the extraordinary volunteers who keep these services flying. The Royal Devon and Exeter hospital near the hon. Member's constituency has a state-of-the-art helipad funded by a £1 million donation from the HELP Appeal. The facility is fully equipped with advanced lighting to allow landings 24/7 and can accommodate the latest generation of larger air ambulance helicopters.

Mr Paul Foster (South Ribble) (Lab): Mr Speaker, as you are fully aware, we have had over a decade-long campaign to see the full reinstatement of the A&E at Chorley and South Ribble hospital. The public support it, the staff support it, the local NHS trust supports it, and the neighbouring hospitals at Preston, Wigan and Blackburn support it, but NHS England is blocking full reinstatement and will not say why. Will Ministers please meet with local MPs and all key stakeholders to get the A&E at Chorley and South Ribble hospital fully reinstated?

Mr Speaker: Well, Secretary of State, what are you going to say?

James Murray: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this long-standing campaign, which I know is of great interest to many people in the Chamber. I welcome the fact that the trust, as I understand it, has now completed a feasibility study, which concluded that there is an evidence-based case to explore extending to a 24-hour emergency department. This work is now being developed with the ICB, and I look forward very much to seeing those proposals progress.

Mr Speaker: And a meeting with me, of course.

Alex Brewer (North East Hampshire) (LD): The Basingstoke and North Hampshire hospital rebuild has been delayed by up to two decades. The buildings are in a dire state and becoming increasingly expensive to maintain. Land for the new hospital is secured, so what possible justification can there be for further delay in building this new hospital?

James Murray: We want to ensure that hospitals in our new hospitals programme across the country are built as quickly as possible. We inherited a programme where there was no funding to deliver that, or funding that was completely unreasonable and with unrealistic delivery timescales. We have changed that to ensure that we have a clear programme with waves of delivery over the coming years.

I am happy to look into the particular situation raised by the hon. Lady, but I emphasise that the lack of capital funding that our health service has had for so long began with funding being cut back under a Government of whom her party was a part.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Research shows that specialist palliative care can deliver palliative care in the community, saving the NHS 1.5 million bed days, as well as £817 million. It is important that funding accompanies the modern service framework, so that we have an invest-to-save model moving forward. Will the Minister meet me and Baroness Finlay, to consider the work we have been doing in this area, and see what more the Government can do to enable that?

Stephen Kinnoch: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and all the campaigning she does on this issue. Our modern service framework will transform palliative care by basing it on strategic commissioning. That will enable us to tackle rising demand, identify patients much earlier, and ensure that quality of care no longer depends on someone's postcode. I would of course be happy to meet her and Baroness Finlay to discuss that further.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): When will the Government implement changes to the vaccine damage payment scheme recommended by Baroness Hallett in her report in April?

James Murray: Officials at the Department of Health and Social Care are looking closely at that matter, and will publish the Government response in due course.

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): We have had 23 reviews into social care since 1997, but no agreement on how care should be funded. Does the Minister agree that the way we fund cancer care should also be the way that we fund care of those with dementia?

Stephen Kinnoch: Dementia is a vital issue, and we are of course committed to creating a national care service. Baroness Casey's independent commission will set out recommendations to deliver that. She recently made recommendations in her speech at the Nuffield Trust, and we are already implementing those, including the creation of a dementia czar to push forward all those issues, in terms of both psychosocial care and clinical research.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): Following recent evidence of a long-term increase in colorectal cancers in the under-50s, the Scottish Government are calling on the National Screening Committee to extend eligibility for bio-screening kits to improve outcomes. I understand that Australia has reduced its screening age to 45. Will the Secretary of State join the Scottish Government in urging the NSC to review the recommended age for starting screening, so that more lives may be saved?

James Murray: The National Screening Committee plays a vital role in providing clinical and evidence-based advice on how to target screening programmes. In my time as Secretary of State over the past few months, the committee has made a number of recommendations, but the benefits of greater screening must be balanced with the risks of doing so, and I know that the National Screening Committee takes that responsibility seriously. I have clearly made the point that the committee must continue to keep its advice up to date and, as new diagnostic and treatment methods become available, it must ensure that its advice keeps pace with those.

Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham Erdington) (Lab): The Health and Social Care Committee is publishing its report tomorrow on fixing the food environment, and it will be making several recommendations to support everyone to eat more healthily. Will the Minister commit to engaging positively with the details of our report, and will she set out the steps that the Government are already taking in that area?

Mrs Hodgson: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, which gives me an opportunity to say how much I enjoyed appearing before her Committee to discuss these matters. The Government are very much looking forward to receiving the report from the Health and Social Care Committee, and I will ensure that I respond to it in due course with full details.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): Young people with cancer often face severe isolation during treatment, separated from their friends and everything that is normal to them at that critical age. In Leicester South, at Leicester Royal Infirmary it has been left to charities like the Teenage Cancer Trust to provide vital care and support, funded through donations and philanthropic grants. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that those charities are sustainably funded so we can support them as much as they are supporting our young people with cancer?

James Murray: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about the loneliness often faced by people who are being treated for cancer—particularly for young people, whose loneliness can be acute when they are separated from their friendship groups and peers as they undergo treatment. I pay tribute to the work of the Teenage Cancer Trust. The Government want to ensure that we are working with that charity to provide a comprehensive service, not just on diagnosis and treatment but on the important emotional support that people across the board, particularly young people, need.

Mr Speaker: I call David Baines to ask the final question.

David Baines (St Helens North) (Lab): Due to a long-running dispute with the building's landlord, Billinge medical practice in my constituency has been given a deadline of September to vacate the premises. I have previously spoken to the Minister about this and I am grateful for the help he has given me so far, but the integrated care board has now decided to move the practice out of the village entirely, to Garswood. I am worried about the impact of that on patients for many reasons, not least the fact that the new location is not easily accessible by public transport. Does the Minister agree with me that places like Billinge deserve their own medical practice? Will he or his officials agree to meet me to discuss the way forward?

Stephen Kinnock: I have discussed this issue with my hon. Friend and I know he feels very strongly about it. I would be delighted to meet him to follow up. It sounds as if some progress is being made, but we need to ensure we get this sorted.

Business of the House

12.41 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Alan Campbell): With

permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a short statement to update the House on tomorrow's business. The business for tomorrow is now:

WEDNESDAY 15 JULY—A general debate on Iran—*[Interruption.]*

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): Shocking!

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Stafford, do you want to leave now? I will not have shouting like that again. Are you going to answer me?

Gregory Stafford: I apologise.

Mr Speaker: Apology accepted.

Sir Alan Campbell: The general debate on Iran will be followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to national security. The business for the remainder of the week is unchanged.

THURSDAY 16 JULY—The Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate. The subject of which has been 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): This is a total humiliation and embarrassment for the Government. Yesterday they published an emergency change to Government business in order to ram the Hillsborough law through this House, with no notice and an absolute minimum of scrutiny. Now they have backtracked again on their own business and cancelled the Opposition day that they themselves had scheduled. Why is that?

Let me read the motion that caused so much consternation in the Whips Office and in No. 10:

"That this House calls on the Government to bring forward a motion to change the date it adjourns to Monday 20 July to enable the new Prime Minister to make a statement about his plans for Government."

In other words, the Government changed the business and refused to delay the activity of this House by even one day to permit the Prime Minister, as he will be, to make a statement and to answer questions about his intentions and plans.

The Government have a majority of more than 150, but they could not trust their MPs to vote the right way on that motion and they could not bear the idea of a new Prime Minister facing any scrutiny before September. Let me remind us all that that Prime Minister has been chosen by a coronation, not a contest, with no known platform, almost no known policies and no idea of his priorities or his Cabinet team. The Government pushed

us to take an Opposition day tomorrow, but they cannot bear the scrutiny, and now they are cancelling it. To do so by hiding—thoroughly distastefully, I am afraid—under the very distressing news of what is happening in Iran, when a Minister could have made a statement today or tomorrow on that issue, is completely disreputable. The Government are not even cancelling the Opposition day for legislation. They could have kept the day for the Representation of the People Bill, but they are cancelling it for a general debate, with no votes.

This is the worst possible exit for a Prime Minister—it is a desperate attempt to create a legacy, as though that could alter two solid years of failure—and the worst possible start for a new Prime Minister. People across this country will see what has happened, and they will conclude that this is a man who is frit, running scared of public scrutiny before he can even take office.

Sir Alan Campbell: If I may, I will introduce some facts into the situation. I appreciate the frustration of Members when business is changed at short notice and when debates are postponed, but they will appreciate the importance of the House being able to discuss the escalating and fast-moving situation in the middle east before the recess. The right hon. Gentleman, who knows that I hold him in high regard, may want to take away the word "distastefully" and have another think about that. What is distasteful is the crisis erupting once again in the middle east. This is an opportunity to update the House, and for Members to give their views on this matter at the earliest opportunity.

The right hon. Gentleman reads out a motion that, he tells us, was to be tabled for tomorrow. I have to say that that is the first I have heard of the motion; no such motion was tabled for the Opposition day tomorrow. We did not see the words of the motion. A decision was made on whether the House should debate an unfolding international crisis.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about what might happen on Monday. He had the opportunity yesterday to raise the question of whether the future Prime Minister would come to the House on Monday. Others raised that issue, but he did not.

Jesse Norman: I raised it in the *Daily Mail*!

Sir Alan Campbell: The right hon. Gentleman might have raised it in the *Daily Mail*, but he did not raise it in the business statement yesterday, unlike others across the House. As for his suggestion that there should be a statement tomorrow, I remind him that if the business tomorrow was as he asks for it to be, there would be no statement. We do not have statements on Opposition days.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House says that there will be a motion on a statutory instrument on national security. I hope that is the SI that will finally allow us to proscribe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has been sufficiently behind much of the anti-Jewish hatred that we see in this country, and has been one of the most destabilising forces when it comes to our democracy and our safety. Is the Leader of the House able to confirm what that SI is about? Will he give us hope that the IRGC will finally be banned tomorrow?

Sir Alan Campbell: I hope to be able to confirm that in due course, but my hon. Friend is not far off.

Bobby Dean (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I understand that usually, if the Government want to make a statement relating to foreign affairs, we get a statement from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, so I hope it will not be a habit of the House to change the whole business to Back-Bench debates, rather than giving us a formal statement from Government Ministers. While we are on the subject of Opposition days, it would be remiss of me not to highlight that the Leader of the Opposition recently said:

“The fact is we are the smallest opposition party in history—we don’t have enough MPs.”

I suggest to the Leader of the House that if the Government want to allocate more Opposition day debates to the Liberal Democrats, we will gladly take them. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition have come out in force today—well done on coming out today.

More broadly, the country will be wondering why, although we have effectively known for weeks who the new Prime Minister will be, it will be months before he faces any parliamentary scrutiny on his plans. Will the Leader of the House explain how this situation has been allowed to happen? Does he agree that our constituents deserve answers about the new Prime Minister’s plans much sooner?

Sir Alan Campbell: The reality is that if a new Administration is formed on Monday, it will take some time to get that Administration into place. As I said yesterday, there are no plans to change the recess dates; those dates were set for the convenience of Members, to enable them to plan ahead. The work of the Government will continue through the recess, and I am sure that once the next Prime Minister is in place, he will come to the House, following recess, to update it on his plans.

Alan Gemmell (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): Is the Leader of the House as surprised as I am by the faux outrage from so many Conservative Members? Would it not have been better to see them in the Lobby with us, voting to increase workers’ rights and the minimum wage, and to lift the two-child benefit cap?

Sir Alan Campbell: I absolutely welcome many of the Conservative hon. and right hon. Gentlemen who are present, because we do not often see them in this place. Mr Speaker, it tells you something about the state of the modern-day Conservative party when its Members can turn out en masse for this statement, but not for debate on some of the big issues of the day.

Sir Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): The Leader of the House had nothing to do with this decision on the business. He knows that, even at the height of Brexit, once an Opposition day debate was agreed, it was agreed. My constituents want to know what the new Prime Minister will do on defence, for small businesses, and on energy, and the decision to not allow the House the opportunity to question the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) is thwarting that desire. Can I urge the Leader of the House to remind the new No. 10 that there will be a point during

this summer when the new Prime Minister will wish he had sought consent from this House, and will totally regret the decision that has been made today?

Sir Alan Campbell: The right hon. Gentleman was a very distinguished Chief Whip, but I fear that he is looking back at when he served in that role with rose-tinted spectacles. I remember both what we did to his party, and what it did to us. Opposition days are not set in stone, in the way that he is suggesting. Had we known what the motions were, that might have informed the debate on this decision, but I remind the House that there is a crisis escalating across the middle east. As for the future Prime Minister, the work of the Government will continue through the recess, and once the Prime Minister is in place, they will come to the House at the earliest opportunity following the recess.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): The Leader of the House is usually a very thoughtful and considerate man, but my recollection is similar to that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Sir Julian Smith); it is that once a date had been agreed through the usual channels, it was usually stuck to. It certainly was in all circumstances where it was agreed with me. Will the Leader of the House make contact with the office of the right hon. Member for Makerfield, and have a discussion with him, so that the Leader of the House can report back to the House on Thursday on whether a date will be made available next week for the right hon. Member for Makerfield to make a statement to this House about his plans and ambitions for the Government and this country?

Sir Alan Campbell: The right hon. Gentleman—who, again, was a very distinguished Chief Whip—might well agree with the former Chief Whip sitting next to him, but that does not make them right. I am not sure that the right hon. Gentleman is correct about what happened once a date was agreed, but if he is, that was because of the right hon. Gentleman’s decency in using the usual channels in that way. Perhaps there otherwise would have been a greater degree of uncertainty. As I have said, when the new Prime Minister is in place, he will come to the House at the earliest opportunity, following recess, and update the House.

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): The Leader of the House knows that I have enormous respect for him, and I am sure that this is quite a difficult statement for him to make, particularly as the right hon. Member for Makerfield will face unfavourable comparisons with Boris Johnson, who did come to this House and make a statement before the summer recess. However, can I change the subject? We are expecting a statement on local government reorganisation on Thursday. Now that tomorrow is not an Opposition day, could the Leader of the House find a way for that statement to be made tomorrow, rather than on Thursday?

Sir Alan Campbell: As I recall, Boris Johnson was appointed before the summer recess, and there was time for him to make a statement. If I am incorrect, I apologise, but I am confident that was the case. The right hon. Lady raises an interesting question about whether tomorrow not being an Opposition day creates space for statements. I will take that question away and think about it.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): My time as Chief Whip may have been a little shorter than that of the Leader of the House, but I would gently remind him that it is highly unusual for an Opposition day to be pulled in this way. Sadly, the crisis is in this place. We are on the cusp of a new Prime Minister coming into office; the general public expect to know his plans, and they expect us in this place to have the opportunity to scrutinise those plans. I urge the Leader of the House to go to the man who we expect to become Prime Minister this week, have a serious conversation with him, and ask him whether he will do the decent thing and come to this place.

Sir Alan Campbell: I am not sure that it is in the right hon. Lady's interest for us to debate her time as Chief Whip. I agree that this is unusual, and it is not a decision that has been taken lightly, but I point out to her and to Opposition Members that the situation in the middle east is unusual. We could well be in the midst of a greater conflagration in that region. She talks about a crisis in this place; she is suggesting that scrutinising the Prime Minister is more important than the crisis that is unfolding in the middle east. She is a shadow Foreign Office Minister. I find that statement incredible.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The middle east has been in a state of rolling crisis for months and months, yet the Leader of the House comes to this place and says that things have got so bad that we need to do this extraordinary thing—which is unprecedented in my 25 years in the House—in order to discuss it. This is from a Government who have a marginal impact on the conduct of affairs in the middle east. Will the Leader of the House commit to a very low bar for a recall of this House over the summer recess to discuss the middle east? What he is saying is that there is such a low bar, and that if anything happens in the middle east beyond background, we need to come back to this place to debate the matter.

Sir Alan Campbell: The right hon. Gentleman is a very distinguished Member of this House, but I do think that the Opposition are talking lightly about what is unfolding in the middle east. This Government have brought statements and debates about Iran to the Floor of the House, but the Opposition are suggesting that nothing that is happening out there is sufficient to merit a debate tomorrow, before the recess, in which the Government can set out their position, and hon. and right hon. Members can set out their views and inform the Government. I think that this is the right way to go about it. If there is need for a recall of the House during the recess to discuss this or any other matter, that will be considered in the usual way.

Mr Speaker: Of course, the Speaker would want to agree whatever proposal was brought forward.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): When was the last time that an allotted Opposition day was withdrawn in the way that the Leader of the House is withdrawing this one? I was looking at my calendar of business, otherwise known as the Order Paper, and it says that

"The selection of the matters to be debated will be made by the Leader of the Opposition (Standing Order No. 14(2))."

Why is the Leader of the House seeking to usurp that right and put his own plans in place instead?

Sir Alan Campbell: I am not seeking to usurp that. What I am saying is that I have also been in this place for the past 25 years, to jog the hon. Gentleman's memory, and it has happened. It does happen on occasion. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] Look, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the dates off the top of my head, but I am absolutely confident that it happened. It happened during his Government—the Government whom he supported. It happened, and I think the record will demonstrate that. This is a highly unusual situation. We are heading towards a recess; the House needs an opportunity to discuss this situation further, and that is what I am seeking to provide.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): The Leader of the House will know that I have huge regard for him, and I wager that he thinks this decision is as disgraceful as we do. When he was Chief Whip, he would never have stood for the disdain that his party has shown for tomorrow's Opposition day debate. My constituents want us to debate and know the plans of the new Prime Minister. That should be given to this House. How can my constituents not now deem that the disdain that this Government have shown for this Parliament over the past two years will carry on under the new Prime Minister? How will my constituents not think that this Leader of the House and this new Prime Minister are running frit from the feelings of my constituents and the wider country?

Sir Alan Campbell: I will not get into the disdain that the hon. Gentleman's Government, of whom he was a firm supporter, showed for this House, because we simply do not have time. As I have said, when the new Prime Minister is in place, he will come to this House and set out his plans for the future. I will not try to speak for the hon. Gentleman, whom I hold in equally high regard, about what his constituents think, but if he thinks they are not concerned about the situation in the middle east, our brave servicemen and women in the region and the economic impact of what is happening, he needs to go and talk to them.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Does the House not deserve to know what the new Prime Minister thinks about this unfolding crisis? Perhaps he will be speaking in the debate tomorrow.

Sir Alan Campbell: I am sure that when the Prime Minister is in place, he will be coming to this House at the earliest opportunity following recess, and he will set that out. [Interruption.] Let me just answer the right hon. Gentleman's question. I expect that when Ministers get up tomorrow to open or to respond to the debate they will set out Government policy. I do not expect that policy to change, even though the Administration might change. The Government will be setting out the plans for the summer. Even if we have a different Prime Minister and a different Administration, I am not sure that the policy will change in the way that the right hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): The Leader of the House was a Whip of long experience, along with the hon. Member for Bridgend (Chris Elmore). I find it hard to understand how the Whips Office has fallen so far that the usual channels did not know what

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the motions would be tomorrow. Who is the Leader of the House trying to convince? One of those motions would have been to censure the Energy Secretary. The Leader of the House has made it clear that the crisis in the middle east has a direct impact on this country because of the energy crisis, yet we will not be able to censure the Energy Secretary for the tens of thousands of jobs he has seen disappear in the oil and gas industry. Perhaps he might act when there is one job on offer. Will the next Government carry on making statements outside of this House? That is what will happen all summer, basically disregarding this House, for which you, Mr Speaker, have admonished those on the Treasury Bench on several occasions.

Sir Alan Campbell: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for informing those on the Government Benches what the other topic was going to be for the Opposition day debate. [Interruption.] I am standing at the Dispatch Box, and Mr Speaker knows the importance I put on Ministers telling the absolute truth when they stand here. I was totally unaware until the right hon. Gentleman just told us—[Interruption.] No, I was totally unaware of the topic, not just the wording. That illustrates his point about the usual channels, because the usual channels, funnily enough, are a two-way process. It is about the Opposition saying to the Government, “This is what we are going to raise”, and then making sure that the debate rises to that, because the Government are informed in sufficient time. If he has a problem with how the usual channels are working, he might want to talk to his side.

Harriet Cross (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): The right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) was elected less than a month ago. He will be Prime Minister on Monday, by which time we will be on an almost 50-day recess. He will be appointing a Cabinet in that time, some of whom will not have to come to this House to answer questions until the middle of October, after the conference recess. We do not know what his plan is. He was elected leader of the Labour party without a contest, and our constituents have the right to know. The point of our motion was to give them the opportunity to know his plans for the country. Why is that too much to ask?

Sir Alan Campbell: I just point out gently to the hon. Lady that I have already said that the Government will continue during the recess. I expect that decisions and announcements will be made, and there was never going to be an opportunity for every new or existing Secretary of State to be brought to this House to answer questions. That is what we will do when the House reconvenes in September. I am sure that those Secretaries of State and the new Prime Minister will want to set out the Government's plans at the earliest opportunity.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): This is a humiliating day for the right hon. Gentleman. Like my colleagues, I have a great deal of respect for him, yet he has been asked to give this embarrassing performance in front of the House. We are talking about the new Prime Minister of this country, who will be taking command, as colleagues have said, of all the offices of state and making appointments. Mr Speaker, you know

that over those 50 days of recess, the Government will have to go ahead, and decisions will be made, and that will not be done with the respect for this House that you champion on a daily basis to a Government who refuse to listen. I reckon that the right hon. Gentleman, like you and me, knows that the new Prime Minister should be setting out his plans, precisely because Secretaries of State will not all be able to come here super quickly. The Prime Minister can, however, and he should be here on Monday to set out to my constituents the reality of what he will be doing in government. The failure to do so is an embarrassment for this Government. I am just sorry that the right hon. Gentleman, who I respect, has to carry the can and pretend that this is about some Iranian debate tomorrow, which it is not.

Sir Alan Campbell: Again, the work of the Government will continue through the recess. The Prime Minister will make a statement to the House at the earliest opportunity. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman did not mean to do so, but he must not downplay what is happening in and around Iran. If he wants to talk about embarrassing performances, let me gently remind him of what he said from the Dispatch Box as a Minister. He might want to turn around to his right hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), the former Chief Whip, and apologise: because of the mess he made on that day, she lost her job.

Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con): Tomorrow, the Conservatives were going to ask for Parliament to sit for one more working day, so that the new Prime Minister could come here and set out his agenda for the country, which we could then scrutinise on behalf of all the people we represent. Instead, there will be a general debate which, no matter the topic, can have no actionable outcome. We will have no chance for a month and a half to scrutinise the Prime Minister's plans. I ask the Leader of the House genuinely: how does he think that looks to the people who send us here?

Sir Alan Campbell: I thank the hon. Lady for reminding us what tomorrow was going to be about, because we did not know. [Interruption.] Well, we might have known tomorrow, but we certainly did not know today. [Interruption.] That is the point, actually, because if the Opposition wanted to set up something that the hon. Lady says is so important, why was no motion tabled to set out what the debates would be? It is all right for the Conservatives to prepare for that, apparently. [Interruption.] If that is the case, it is irrelevant. I am talking about a situation that is erupting once again in the middle east. People who are listening to or watching this debate will be doing so with a degree of incredulity, seeing the Conservatives preferring to go down a route of playing some weird political game while the middle east is on the brink of conflagration.

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): The Leader of the House is a decent and honourable man, and the fact that he is so clearly rattled this afternoon shows how uncomfortable he is with the statement that he has delivered to us. As he knows, the purpose of that Opposition day debate was to have a vote to delay recess by one day to scrutinise the new Prime Minister. My constituents want to know if the new Prime Minister will put up their taxes. Will he spend more on welfare?

Will he fund our armed forces properly? Will he curtail my constituents' right to a jury trial? The truth is that our new Prime Minister is already running away. He is frit, is he not?

Sir Alan Campbell: As I have said before, and I say again, when the new Prime Minister is in place he will come and make a statement to the House, and set out his plans on those and other matters. The hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of taxation—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members might want to listen to this, because it answers a question that they have asked before and to which I now have an answer. The universal credit vote was blocked on 7 September 2021 by Jacob Rees-Mogg, who scrapped an Opposition day in order to vote for a national insurance rise.

John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): Metal prices being what they are, if we were to take the amount of brass neck on show here today and melt it down, we could fund defence properly. The right hon. Gentleman tells us that the ship of state will sail on regardless throughout the summer, but my constituents want to know whose hand is on the tiller and what course will be set. Is that so unreasonable? If Manchesterism is so fantastic, why can the right hon. Member for Makerfield not come here and tell us all about it?

Sir Alan Campbell: That is because on the day the Opposition were suggesting my right hon. Friend should come here and make that statement he will be putting together a new Administration—presumably appointing a new Cabinet, and then a new Administration. He will be setting out—*[Interruption.]* If Members want to scrutinise an Administration, they should at least provide an opportunity for the Prime Minister and the Administration to be in place. However, that is not the reason why tomorrow's business is being altered. Tomorrow's business is being altered because we are on the verge of a conflagration, and a decision was made without knowledge of what the motions would be for tomorrow. A decision was made that it was appropriate for the House to consider that matter, rather than the motions that were yet to be tabled.

Alison Griffiths (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): The Leader of the House will know that I hold him in great respect, but over the two years for which I have been in this place, I have seen a pattern of behaviour in the final week before the recess—business is announced at the very last second, particularly when it concerns local government reorganisation—and we are seeing an increase in that behaviour in relation to this important issue. The Leader of the House is being disingenuous. He is suggesting that this is a binary issue: that either we ask the new Prime Minister, as of Monday, to come to the House one extra day late, or we discuss Iran. I think that that is an insult to my constituents, and I ask once again that the Leader of the House reconsider his position.

Sir Alan Campbell: I am slightly alarmed by the constant references to the respect in which I am held. I think today may constitute a seminal moment in that regard.

This is not a binary issue. It is about deciding, with a relative shortness of time given that the House has voted for the recess to start on Thursday, what we

believe should be the priority for the House to discuss. Should it be the conflagration in the middle east, or motions that we had yet to see?

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): On Tuesday 24 March 2026, the Leader of the House tabled a statement by the Chancellor on a Conservative Opposition day. So it does happen: he has done it himself. More to the point, however, I have always held him in high esteem for representing both sides of the House, and he has made it incredibly clear that this Iranian debate is super-important. Will he therefore undertake to write to the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) to ask him to come to the House and take part in that debate, so that at least the country has a hint of an understanding of the momentous and important discussion that is to take place tomorrow?

Sir Alan Campbell: The hon. Gentleman's first point was that it happened to us, or we did it. I understand, because I would have been angry at the time. I can assure the House that I would have been very angry, and I understand the anger on the Opposition Benches. What I am saying, however, is that the decision is a choice between an issue relating to the international situation, which we need to discuss before the recess, and motions that we were yet to see. As for writing to or otherwise contacting my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield, I assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend will know that the business for tomorrow has changed, and he will now know what the topic is, and if he wishes to come here to make his views plain on that particular issue—or if any other Member wishes to do so—that is a matter for my right hon. Friend.

Rebecca Smith (South West Devon) (Con): The right hon. Member has highlighted that, in his view, this is not a binary choice between a debate on the middle east and holding the new Prime Minister to account. I wonder whether I might therefore offer him a solution. Why do we not have the debate tomorrow—it is clearly important, and no one on this side of the House is saying otherwise—and then have a vote, which is also in the right hon. Member's gift, to return on Monday anyway?

We were essentially doing the Government a favour by tabling the motion, because ultimately we all want to hear from this new Prime Minister. With the exception of a few lucky people on the Labour Benches, nobody knows what he is planning to do. For the benefit of my constituents in the south-west, I want to be able to raise his obsession with No. 10 in Manchester. I want to hear his views on defence, welfare, taxation and special educational needs. Those are the things that I believe the House deserves to hear directly from the new Prime Minister before we return in September. Might the right hon. Member consider that pretty simple solution, which would give everyone what they want?

Sir Alan Campbell: As I have said, the new Prime Minister will wish to come to this place, and, on the points that the hon. Lady has raised, he will want to answer questions; but let me give her a different scenario for what tomorrow might have looked like if it had been an Opposition day. We could have had a motion which, perhaps, the whole House could have got behind, about the dangerous international situation—*[Interruption.]* We could have done that, because we could have risen to

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the occasion. But what we got—the shadow Leader of the House read it out—was a party political motion. We did not know that, but it turns out to be proven—*[Interruption.]* Let me be clear: we did not know the wording of the motion. We did not know what that was. But let me just say this. I do not appear to be so all the time, but I am always optimistic. Sometimes I expect Opposition parties to use Opposition days to rise to the occasion. Unfortunately, however, I am disappointed yet again.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): I am normally a temperate man, but this is a farcical situation. I have huge respect for the Leader of the House, but I suspect that he has come here with gritted teeth, because the reality is that our constituents want to hear from the new Prime Minister. In fact, the Leader of the House has given a compelling reason for Parliament to sit for a further day next week. If the situation in the middle east is as precarious as he suggests, and if there are challenges facing our country, for us to have a Prime Minister who was elected not by the majority of this country but by one constituency, on a mandate that he has not set out, and through a leadership contest that has had no scrutiny whatsoever, is an affront to democracy.

Sir Alan Campbell: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman at all. The work of the Government will continue throughout the recess. What the Government will set out tomorrow is our position on the situation in the middle east. If, heaven forbid, there is a need to recall Parliament or indeed we return to this matter in September, even with a new Prime Minister, I do not expect there to be a major difference in that regard. The hon. Gentleman knows that this is a matter of the

highest importance to our constituents. *[Interruption.]* There is no statement today because we are changing the business for tomorrow to give Members on both sides of the House the opportunity to make their case, perhaps in an extended way, rather than simply in a statement. That is what this important issue tomorrow deserves.

Mr Speaker: The final question goes to Lancashire.

Mr Andrew Snowden (Fylde) (Con): This is a farce. It is a charade. We are all puppets in a political pantomime being orchestrated by the new Member for Makerfield. I did not realise that the right hon. Gentleman wanted a job in the reshuffle so much that he would put himself through this. Today the Table Office cleared, or had had sight of, the motion for tomorrow. The right hon. Member for Makerfield has been avoiding scrutiny from the press; he has avoided scrutiny from his own parliamentary party through an uncontested leadership election; and now he is trying to avoid scrutiny from any Member in this place. Does the Leader of the House at least recognise that that is not a good tone for an incoming Prime Minister to set, and that it does not bode well for his future if that is how he is going to conduct himself as Prime Minister of this country?

Sir Alan Campbell: I think the hon. Gentleman is making a bid for a role that does not exist but could be created: the shadow Minister for clichés. As I have said, the new Prime Minister will come to this House and set out his plans, but we deemed the crisis unfolding across the middle east to be of sufficient priority to change tomorrow's business. I apologise that that is the case. Nobody wanted to do it, but that is what the importance of the situation demanded. I am sorry if the Opposition cannot get their head around that.

Points of Order

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the House, during his oration and statement, stated that the Government did not know the wording of the proposed motions for tomorrow's Opposition day debates. Can you confirm that Opposition parties have until the end of business today to table the wordings of those motions and that that situation has not changed? May I put it on the record that the usual channels had informed the governing party of the subject of an Opposition day debate tomorrow? He knows that, and the Government Chief Whip knows that. Could you ask the Leader of the House to correct the record?

Mr Speaker: If the Leader of the House wishes to respond, he can.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Alan Campbell): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I just want to thank the hon. Gentleman for making my point for me. He said—*[Interruption.]* No, he said that the Opposition have until the House rises to put down the—*[Interruption.]* I have not disputed that; he is simply confirming that when we made this decision, that was not clear. We did not know that.

Paul Holmes: Yes, you did!

Sir Alan Campbell: No, we did not. The decision was therefore taken to go with the situation in Iran, rather than hang around and wait for what the Opposition might come up with. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. We are not going to continue this debate. The hon. Gentleman asked me a question, and the answer is yes.

Sir Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Now that the new Prime Minister's special advisers have removed by diktat the opportunity for the Opposition to hold a debate about allowing him to be scrutinised on Monday, can you provide the House with clarity on what other routes might be available for us to hear from the new Prime Minister, from whom we will not otherwise hear for over 50 days?

Mr Speaker: I think we are trying to keep the debate going. I do not have the ability to do what the right hon. Gentleman asks; I have the ability to agree to a recall, if the House wished for it, but I cannot create one, as we all know.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am sure it must be.

Graham Stuart: The Leader of the House, in his reply to me, suggested that I had cost my right hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) her job as Chief Whip when, like him, I found myself embarrassed at the Dispatch Box because I was given an instruction. In fact, it came from No. 10 and told me that I must announce that, contrary to what had been said all day, the vote was—

Mr Speaker: Order. Sit down, Mr Stuart. You are continuing the debate, so we will leave it at that.

UK-Switzerland Enhanced Free Trade Agreement

1.23 pm

The Minister for Trade (Chris Bryant): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will update the House on the enhanced free trade agreement that was concluded yesterday between the United Kingdom and Switzerland. This is the sixth trade deal that the Government have secured over the last two years.

We already had an FTA with Switzerland, which was based on the 1972 EU-Switzerland agreement, but in keeping with many FTAs of that era, it was primarily focused on trade in goods. By contrast, this is the most significant trade agreement for services that the UK has concluded so far, and 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 especially plays to our strengths as a pre-eminent services superpower. It includes some of the strongest services commitments that we have ever secured, while creating opportunities in the eight core growth-driving sectors of our industrial strategy, including financial and professional services, life sciences and digital technologies.

Our trade strategy, published one year ago, underscored what everyone with an eye on trade already knew: that our

"services sectors are the most powerful engine of our growth and prosperity",

and that it was high time to pull services trade out of the margins of trade discussions. Some 83% of UK workers are employed in services, including through regional employers such as Capital Law in Cardiff and the Edinburgh-founded Skyscanner; large firms with multiple offices across the UK, such as Julius Baer, which has a regional office in Newcastle, and KPMG, which has offices in Leeds and elsewhere; and thousands of smaller firms across the country. We have worked hard to ensure that this deal really works for them.

Switzerland is already the UK's sixth largest services export market, and bilateral services trade was worth more than £30 billion last year. This agreement is estimated to increase UK services exports to Switzerland by £5.2 billion annually in the long run, while supporting jobs across the UK, including the 171,400 already supported by exports to Switzerland. On top of this, we know that Swiss-owned businesses employed around 150,000 people in the UK in 2024, and bilateral foreign direct investment stood at £87 billion at the end of 2024. The agreement we have reached ensures that job creation and investment will continue to grow as our bilateral trade grows.

The UK and Switzerland have agreed that future improvements to access in certain sectors are locked in—the first time that Switzerland has agreed to adopt this approach. It gives UK firms a more stable business environment, and greater confidence to plan and invest. The agreement permanently protects the rights of UK lawyers to advise on foreign and international law in Switzerland without requalifying. Additionally, it includes the most comprehensive digital chapter that Switzerland has agreed to in an FTA. Over 70% of UK-Swiss services trade is delivered digitally, so it was absolutely critical to us that we laid out provisions that supported the free flow of data while ensuring that privacy remained

protected, and I am glad to say that we have been successful. Our digital chapter modernises the digital trading environment through commitments on electronic contracts, signatures and invoicing, prevents customs duties on electronic transmissions, and restricts unjustified data localisation requirements, all of which will make digital trade easier and more appealing for businesses, whether they are based in Birmingham or Berne.

This FTA locks in the commitments of the UK-Swiss services mobility agreement, which was due to expire in 2029. That will protect an estimated £700 million in UK services exports, and allow British professionals to supply services in Switzerland for up to 90 days each year without a work permit. I should add that this is the first UK FTA to cover Gibraltar from day one, ensuring that Gibraltar's businesspeople will continue to be able to supply services to Switzerland for up to 90 days a year without a permit.

Perhaps the real power in this agreement is the statement of intent for future co-operation between our two nations. For example, we know that the UK and Switzerland are global leaders in life sciences. It is in both our nations' interests for our best and brightest to be able to work together, which is why we have included iron-clad intellectual property and data protection provisions. The outcomes of the deal will support the discovery and development of new medicines, and it does not change UK legislation or practice, maintaining the existing balance between supporting pharmaceutical innovation and the NHS's access to lower-cost generic medicines. The generics and biosimilar industry supports this deal, saying that it safeguards the NHS's access to affordable generic medicines.

The agreement establishes an innovation working group to bring together business, academia and the Government, with the goal of finding the biggest opportunities and challenges facing our generation. The group is designed to keep pace with emerging technologies and global conditions, which keeps our agreement focused on the future and helps both the UK and Switzerland to stay on the front foot in an ever-changing world. To that end, the agreement also strengthens our co-operation on climate change, development and gender equality.

This FTA is designed to evolve, survive and thrive over the long term. One of the key asks of UK businesses was to improve business mobility. Alongside the FTA, Switzerland has announced that UK nationals will soon be able to use e-gates at Swiss borders, in line with Schengen requirements, and they will be able to exit via e-gates at Zurich airport from as soon as the end of this year. Switzerland is also working towards allowing entry via e-gates, particularly at Zurich, Geneva and Basel airports, and will set out a timetable very shortly.

The agreement will benefit all nations and regions of the UK. It will support services firms—from major financial and professional services employers in London and Leeds, to specialist small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

My Department's focus now is preparing the treaty for signature and implementation, and we will of course update the House as soon as this can happen. I am immensely grateful to my counterpart, Frau Budliger, with whom I had several assertive conversations—that is an understatement—and to my officials, especially Rob Whiteway, James Clarke, and Georgia Taylor from my private office.

When it comes to trade, the primary role of Government is to pave the way for UK businesses by taking down barriers that prevent them from exporting their goods and services around the world. Of course, we also have to protect key sectors, and we will never compromise on animal welfare or food standards just to get a deal. This last year, this Government have made good on that responsibility. We secured the best deal with the USA of any country in the world. We took the India deal from signature to entry into force tomorrow—in record time. We secured a significant upgrade to our deal with the Republic of Korea. We concluded an agreement with the Gulf Co-operation Council worth £3.7 billion. We started discussions with China about a services agreement. We secured ratification of our membership of the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership with Canada and Mexico, and started accession talks with Uruguay, the United Arab Emirates, the Philippines and Indonesia. We are pursuing a new strategic partnership with the European Union.

These deals are all about building a stronger and more resilient UK economy. They will be felt up and down the land in enhanced job prospects and better pay. I was delighted to mark the conclusion of negotiations at KPMG with some of the graduates and apprentices there. Our decisive actions are helping to make a difference to young people's lives as they build their careers. They also prove that free trade can deliver the goods for British jobs and livelihoods, that the rules-based order is still in fine fettle, and that free and fair trade can enhance our lives.

In the end, an FTA is just a piece of paper unless businesses seize the opportunities it affords them. We will play our part in informing and supporting businesses to do that, but it is British entrepreneurs, risk takers, innovators and deal makers who will be the real heroes of this era of UK trade. For all those reasons, I commend this statement to the House.

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

1.32 pm

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

We Conservatives warmly welcome this excellent agreement and congratulate the Ministers and officials who delivered it. I was pleased, when I was the City Minister, to have been part of the team behind the forerunner, the Berne—[*Interruption.*] Would the Minister listen for a moment? The Berne financial services agreement with Switzerland was signed by the then Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Godalming and Ash (Sir Jeremy Hunt). That was one of our first ever post-Brexit agreements based on mutual recognition of each country's regimes, and Conservative Ministers, including my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Essex (Mrs Badenoch) and my hon. Friend the Member for Droitwich and Evesham (Nigel Huddleston), were involved in the commencement of the planning for the negotiation that we are discussing today. The benefits of this deal are what taking back control looks like in practice: British lawyers advising in Zurich without requalifying, British firms winning contracts that an EU customs union would have blocked, and British travellers enjoying e-gate access and lower roaming tariffs.

As the Minister said, this joins a growing number of such deals, including our accession to the CPTPP and agreements with Australia, New Zealand, the Gulf, India and the United States. This is Britain once again charting its way in the world, engaging directly with the leading or fastest-growing economies on the planet. Britain could strike this deal only because of our independent trade policy. Without that, the Government could never have launched the consultation this morning on deepening our trade relationships with Indonesia, the Philippines, the UAE and Uruguay—all countries with whom the UK should seek closer ties.

The next Conservative Government will go further and faster on trade. We support deeper trade agreements with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, following the recent agreement with the Gulf Co-operation Council, and we will seek a trade agreement with Mercosur. We will boost rather than cut the number of Department for Business and Trade boots on the ground in Asia, Africa and Latin America. We will reintroduce a revised investment visa for those seeking to create wealth and jobs here in the UK. As part of a "trade first" culture change in the Foreign Office, the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), and I have agreed to make ambassador appointments among leaders in business, the City and former Lord Mayors of London.

I gently point out one glaring omission in the Minister's otherwise very positive statement about this excellent enhanced Swiss free trade agreement. In nearly 1,400 words, he did not mention the words "Brexit benefit" once. That is a curious insight, since this deal exists only since and because we left the European Union. A nation inside the customs union cannot cut its tariffs on sparkling wine, win tariff-free access for British lamb, gain mutual recognition of professional qualifications, or secure better access to Swiss public procurement.

Finally, I look forward to hearing an unabashed welcome for the benefits that will flow to his Maidenhead constituents from the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mr Reynolds). Had his party's policy been in force, this agreement could not have been struck at all. The Liberal Democrats' settled ambition is to march Britain straight back into a customs union, turning it back into a rule-taking vassal state, with none of the freedoms that, for example, the Canadian Parliament enjoys. The hon. Gentleman's cheerleaders on the Liberal Democrat Benches would have legislated away every benefit that the Minister has described to this House.

We warmly welcome this deal—no ifs, no buts. It is a win for Britain, a win for growth and a win for friendship between our two great nations. I have been very generous in praising the Government today, and on what I hope is not, but may be, the Minister's final outing, I hope he will reciprocate by being honest with the country about why the deal was possible. I have just one question, and the interests of time a yes or no answer will suffice: does the Minister agree that, as a point of fact, it was only Brexit that made this agreement achievable?

Chris Bryant: It is an enormous delight to put a smile on the hon. Gentleman's face. It is such a rare outing to see a smile on his face that I feel my job is done—my work is done.

Andrew Griffith: Your legacy!

Chris Bryant: My legacy will be a smile on the hon. Gentleman's face. It was nice that he actually congratulated us. I think that is what he was doing. He said that was without any condition, but then he said it was really the Conservatives who started all of this business. It is exactly what he said about the GCC deal earlier this year, when he said that really all the work was done by them. But to be honest, it is not about where you start; it is about where you finish, and it is actually getting a deal over the line that is the difficult bit.

I was standing in Hyde Park at a Duran Duran concert, I think 10 days ago, when—[*Interruption.*] Wild boys, calm down! Frau Budliger rang me, and she wondered what was going on in the background. It was actually the Scissor Sisters, the act on beforehand. I was just thinking, “I don't know whether we want to dance or not,” because we had not been able to get all of this deal over the line yet.

The truth of the matter is that the last two weeks are nearly always the most difficult bit. Sometimes it is a degree of negotiating between different Departments, and I am enormously grateful to all my other colleagues in the Government who have made it possible to get this to the place where we are now. Indeed, I do not want to exaggerate, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Really? [*Laughter.*]

Chris Bryant: I do not think you are meant to take part in the conversation, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Andrew Griffith: Or deviate!

Chris Bryant: Or deviate. Or repeat!

I do not want to exaggerate, but this may be the most significant iconic moment for the UK and Switzerland since Sean Connery and Ursula Andress met one another in “Dr. No” back in 1962. [*Interruption*—no exaggeration at all, of any kind.

I am worried about one thing the shadow Minister said, which is about how he would appoint ambassadors. I would just say that appointing ambassadors in unusual circumstances has not gone very well for this Government, and I would not urge him to do it himself.

I did not use the term “Brexit dividend.” It is factually accurate that we would not have been able to have had these negotiations if we were still in the European Union. Of course I am 100% up for exploiting every opportunity we have, and that is precisely what we are doing and we have a pretty good record. Most of the FTAs agreed by the previous Government were basically cut and paste from EU FTAs into UK legislation, whereas we are making agreements that are a bit more bespoke. It is great to see the European Union following suit—for instance, in India. The hon. Gentleman makes a very fair point about Mercosur. I would like us to be able to start that process fairly soon. I think that will be a matter for the new team, whoever they may be, in a week's time.

But I would just say to the hon. Gentleman that the losses we have incurred by virtue of leaving the European Union are very, very dramatic. The single most important trade deal we could do at the moment would be with the European Union, not just to sort out a sanitary and

phytosanitary agreement but to provide what he used to promise day in, day out: frictionless trade with the EU, our single biggest trading partner. That is precisely what we have to secure.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on deal No. 6. A very warm thanks, on behalf of the Committee, to the hard-working officials in the Department for Business and Trade and to James Squire and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office team on the ground in Berne. We very much look forward to scrutinising the deal on behalf of Parliament, with a debate that will no doubt be triggered in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act period.

The Minister will know, though, that there has already been some controversy this morning, about which he could perhaps inform the House. This is, I think, the first free trade agreement to lock in exclusivity arrangements around intellectual property for pharmaceuticals. That is a precedent that the House should debate. Will he take this opportunity to put our minds at rest that the deal that he is commending to us today will not lead to higher NHS prices in future, and will not impair access to generic medicines?

Chris Bryant: I am very grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee; I look forward to seeing my right hon. Friend later today and then again tomorrow, in two different sessions. He is absolutely right that this is a very important deal. Of course, it is not just done by the politicians involved. The teams in our embassy in Switzerland and in our respective Departments—I include other Departments such as the Home Office, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and so on—are all part of the team that get a deal over the line.

My right hon. Friend makes an important point about intellectual property. Of course, that is frequently now a key part of any FTA, because we want to look at how we can ensure we are protecting UK IP. We are an IP superpower and that is a key part of any of our services negotiations, and certainly in digital trade as well. I can confirm that the deal will do no harm to the NHS—far from it. It will mean that our life sciences industry, working closely with the Swiss life sciences industry and pharmaceuticals, will be able to deliver groundbreaking new drugs and generics more quickly to NHS patients. I am not worried in any way, shape or form about the anxieties raised by some campaigning groups. I think they have abstracted from a couple of figures and ended up with the worst possible estimation of what might happen. That fear is misguided.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Mr Joshua Reynolds (Maidenhead) (LD): The Liberal Democrats want a closer, more sensible relationship with our European friends and neighbours, so there is plenty to welcome here. I congratulate the Minister and his team on being able to secure some of the things we

see today. Scrapping mobile roaming charges—charges that had to be changed when we left the European Union—will significantly boost support for consumers and the small businesses who trade across Europe.

The Minister is aware that the European Union is our biggest single trading partner in services. Some 37% of our services trade is with the EU, so repairing our relationship with the EU is the biggest single thing we can do to boost trade in our financial and professional services. I know the Minister agrees: when he was in front of the Select Committee recently, he told colleagues that if he had the choice, he would rejoin the European Union. It is disappointing that the Government have not moved more on the European Union and followed the Liberal Democrats' plan for a defence and growth partnership, cutting the red tape and barriers that British businesses face. According to TheCityUK, exports of financial services have declined by 5.9% since 2019, at least in part due to Brexit frictions.

I would like to ask the Minister a specific question in relation to e-gates. We welcome the news about the changes to e-gates but, given the serious risk of disruption with the entry and exit systems, will he tell the House when our constituents can expect the same clarity and certainty for airports across the European Union, so that we can really make a positive change?

Chris Bryant: Now, you see, the hon. Gentleman always has a smile on his face—every single day of the week. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith) has managed to keep it going for at least half an hour now, so that is a good thing.

The honest truth is that we all want to achieve the same thing: to increase our trade in services and goods across the European Union. It is a shocking sadness, I think, that 16,000 businesses in the UK have stopped exporting to the European Union. The figures for last year are actually slightly different from the figures that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mr Reynolds) gave. Our services exports to the EU rose by 7%, but our goods exports to Europe fell. He, like many other Members, will have heard concerns expressed by people who export small goods and are suddenly facing an additional charge that they did not previously have to pay, because of the *de minimis* rules being changed. They are also being changed by the United States of America, of course.

I want to achieve trade with the EU that is as frictionless as possible, and I will strive to do so as fast as we possibly can. I do not have personal responsibility for e-gates across the whole of Europe, so I am afraid the hon. Gentleman cannot hold me to account on that particular issue. On Switzerland, it is not as simple in Switzerland as it might be in some other countries, because some of these issues lie with cantonal Governments. I have worked very closely with Frau Budliger. She has made a lot of headway in trying to get us to a place where British business folk and others will be able to use e-gates, both in and out, in the very near future.

The hon. Gentleman is quite right to raise the issue of roaming. It is another issue where we need to finalise the details over the next few months, because it requires some changes in Switzerland in particular, but we have a very strong commitment to achieve that. I think most British people who travel to Switzerland will be very happy to see that.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend, but I want to ask about pharma in the light of the US-UK pharma deal. When I met academics yesterday, they expressed a concern that if we were to change the terms of the deal with the US, because of mounting costs and the cost to lives which are foreseen under that deal, it could have an impact on the deal that he has now signed. Can he give this House an assurance that we would not have to go back and renegotiate the deal with Switzerland, if we were to renegotiate the deal with the US?

Chris Bryant: No, there are no direct connections between the two. More importantly, I have read some of the commentary about our US deal on pharmaceuticals. I am really glad that we have a zero-tariff deal on pharmaceuticals. We were seeking to do two things that had not been addressed for a considerable period of time: first, to ensure that the big pharmaceutical companies based here in the UK remain here, because they provide jobs for lots of people in the UK; and secondly, to ensure that we did not end up with tariffs on our pharmaceuticals being sold into the United States. We have achieved both aims. Some of the commentary in the press suggests that lots more people are going to die, but that is simply abstracting from a single figure and presuming what the future financing of the NHS will be. That is a false, *reductio ad absurdum* position to adopt. I am very confident that the deal we have struck is a good one.

John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): As a member of the Business and Trade Committee, it is a delight to see the fruits of Brexit being brought home. Will the Minister confirm that the deal is not contingent on us taking Swiss courts as being superior to our own? We are not aligning with their rules on angular chocolate, for instance, and I know that the Swiss do not have a large fishing fleet, so there is no impact on our fishing waters. I am struggling to understand why we are bold with this deal, but so supine when it comes to the EU.

Chris Bryant: I am afraid the hon. Gentleman's argument is full of holes—thank you very much, I'm here all week. I should also point out to him that Toblerone is no longer Swiss; it is owned by an American company and is therefore not covered under Swiss rules, although it has had a complicated negotiation process. We are not supine in our relationship with the EU; we are absolutely determined to get a good deal. The worst deal that could ever have been written was secured by his Government.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): If the Swiss negotiator was asking, "Is There Something I Should Know?", it is that the shadow Minister was boasting about Brexit. He mentioned the mutual recognition of qualifications, but by leaving the European Union we have lost benefits for British workers worth 20 times anything that could be compensated even by the admirable deal the Minister has negotiated with Switzerland, and the contrast with the British Ministers in this Government, who are looking to the future to the new relationships that we need to build to help British businesses. That is what today's trade deal is about.

I very much welcome the deal that the Minister has struck, because it means that we can learn from the Swiss, who have the benefit of doing business both with

[Ms Stella Creasy]

us and with the European Union, have access to the single market for goods and have a managed migration scheme that replaces freedom of movement. Rather than saving a prayer for the future of the Tory party, could the Minister tell us what he thinks this teaches us for our future relationship with the European Union?

Chris Bryant: I detected the Duran Duran quotes there. It is important that we are able to secure mutual recognition of professional standards; otherwise, we do not have full business mobility. That is one of the key things we are trying to sort out with the European Union at the moment. I see that the Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), is also sitting on the Front Bench at the moment—that is one of the issues that we have been addressing. Whether it is accountancy, legal services, financial services or whatever else it may be, we need to be able to secure that. I would just add one thing: to quote one of the greatest philosophers of our era,

“When the going gets tough, the tough reinvent”,

which is precisely what we are doing. That, of course, was RuPaul.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): I welcome this deal, and I agreed entirely with the Minister when he said that when it comes to trade, the primary role of Government is to pave the way for UK businesses by taking down the barriers that prevent them from exporting their goods and services around the world—if only there were not so many domestic barriers being put up that were thwarting British business.

The Minister is quoted in the press as saying that the negotiations around this deal descended into “shouting...across the table”. Will he tell the House where most of the compromise fell when that shouting stopped—was it on our side of the negotiations, or the Swiss side? Will he also say more could have been in this deal after that shouting?

Chris Bryant: A gentleman does not tell. We did have forthright conversations—as, for that matter, I did on the deal with the Gulf Co-operation Council, with both my Saudi and Emirati counterparts. The last bits end up with a degree of haggling, and it has to be done Minister to Minister because we have a bit more political leeway to be able to deliver the goods. We are both very happy with the deal that we have struck. It is true, though, that we had some forthright conversations.

Chris Bloore (Redditch) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on securing this deal, which is the sixth from his Department—not bad for a Government made up of public sector workers, as derided by those on the Opposition Front Bench. I was interested in what he said in his statement about this being a statement of intent for future co-operation. I hope that he stays in his position under the new Prime Minister. If he does, what sort of future co-operation would he like to see?

Chris Bryant: I note that the No. 1 song at the moment in Switzerland is “Dai Dai” by Shakira and Burna Boy, which I thought was about two Welshmen.

One of the lines in the song is “Dream a little higher”, and I think that is what we need to do. There are a lot of British businesses and Swiss businesses that fit alongside each other in a perfect way, and we therefore need to address these issues face to face.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Obviously I welcome this deal, but the Minister recently told CNBC’s Ritika Gupta that he believed that this country’s “historic destiny” was to rejoin the European Union. Last December, the Deputy Prime Minister said that we should rejoin the customs union. Do either of those things represent Government policy?

Chris Bryant: Government policy is represented by our manifesto commitments, but a boy is allowed to dream.

Ben Coleman (Chelsea and Fulham) (Lab): I join the City of London and the British Chambers of Commerce in welcoming this deal—I’m smiling too, Minister! I am sure that the large number of my residents in Chelsea and Fulham who work in financial services will be delighted, too, and that they will have a lot of questions to ask. I wonder whether I could invite the Minister to come and have a meeting with them in my constituency to sell and make quite clear to them the opportunities, both in the City and across the country, that this deal now presents.

Chris Bryant: I can wholeheartedly commit the Minister for Trade to organising precisely such a meeting in the near future. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the financial services industry, some of which is based in the City of London, will benefit from this deal, but it is actually about the whole of the United Kingdom—as I was trying to lay out, there are financial services and tech industries across the whole of the UK that will benefit from this deal, whether that is in Glasgow, across Scotland, in Leeds, Manchester or wherever it may be. That is an important part of what we are trying to achieve.

Lara Bird (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): I apologise in advance to those on the Opposition Front Bench, because I, too, am going to ask a question about Brexit. A study last month showed that the Scottish economy has been hit to the tune of £30 billion every single year because of Brexit, so deals like this—as much as I congratulate the Minister on securing them—do very little to comfort Scottish businesses, especially those in the food, drink and agriculture sectors. So although I welcome some of the additional benefits that will come from this deal for Scottish agricultural industries, there is still a deep feeling among Scottish farmers that they have become collateral damage and are constantly overlooked as the UK Government scramble to secure trade deals in a post-Brexit world. What does the Minister have to say to my farming constituents who feel that they have been overlooked in new trade deals?

Chris Bryant: Well, it would have been difficult for us to secure more in this deal, because 99% of all tariffs on goods are at zero between the UK and Switzerland already, so there was not more to achieve in that. I would simply point to the fact that the India deal enters into force tomorrow, immediately cutting tariffs on Scotch whisky from 150% to 75%, and then further

to 40%, which has been welcomed enormously in Scotland. I would also say that the financial services industry and a whole series of tech businesses across not just the mainland of Scotland, but the islands, will stand to benefit from this deal, because we are in the main a services country.

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement and for his great work in securing the deal. I particularly welcome the fact that the call he received in Hyde Park while the Scissor Sisters were playing has enabled him to cut red tape in our trade relationship with Switzerland. The acid test for the six free trade agreements that have been achieved since 2024, including this deal, is whether they make my constituents in Dartford and constituents right across the country better off. I hope that the Minister is able to confirm that will be the case.

Chris Bryant: Packaged together, all these trade deals represent a significant additional set of opportunities for British businesses. I have said this before, but I think it bears repeating: only one in 10 British businesses exports. Something like twice that number of French businesses export, and it is three times that number in Germany—the numbers are not precisely correct, and it is difficult to compare, but it is not far off. That is a problem for the UK, so we need to get much better at exporting. Our Department's job, once we have all these trade agreements signed, is to try to persuade and enable people to understand how they can do that. Now, we have some funds—the Ricardo fund, for instance, is available for people to take down trade and other barriers where they see them. We also try to make financial support available for people to take advantage of these opportunities across the whole country, including in the south-west.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for his statement. There are strong commitments to all of the United Kingdom. In particular, I welcome the focus on—and, indeed, the bonus for—the high-tech industries in Northern Ireland, which will enable our businesses to grow even more. Does the Minister agree that this is an excellent example of the benefit of being an integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? As I often say in this House, we are always better together, and here is the proof.

Chris Bryant: One of the great things about Northern Ireland, of course, is that it gets the double benefit of being both in the European single market and in the UK's single market. That has undoubted benefits. If I could point to one tiny area where having left the European Union has caused us an enormous headache this year, it would be steel. It seems bizarre, in the end, that the UK and Europe, which are not one another's problem for steel production—other countries in the world are, where there is over-production and unfair subsidies—should have to negotiate access between one another. It would make much more sense if we were able to achieve some kind of shared deal.

As this is perhaps my last appearance as Minister for Trade—[*Interruption.*] Well, who knows? I just want to thank my private office. As every single Minister will know, our private office is the only way that we ever get anything done. I want to say an enormous thank you to everybody in my team, so to Alisha, Josh, Josh—there are two Joshes, senior and junior—Lola, Georgia and Tarek, I say an enormous thank you. We would not have got any of these deals over the line if it had not been for them.

BILLS PRESENTED

DATA PUBLICATION AND QUALITY (IMMIGRATION, NATIONALITY AND COUNTRY OF BIRTH) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Katie Lam, supported by Sarah Bool, Bradley Thomas, Lewis Cocking, Neil O'Brien, Mr Andrew Snowden, Mr Peter Bedford, Jack Rankin, Claire Coutinho, Chris Philp, Matt Vickers and Harriet Cross, presented a Bill to make provision about the collection and publication of data on immigration status, nationality and country of birth of certain persons, including relating to users of certain public services, claimants of certain benefits, the prison population, and arrests; to require that such data is published at least once per calendar year; to require the Secretary of State to review the quality and consistency of any such data collected and published; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 116).

NEURODIVERGENCE (SCREENING AND TEACHER TRAINING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Adam Dance, supported by Ed Davey, Munira Wilson, James MacCleary, Vikki Slade, Manuela Perteghella, Clive Jones, Freddie van Mierlo and Caroline Voaden, presented a Bill to make provision about screening for neurodivergence in children; to make provision about teacher training relating to neurodivergence; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 January 2027, and to be printed (Bill 117).

SHORT-TERM LET ACCOMMODATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Rachael Maskell, supported by Neil Duncan-Jordan, Euan Stainbank, Lizzi Collinge, Markus Campbell-Savours, Alison Hume, Andy Slaughter and Tim Farron, presented a Bill to make provision for the licensing of short-term let accommodation; to make provision about the marketing of short-term let accommodation; to make provision about planning permission in respect of short-term let accommodation; to require the Secretary of State to publish guidance about the management of short-term let accommodation; to make provision about small business rates relief for short-term let accommodation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September, and to be printed (Bill 118).

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Amendment)

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

2.1 pm

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to omit section 37 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; to provide that the Sovereign, the Royal Family, the Royal Household, the Royal Archives and the Duchies of Cornwall and Lancaster are public authorities for the purposes of that Act; and for connected purposes.

I am grateful to have the chance to introduce this Bill alongside colleagues from parties across the House. I am very grateful for the breadth of support across many parties for the measures that it contains; that shows how much Members of the House recognise the importance of transparency and accountability in public office.

Today the people of France celebrate Bastille Day, to commemorate when they were driven to revolt because they were fed up of an aloof regime that they had no way of holding to account. One particular member of the royal family was travelling to shady destinations to meet secretly with foreign men of extreme wealth for reasons that would have shocked the common people if they had known. There is no record we can find to say whether or not Marie Antoinette spent three days visiting any of these men to tell them that she could not be their friend any more. Meanwhile, the elected representatives of the country—the Third Estate—were being blocked from having any say in the behaviour of the French royal family or even being able to investigate what members like that were up to.

To be clear, at this stage I do not believe that we in this place should be calling for an insurrection, as the Third Estate did then. Instead, the Bill I present today will go some way to adding a brick of transparency to the wall of secrecy and privilege that surrounds our own monarchy nearly 250 years later. The Bill also has support from the Campaign for Freedom of Information, Republic, the general committee of Labour International, and the National Union of Journalists.

There are two questions that we must ask in connection with the royal family and freedom of information. Under our constitution, which needs modernising in so many ways, are the royal family public servants or not? If they are, is it reasonable for one set of public servants to have such a blanket exemption from the rules that all others have to follow?

As MPs and Ministers, we are expected to follow the Nolan principles of public life, as are all public bodies and servants. The fifth Nolan principle is openness. It says:

“Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.”

Clearly, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 was created in that spirit. But despite meeting the criteria of a public body, and despite the royal family unarguably being public servants, the monarchy has its own special exemption carved out in the Act. Can that in any way be right? Some right hon. and hon. Members may be concerned that the Bill is not perfectly reasonable in what it asks for, but I assure them that it is. It is about

providing the bare minimum of accountability to the royal family and closing loopholes that I think we all agree should not be carved out just for members of one privileged lineage.

The Bill will address section 37 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which gives a more or less blanket exemption to communications between relevant authorities and members of the broader royal family, not just the King. That provision too often prevents communications from being released under freedom of information requests to other public authorities. In practice, the section 37 exemption has meant that perfectly reasonable questions about trips on the RAF's royal flight have been refused, including the question of who flew with Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor when he was not only a member of the royal family but employed as our trade envoy.

We now have a former Prime Minister pressing for information about whether Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor used taxpayer-funded jets or RAF bases to meet the paedophile and trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. Countless other questions along those lines should have been answered long ago.

Andrew Lownie, who wrote the biography of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, has seen the exemption at work time and again. He told me last week:

“It's a scandal the royal family are exempt from the Freedom of Information Act—this was never intended to be an absolute exemption, and in practice the public interest test that should be applied has never come down in favour of disclosure, in my experience from scores of requests over a decade.”

This is really just one arbitrary and absurd rule for the rich and powerful and another for the rest of us. My Bill would remove section 37 from the Freedom of Information Act completely.

The second part of my Bill would add a number of relevant institutions to the list of public authorities in the 2000 Act. That is because none of the main royal institutions is listed in the Act, so freedom of information requests cannot be made of them directly. My Bill proposes to fix that by adding the royal family, the royal household, the Royal Archives, and the ex-officio royal duchies of Cornwall and Lancaster to the list of public authorities covered by the Act. We should be able to ask questions to those undoubtedly public authorities.

Currently listed in schedule 1 of the 2000 Act are such institutions as the Advisory Board on the Registration of Homoeopathic Products, the British Wool Marketing Board, the Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses and the Government Hospitality Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine. The Act is very comprehensive, because we rightly expect transparency from the whole range of public bodies that owe us the Nolan duty of openness in exchange for our funding, patronage and respect—and we should of the royal family too.

All the usual exemptions would still apply—those relating to junior staff and national security, for example—but my Bill would go further. With reasonable measures similar to those that protect MPs from disclosures that might pose a danger to us from a security perspective, my Bill will allow for non-disclosure where data such as future travel details appear.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the uses and abuses of the secrecy currently afforded to the Royal Archives and why that must be included in schedule 1 to the 2000 Act. Under the Public Records Act 1958, UK

Government Departments must identify records of historic interest and release all possible content to the National Archives. Many closed Government records have been made public this way through the 30-year rule—now the 20-year rule. MI5 now declassifies and releases historical records to the National Archives after 50 years, but the royal family operates with no such rule around its own archives.

The Royal Archives operates broadly reign by reign, but nearly four years after the death of Queen Elizabeth II, still no historical records since 1952 can currently be accessed from the archives. Even when records are unlocked within the archives, as those from previous monarchs have been, it is still left to the archive gatekeepers to decide which historians can be given the keys—in private and without the public interest tests of the Freedom of Information Act.

History should not be curated, but the preservation of royal image—even many years after a monarch's death—seems to take precedence over academic inquiry. We need all historians, not just those within a certain circle, to have access to these records so that we can have a truthful account of our own history.

This sounds like a Bill only for republicans, but I believe that monarchists should be its most fervent supporters. No one has damaged the reputation of the monarchy in this country and abroad more than Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, who was able to carry on his nefarious activities in the comfort of knowing that he was protected by this shroud of secrecy. Yes, we found him out many years later and took away his offices, but the sunlight of Nolan is not only disinfectant in retrospect, but also preventive. If he had had to be open, would he have been as bad? We will never know.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Siân Berry, Ian Byrne, Rachael Maskell, Tom Gordon, Pete Wishart, Kirsty Blackman, Claire Hanna, Jeremy Corbyn, Dr Ellie Chowns, Hannah Spencer, Liz Saville Roberts and David Davis present the Bill.

Siân Berry accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 November, and to be printed (Bill 119).

Public Office (Accountability) Bill

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): In the circumstances following the late change to today's business, Mr Speaker has selected amendments tabled after what would have been the usual deadline.

New Clause 8

INFORMATION CONTAINED IN PUBLIC RECORDS

“(1) This section applies to information contained in a record that is transferred to a relevant authority under—

- (a) the Public Records Act 1958,
- (b) the Public Records (Scotland) Act 1937,
- (c) the Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923, or
- (d) any other enactment or arrangement under which records are transferred to a relevant authority for their care and preservation.

(2) For the purposes of this Chapter, the information is not to be treated as information that is held by—

- (a) the relevant authority, or
- (b) persons who work for the authority.

(3) Each of the following is a ‘relevant authority’—

- (a) the Public Record Office;
- (b) the Keeper of Public Records;
- (c) an authority responsible for records deposited at a place of deposit appointed under section 4 of the Public Records Act 1958;
- (d) the Keeper of the Records of Scotland;
- (e) the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland;
- (f) any other person with responsibility for the care and preservation of records under arrangements made with an authority within any of paragraphs (a) to (e).

(4) In this section references to a record being ‘transferred’ to a relevant authority include references to it being transmitted to, or accepted or acquired by, the authority.”—(Catherine Atkinson.)

This new clause provides for an exemption from the duty of candour and assistance for bodies such as the National Archives so far as relating to their statutory responsibilities of holding public records.

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Catherine Atkinson): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

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

Government new clause 9.

New clause 1—*Post-legislative assessment of the legal duty of candour for public authorities and public officials*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 12 months of the passing of this Act, publish a report into—

- (a) the impact of the Act's provisions on increasing public confidence that public authorities' internal processes are fit for purpose in identifying and investigating failures when they first arise following a major incident.
- (b) the role of the standing public advocate in assessing public authorities' responses to affected individuals and relatives of bereaved victims following a major incident or where there is a major public concern that public authorities may not be acting in the best interests of those affected by a major incident.

(2) The report must assess—

- (a) extending the public advocate's powers to facilitate the gathering of information from those people affected by a major incident to support official inquiries and investigations to help ensure that all public authorities and officials are acting in accordance with the duty of candour set out in this Act.
- (b) the case for facilitating a mechanism whereby the public advocate can instigate an independent panel to collate evidence and information following a major incident to support the oversight of public authorities and officials' responses to major incidents.
- (c) the costs of establishing independent panels as compared to non-statutory inquiries, or statutory inquiries under the Inquiries Act 2005 in line with paragraph (b).

(3) The Secretary of State must lay a copy of the report before Parliament."

New clause 2—Offence of wilfully destroying information or records relevant to an inquiry or investigation—

"(1) A public authority or public official commits an offence if—

- (a) they deliberately destroy relevant information or records relevant to an inquiry, investigation, or inquest;
- (b) they know that, or are reckless as to whether, the information is relevant to or required by an inquiry, investigation, or inquest.

(2) A public official who commits an offence under this section is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction in England and Wales, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding the general limit in a magistrates' court or a fine (or both);
- (b) on summary conviction in Scotland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both);
- (c) on summary conviction in Northern Ireland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both);
- (d) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine (or both)."

This new clause introduces an offence for wilfully destroying relevant records after a major incident that may lead to an inquiry or inquest.

New clause 3—Monitoring compliance with duties under the Act—

"(1) The Secretary of State must commission and publish annually an independent report which monitors public authorities' compliance with their duties under the Act.

(2) The report must assess—

- (a) public authorities' record-keeping, disclosures and responses to inquiries and investigations;
- (b) the effectiveness of enforcement and sanctions provisions in the Act in helping to ensure that public authorities and public officials perform their functions in line with the duty of candour in their dealings with inquiries and investigations; and
- (c) the effectiveness of the provisions in the Act for supporting persons, including public officials, making protected disclosures and for reporting wrongdoings to an inquiry or investigation following a major incident.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay a copy of each report before both Houses of Parliament.

(4) The first report must be laid within the period of 12 months of the passing of this Act.

(5) Each subsequent report must be laid annually beginning with the day on which the previous report was laid."

This new clause requires the Secretary of State to commission and publish annually an independent report with the purpose of providing an oversight mechanism to monitor compliance with duties under the Act.

New clause 4—Conduct of public authorities and access to legal aid for seriously injured survivors who are participating in inquests or inquiries—

"(1) Legal aid must be made available, without a means test, to seriously injured survivors who are participating in inquests or inquiries where there are reasonable grounds for believing the matter under investigation relates to the conduct of public authorities tasked with carrying out public functions, or public officials working for bodies in a public capacity, in connection with the discharge of their public duties.

(2) The Secretary of State must, within three months of the Act receiving Royal Assent, make regulations to—

- (a) add civil legal services to Part 1 of Schedule 1 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 in connection with proceedings relating to seriously injured survivors who are participating in inquests or inquiries as under subsection (1);
- (b) amend the Civil Legal Aid (Merits Criteria) Regulations 2013 (S.I. 2013/104) for the purposes of providing criteria for a determination for legal representation in respect of cases under subsection (1).

(3) This section comes into force on the day on which this Act is passed."

This new clause would extend civil legal aid to seriously injured survivors who are participating in inquests or inquiries where the conduct of public bodies or public officials is in question.

New clause 5—Review of the merits of establishing a national oversight mechanism for ensuring candour and transparency of public authorities in respect of inquests and inquiries—

"The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passing of this Act, carry out a review to determine the merits of establishing an independent oversight mechanism to help ensure candour, transparency and follow up with respect to the actions of a public authority arising from the conclusions and recommendations of inquests and inquiries."

New clause 6—Monitoring the standards of ethical conduct of officials in response to the recommendations from inquests and inquiries—

"In discharging its duty under section 9(1) of this Act a public authority must monitor the standards of officials in response to the recommendations from inquests and inquiries to ensure they are acting with candour, transparency and frankness."

New clause 7—Public interest—

"(1) Within six months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must define in regulations what constitutes the "public interest" for the purposes of section 1(1)(b).

(2) Regulations under subsection (1) may not be made unless a draft has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament."

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to define public interest for the purposes of this Act by regulations.

New clause 10—Expected standards of conduct and duty of NHS boards to report medical malpractice or serious wrongdoings—

"(1) This section sets out a duty for boards of NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts in England to adopt codes of conduct mandating reporting of concerns in relation to systemic medical malpractice or serious wrongdoings relating to patient safety within an NHS body.

(2) A member of the board of directors of an NHS trust or an NHS foundation trust in England must report any evidence or reports they have seen of systemic medical malpractice or serious wrongdoings relating to patient safety within the trust to—

- (a) the Care Quality Commission,
- (b) the Department of Health and Social Care, and
- (c) the Health Services Safety Investigations Body.

(3) The board of directors of an NHS trust or NHS foundation trust in England has a collective duty to—

- (a) refer the trust to the Care Quality Commission, and
- (b) alert the Department of Health and Social Care and the Health Services Safety Investigations Body, if staff employed by, or acting on behalf of, the trust raise concerns of systemic medical malpractice or serious wrongdoings relating to patient safety.

(4) In discharging its duties under subsection (1), an NHS trust board must, in particular—

- (a) adopt a code of conduct which sets standards expected of members who serve on the boards of an NHS trust or NHS foundation trust, and
- (b) ensure that the code of conduct is published.

(5) An NHS trust's code of conduct must in particular—

- (a) require members of a board of an NHS trust or NHS foundation trust to act in accordance with the duty of candour in reporting concerns relating to systemic medical malpractice or serious wrongdoings relating to patient safety within a trust,
- (b) require members of the trust's board to promote ethical conduct, candour, transparency and frankness within all parts of the NHS trust or foundation trust for which they work,
- (c) contain information about the steps that a person who works for an NHS trust should take if they believe that a member of a trust's board has failed to act in accordance with the code of conduct.

(6) In this section—

'systemic medical malpractice' means an action or omission in the provision of health care that falls below the expected standard of care and indicates a widespread, patterned, or recurring failure within the systems, processes, or governance of the trust.

'wrongdoing' includes abuse of authority, perverting the course of justice, neglect of duty and the exploitation of vulnerable people."

This new clause sets a duty for boards of NHS trusts and foundation trusts in England to adopt codes of conduct mandating reporting of concerns in relation to systemic medical malpractice or serious wrongdoings relating to patient safety within a trust.

New clause 11—Duty of candour and enforcement of standards of ethical conduct in DHSC—

"(1) In discharging its duties under section 9 of this Act, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), must, in particular—

- (a) set out the steps DHSC will take to ensure that legal services provided to NHS bodies and other relevant health-related organisations are consistent with the statutory duty of candour and the principles of openness, transparency and learning following patient safety incidents.
- (b) set out which oversight body is responsible for ensuring the standards set out in DHSC code of ethical conduct are adhered to and enforced.
- (c) set out provisions to allow a relevant oversight body to examine on its own initiative suspected serious or systemic breaches of DHSC's code of ethical conduct.
- (d) set out a mechanism for ensuring that any breaches of DHSC's code of ethical conduct are recorded and that proper data is kept and published that records the extent to which complaints have been made regarding its ethical conduct and their outcome."

This new clause would set out additional requirements for the DHSC in respect of the statutory requirements it must fulfil under section 9 of this Act.

Amendment 13, in clause 1, page 2, line 1, after "public authorities" insert

“, Members of both Houses of Parliament”

This amendment is connected to Amendment 14.

Government amendments 151 and 152.

Amendment 1, in clause 2, page 2, line 35, at end insert—

“(ca) where the authority or official has relevant records, including digital messages and communication, retain and disclose those records;”

This amendment would add the disclosure of digital messages and communication to the assistance that a public authority or official must provide to an inquiry or investigation.

Amendment 3, page 2, line 39, at end insert—

“(f) ensure all relevant public officials can safely disclose information to an inquiry, investigation or inquest.”

This amendment requires public authorities or officials who are assisting an inquiry, investigation or inquest to demonstrate that they have taken steps to ensure relevant persons can safely disclose information relevant to an investigation.

Amendment 150, page 2, line 39, at end insert—

“(4A) Where in exercise of its duties under subsections (1) to (4) a public authority or public official intends to provide information to the inquiry or investigation, and that information includes information about a person who has or may have been caused harm in the incident under inquiry or investigation it must, subject to subsection (4B) below, provide to that person, or if deceased, the person administering their estate, such part of that information as is relevant to the nature and cause of the harm they have or may have sustained.

(4B) The obligation described in subsection (4A) above does not apply if the chair of the inquiry or investigation directs, either on application or their own motion, that the subsection should not apply, or where the chair directs that subsection (4A) shall apply subject to conditions specified in the direction, the subsection shall apply subject to those conditions.”

This amendment would require a public authority or public official to provide information to a person, or the relatives of that person, who was affected by an incident under investigation subject to the chair of an inquiry or investigation directing otherwise.

Government amendment 153.

Amendment 4, in clause 4, page 4, line 19, after “authority” insert

“or any sub-contractor in any chain of provision to a service provider”

This amendment ensures that any person involved in providing a service to a service provider which was subcontracted will fall under the duty to comply with the duty of candour and assistance to an inquiry or investigation.

Amendment 5, in clause 5, page 5, line 21, at end insert—

“(1A) Where an offence under this section is committed by—

- (a) a public authority, or
- (b) a body corporate with relevant public responsibility under section 4 of this Act,

the chief officer or chief executive (as well as the public authority or body corporate) is guilty of the offence and liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.”

This amendment would place a personal responsibility on the chief officer or chief executive of a public authority or a corporate body with public responsibility under Clause 4 for an offence of failing to comply with the duty of candour and assistance.

Government amendments 26, 28 and 154 to 157.

Amendment 20, in clause 6, page 6, line 3, at end insert—

“(2A) Where an obligation to give notification would have arisen under section 2(3), save for the exemptions in subsection (2), the head of the relevant intelligence service must provide a written notification to the Intelligence and Security Committee of the UK Parliament summarising the acts that may be relevant to an inquiry or investigation.”

This amendment aims to provide accountability for intelligence services and their operations in relation to the duty of candour and its exemptions from them.

Amendment 199, page 6, line 3, at end insert—

“(2A) Where, in compliance with the obligation under section 2(4), a person who works for an intelligence service, a military intelligence service, the National Crime Agency, Counter Terrorism Command, or one of the armed forces, would be required to provide security or intelligence information, the obligation applies in respect of that information only if the head of the service or agency consents to it being provided.

(2B) The head of an intelligence service, the head of military intelligence service, the head of the National Crime Agency, the head of Counter Terrorism Policing UK, or the head of one of the armed forces may withhold consent under subsection (2A) only if it appears to the head that either of the following conditions is met.

(2C) The first condition is that it is necessary for consent to be withheld in the interests of national security or otherwise for the purposes of the proper exercise of the functions of the service.

(2D) The second condition is that the information would not be of assistance to the inquiry or investigation in meeting its objectives.

(2E) Where the head of an intelligence service, the head of military intelligence service, the head of the National Crime Agency, the head of Counter Terrorism Policing UK, or the head of one of the armed forces withholds consent under subsection (2A), the head must notify the person leading the inquiry or investigation of that fact.”

This amendment ensures that the duty of candour and assistance may require a person who works for an intelligence service, military intelligence, the NCA, Counter Terrorism Command or the armed forces to provide security or intelligence information with the consent of the head of their service.

Government amendments 32 and 33, and 158 to 168.

Amendment 2, in clause 9, page 8, line 3, after “work” insert

“including the retention and disclosure of digital records including messages relevant to their public functions”

This amendment ensures that digital messages and records are added to the duty of candour in relation to inquiries and inquests.

Government amendment 37.

Amendment 6, page 8, line 18, after “disclosures” insert

“and to whom such disclosures should be made;

(ba) how a person making a protected disclosure under paragraph (b) is protected;

(bb) a list of prescribed people and bodies to whom a potential whistleblower may speak to in confidence about a relevant concern.”

This amendment would require that a public authority’s code of ethical conduct includes information on whom a person can make a protected disclosure to and how that person would be protected.

Amendment 7, page 8, line 23, leave out subsection (6) and insert—

“(6) The Secretary of State must introduce a standard

template for ethical code of conduct for completion by public authorities which satisfies the requirements in this section and which may be added to by public authorities to include information specific to their organisation or function.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to introduce a standard template to ensure a consistent and high standard approach to completion of code of ethical conduct documentation across public authorities.

Government amendments 38 and 39.

Amendment 14, in clause 11, page 9, line 22, after “public authority” insert

“, Member of either House of Parliament”

This amendment expands the offence of misleading the public to apply to Members of either House of Parliament.

Amendment 15, page 9, line 23, after “authority” insert “, Member”.

This amendment is connected to Amendment 14.

Amendment 25, page 9, line 26, at end insert—

“(1A) An act under subsection (1)(a) includes the provision of misleading information to a person acting for the purposes of journalism (as described in subsection (4)(b)) carried out via a press statement, media briefing, or other communication intended for dissemination by a recognised news publisher.”

This amendment would ensure that the offence of misleading the public would include a public authority or public official providing misleading information to a recognised news publisher.

Amendment 16, page 9, line 38, after “authority” insert

“, Member of either House of Parliament”

This amendment is connected to Amendment 14.

Government amendment 40.

Amendment 8, page 10, line 5, leave out paragraph (b).

Amendment 17, page 10, line 8, at end insert

“, or

(c) in furtherance of the privileges of either House of Parliament.”

This amendment is connected to Amendments 13 to 16 and 18. It provides that the offence of misleading the public does not apply to any act done in furtherance of the privileges of either House of Parliament.

Government amendments 41 and 42.

Amendment 19, page 10, line 23, at end insert—

“(7A) A prosecution for an offence under this section shall not be instituted except by or with the consent of the Attorney General.”

This amendment requires the Attorney General to consent to the prosecution of anyone for the offence of misleading the public.

Amendment 18, page 10, line 37, at end insert—

“(8A) A certificate signed by the appropriate authority (as defined in section 34 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000) certifying that an act is done in furtherance of the privileges of either House of Parliament shall be conclusive evidence of that fact.”

This amendment is connected to Amendments 13 to 17.

Government amendments 43 to 51.

Amendment 12, in clause 15, page 13, line 7, at end insert—

“(2A) References in this Part to a person who ‘holds public office’ include references to an individual who was, but is no longer, such an office holder, in respect of conduct occurring while they held such office.”

This amendment would ensure that public officials would still be liable for misconduct during their time in public office if they resign or retire.

Government amendments 52 to 69.

Amendment 11, in clause 23, page 22, line 20, at end insert—

“(6) For the purposes of this Act, any duty or liability imposed on a public official or a person holding public office applies in respect of any act or omission occurring while the person held that office or performed those functions, notwithstanding that the person has subsequently resigned, retired, or otherwise ceased to hold that office or perform those functions.”

This amendment would ensure that the duties and liabilities in this Bill apply to public officials during their time in public office even if they have since resigned, retired or ceased to hold a public office.

Government amendments 70 and 71.

Amendment 9, in clause 25, page 22, line 30, leave out subsections (1) to (8) and insert—

“This Act shall come into force on Royal Assent, save for sections 9, 10 and 18, which will come into force six months thereafter.”

This amendment clarifies that the Act should come into force straightaway except for those sections which require the provision of codes or guidance.

Government amendments 72, 76 and 169 to 178.

Amendment 10, in schedule 1, page 29, line 9, after “an inquiry” insert

“, independent panel or review established by a Minister”

This amendment ensures that the statutory duty of candour and assistance extends automatically to independent panels and reviews established by Ministers of the Crown.

Amendment 146, page 29, line 9, after “an inquiry” insert

“, independent panel, review established by a Minister, or independent panel or review established by a local authority.”

This amendment ensures that the statutory duty of candour and assistance extends automatically to independent panels and reviews established by Ministers of the Crown and by local authorities.

Government amendments 78 to 80, 91, 93 to 97, and 179 to 198.

Amendment 149, in schedule 2, page 47, line 22, at end insert—

“(4A) Notwithstanding regulations made under subparagraph (4) a statutory water company holding an appointment under Chapter I of Part II of the Water Industry Act 1991 as a water undertaker (company) must meet the obligations set out in Chapter 2 of Part 2 of this Act for public functions in connection with their duties to—

- (a) provide water supply within their area;
- (b) supply water that is wholesome for domestic or food production purposes;
- (c) provide, improve, and extend a system of public sewers and to treat sewage within their area;
- (d) comply with water quality regulations;
- (e) ensure long-term resilience of water supply and sewage networks against climate change, population growth, and consumer behaviour changes;
- (f) maintain their assets to prevent sewage from polluting watercourses; and
- (g) reduce sewage pollution.”

This amendment would place privatised water companies in England and Wales under the obligations of Chapter 2 of Part 2 on the face of the Bill for the functions for which they are responsible of a public nature.

Government amendments 98 to 142.

Catherine Atkinson: It is an absolute privilege to bring the Bill back to the House on Report. I know that Members across the House have long supported it and have been waiting for its return.

At its heart, this legislation is about what people should expect from the state when the worst happens: honesty, transparency and a system that stands with victims and families, not against them. For too long, that has not been the experience of too many people in this country; bereaved and traumatised families have been forced into exhausting, heartbreaking battles to uncover the truth. Institutions have closed ranks and ordinary people have been left to fight the full weight of the state at the very moment when they most needed its support. The Bill seeks to put an end to that. It will drive the culture change that the country so desperately needs so that when public bodies fail, the response is candour, not cover-up.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South and Walkden) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Catherine Atkinson: I am going to make some progress, but I will give way.

It is essential that there is accountability, not denial, so that those affected get the support they need, not obstruction. We often refer to this Bill as the Hillsborough law. Without the determination of the Hillsborough families, we would not be debating this legislation today. Their determination has been driven by a selfless belief that no other families should ever go through the ordeal that they have suffered. But sadly their story is not unique: we have seen scandal after scandal and cover-up after cover-up, where families have had to fight for the truth and their trust in the state to be forthcoming and truthful has been shattered.

The Bill began with the Hillsborough families, but in the last decade their fight has become a movement, with a coalition of families and campaigns and those searching for the truth; the Bill belongs to every one of them. I am sure that the House joins me in thanking every single family member and campaigner from the Hillsborough families, the Manchester Arena families, Grenfell, the Post Office scandal and many other campaign groups, as well as many other individual cases that fall outside those campaigns.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

Catherine Atkinson: I will make some progress, and then I will take interventions.

Many have graciously—often at huge personal and emotional cost—shared their experiences with us to shape the Bill. The changes that it brings forward are so needed. It is thanks to their campaigning, perseverance and willingness to work with us to find solutions that the Bill is back before the House today. The House and the country owe them a debt of gratitude. I know that some of them are in the Gallery with us today—thank you.

Before I turn to the Government amendments, I must pay tribute to the work of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones). I was on the Bill Committee, and I know how hard she worked to get us to this point. I also thank the Attorney

[Catherine Atkinson]

General, the Minister for the Cabinet Office and colleagues across Government for coming together to resolve these complex issues, so that we could bring the Bill back before the House today.

From the start, we have been clear that this is a Bill for the families concerned. That means listening to their views, and ensuring that the legislation delivers and has their confidence. It was in that spirit that the Manchester Arena families raised their concerns about the duty of candour and how it would apply to the intelligence services; I thank them for doing so. It is right that when a concern is raised, we pause, take stock and, where necessary, change course. The process has not been easy, and it has taken some time, but we had to get this right, and assess all possible implications and unintended risks resulting from how the duty would work in practice. I thank Pete Weatherby KC, the Intelligence and Security Committee and experts across our national security community, campaigners and Members of both Houses.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am proud to have sponsored the original proposal, promoted by the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne), and I salute the survivors and the victims' families. I am glad that the UK Government have listened to them, and that the Bill reflects the level of accountability required of our public authorities. Plaid Cymru stands in firm solidarity with the Hillsborough families and other families in their long campaign for justice. Considering the Labour Government's reset next week, will the Minister assure me that this law will be implemented in partnership with devolved Governments, and that constructive engagement with Wales and elsewhere will be ensured throughout the legislative process?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I know that this is a highly sensitive debate, but interventions must be short and to the point. Lots of colleagues want to get in on the debate.

Catherine Atkinson: I thank the right hon. Member for her intervention. She has my assurance that we are clear that the Bill needs to apply across the United Kingdom, and we are working with devolved nations to ensure that happens.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): The Minister is making a passionate and important speech about a long-overdue piece of legislation. Freddie Scappaticci was the agent known as Stakeknife in the IRA. He was involved in lots of murders, but the Government have yet to unmask him as Scappaticci. Will the Bill put an end to the ridiculous position we are in by doing that? Would the Bill have stopped MI5 doing everything in its power to prevent the public from finding out about his crimes?

Catherine Atkinson: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. We are seeking a full culture change, and are trying to prevent any kind of attitude of covering things up. I am happy to meet him further to discuss that specific case.

All the work that has been undertaken has enabled us to find a solution that provides full application of the duty, while protecting national security, which is absolutely essential.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Catherine Atkinson: I am going to make some progress, and then I will take interventions again.

The amendments before the House ensure that the duty of candour and assistance applies to all individual intelligence officers, while establishing secure procedures for the disclosure of sensitive information. First, the Bill as introduced did not allow compliance directions to be issued to individual intelligence officers; rather, they were issued to the organisation that officers worked for. There were concerns that this effectively amounted to a carve-out for the intelligence services. Our amendments allow compliance directions to be issued to individual intelligence officers, so that the duty applies consistently across the public sector.

Secondly, the amendments establish secure models for the disclosure of sensitive national information. The Government's objective has always been clear—it has been to ensure that where information can be disclosed, it should be disclosed, while ensuring that proper protections are in place. We have therefore adopted the approach proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne), which is to apply existing safeguards to the new provisions. When an individual working for a national security body receives a request for protected information, they must pass that information to the head of the authority, not directly to the inquiry or investigation. The head of the authority is then responsible for sharing it with the inquiry or investigation, subject to all existing arrangements for protecting information in law and practice. Restrictions on disclosure can still be sought, where necessary. Existing arrangements for secure inquiries remain available, and established practices, such as the use of security-vetted counsel, can continue.

Under these arrangements, national security bodies will now be under the same duty to notify as other public authorities, but we have a limited provision to ensure that the right public authority is making the notification, and that this happens in an orderly and secure manner. While the Government support removing this exemption, nothing in this Bill, and none of its practical effects, change our position, which is that national security and the safety of our citizens and public servants must never be compromised.

Vikki Slade: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way on the matter of the safety of our citizens. I have been contacted over the last couple of years by the family of Major Anthony Hornby MBE, who was a victim of the Chinook crash. Today, the Ministry of Defence is in the High Court, fighting for them not to have rights under the duty of candour. Will the Minister step in and ensure that the victims of the Chinook crash are given the same dignity and respect as others, and that their case can come under a full public investigation?

Catherine Atkinson: I am very happy to meet the hon. Member and others, specifically in relation to the Ministry of Defence, and to give reassurance on how this can work and be done safely.

Yasmin Qureshi: Will the Minister give way on the point about the duty of candour?

Catherine Atkinson: If it is specifically in relation to security services, and to security at the moment—

Yasmin Qureshi: It is on the duty of candour.

Catherine Atkinson: If I can just wait—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Minister, either you take an intervention or do not. Please do not continue a conversation when Members are seated.

Catherine Atkinson: It is important to stress that nothing in this Bill, and nothing about its practical effect, changes our position in relation to national security. Many in our public services work in sensitive roles, and revealing their identity could put them or others at risk. The Bill does not require anyone to breach any other law. It expressly states that it does not override existing legislation, including the Official Secrets Act 1989. The Bill contains a specific protection from the requirement to notify for employees of the intelligence services and other select bodies, where they cannot come forward.

However, there may be other situations where notifying may carry a similar risk. I want to make it clear that a public servant does not have to come forward until it is safe to do so, but steps must be taken without delay to ensure that a notification can be made safely. The Bill requires notification to be made as soon as reasonably practicable, after the authority or official becomes aware of the investigation. The explanatory notes will clarify that it would not be considered reasonably practicable if that meant a person was at risk of harm in making that notification. In those rare circumstances, the official must contact their current or former employer, or another third party if necessary, so that arrangements can be made with the inquiry or investigation for a notification to be made safely. Those actions must be taken without delay. Those leading inquiries and inquests must act reasonably, and authorities have a responsibility to protect their current and former employees.

We will also set out guidance to accompany the duty. It will explain what individuals should do, and will make it clear that public authorities and investigations must work together to put arrangements in place for authorities and individuals to meet their duties while protecting personal safety and national security. If the investigation cannot provide those means, existing legal processes already provide ways to convert it into a form of investigation that can.

Now that we have the right model for applying the duty in a national security context, we are extending that model to Defence Intelligence, the National Crime Agency and Counter Terrorism Policing, where the same considerations about the sensitivity of their information and work apply. Clause 8 includes them in the list of relevant public authorities for the purpose of clause 6. We have also made several amendments to ensure that the compliance directions operate as intended. The explanatory notes for schedule 1 clarify that directions should be made only where the person leading the investigation believes that a compliance direction would genuinely assist, and that they are not, for example, obliged to issue multiple directions to individuals who may all have the same information.

We have also made a small change to clause 2 to make it clear that we are not inviting individuals to speculate on what may or may not be relevant. It is for the inquiry or investigation to define relevance through its terms of reference or equivalent. Finally, we have amended schedule 1 to require the investigation lead to consult the head of the public authority before issuing a compliance direction to an individual employee where national security is concerned. This aligns the new duty process with existing practice, in which public authorities and chairs of inquiries work together to determine how protected information can be provided safely. This will assist inquiries or investigations in practice because, given the way national security bodies operate, they will not usually know which individuals hold the relevant information, or how to receive it without creating unnecessary risks.

The Bill also includes a power to extend the duty of candour to other types of investigations. We intend to make broad use of this power, and will bring forward secondary legislation, following consultation with the relevant sectors and investigatory bodies. I can confirm that that will extend the duty to investigations into police misconduct; to serious healthcare incidents, including major maternity reviews, such as the Leeds and Sussex maternity services reviews; to serious health and safety investigations; and to key ombudsman investigations, transforming the ability of these investigations to get to the truth.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I pay tribute to everyone who has pushed and cajoled the Government to enable us to get to this stage. The Minister mentioned secondary legislation. One of the key areas mentioned in the Grenfell inquiry by Grenfell United and Justice for Grenfell was a national oversight mechanism to make sure that the Government are not marking their own homework when it comes to recommendations from public inquiries. Will that be included in the consultation?

Catherine Atkinson: It is absolutely right that recommendations are tracked and that we ensure there is a clear way of giving everyone confidence that recommendations will be implemented. The Cabinet Office is doing a significant piece of work to ensure that that is put in place, and both the Cabinet Office and I will be happy to meet my hon. Friend to share with her the work that is happening, both on recommendations from inquiries and on the prevention of future deaths and inquests.

2.30 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): I appreciate the way in which the Minister has responded on the national oversight mechanism, but if this is to have teeth, and if it is to deal with both inquiries and inquests, do we not need a separate public body? It is a substantial piece of work.

Catherine Atkinson: The Government have already taken steps to improve transparency in response to inquiry recommendations, including launching the new gov.uk dashboards, which demonstrate progress in delivering accepted inquiry recommendations. The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is currently considering how the implementation of recommendations resulting from future public inquiries should be scrutinised, and we welcome that.

Chris Coghlan (Dorking and Horley) (LD): I have given the Government evidence that hundreds of children with special educational needs and disabilities are avoidably killing themselves because of public authority negligence and misconduct, including my constituent Jen Bridges-Chalkley. Does the Minister agree that the first step in tackling this problem is knowing how many of these suicides there are? We cannot do that unless we have a national oversight mechanism and a preventable death tracker that measure it.

Catherine Atkinson: The Office of the Chief Coroner has continued work to improve access to prevention of future deaths reports, while the Government seek to strengthen arrangements for responding to concerns raised through them, including better and more strategic use of technology. In addition to the work that the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is undertaking, there is clearly work to be done in relation to inquests and in relation to inquiries and their recommendations, and I look forward to working on that.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): Do the Minister and the Government agree with the principle that an independent body should oversee the Government's performance in responding to inquiry recommendations? Is that the way we are going to go forwards? The way that the Government—not just this one, but others in the past—have responded to recommendations from inquiries has, to say the least, required improvement for a very long time. Can we be assured that independence will be introduced into the scrutiny process?

Catherine Atkinson: It is clear that there needs to be public confidence about what happens to any recommendations, and this is therefore an area of work that is being considered. I am happy to ensure that my hon. Friend is kept up to date with the work as it continues.

I will now make some progress. Transforming the ability of investigations to get to the truth is essential, and I hope that the House recognises how far we have come. On Second Reading, the Prime Minister said that we would only strengthen this Bill, while affirming that we would always protect national security. The amendments I have mentioned do both.

I now turn to the Government's remaining amendments. On legal aid, families attending inquests have for too long found themselves, in their darkest moments, facing public authorities represented by large legal teams while they have been left to navigate complex proceedings without legal representation. The Bill finally addresses that imbalance through the largest expansion of legal aid in a generation, granting access to non-means-tested legal aid to families at any inquest where a public authority is an interested person.

We have tabled amendments to ensure that this new entitlement operates as intended—first, to make it clear that legal aid will also be available when an individual is named as an interested person on behalf of a public authority or Government Department and, secondly, to simplify how the legal aid system operates so that it is more effective and easier to manage for providers and the Legal Aid Agency. The amendments mean that the expansion will operate efficiently from the outset.

Maria Eagle (Liverpool Garston) (Lab): I think there is widespread welcome in the House for the expansion of legal aid, but does the Minister agree that allowing advocacy for each family only to the first person who manages to apply for it might cause some problems subsequent to disasters like Hillsborough? What will she do to try to improve the mechanism for who gets the legal aid?

Catherine Atkinson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the time she has spent with me in raising this and other issues. Under our proposed expansion, multiple family members will be able to receive non-means-tested legal help to prepare for an inquest hearing where a public authority is an interested person, and that includes help with preparing documents to send to the inquest. Increasing the number of legal representatives when it comes to advocacy is an area of some concern. Inquests are fact-finding proceedings designed to determine the circumstances of a death, and we would hope that, in general, one legally aided advocate would be sufficient to support each family through an inquest hearing. However, we have heard her concerns, and I hope for her assistance in continuing to look at the issue as the Bill progresses. *[Interruption.]*

Sarah Russell (Congleton) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Catherine Atkinson: I will—my hon. Friend assists me in finding my place in my notes again, so I thank her.

Sarah Russell: My hon. Friend is most welcome. I am grateful for all the amendments that the Government have tabled, but I remain concerned that the current civil legal aid rate is £40 an hour. She has referred to security-vetted counsel. Is it likely that security-vetted counsel will be prepared to work for £40 an hour, when those of us who have done legal aid work know that, frankly, half the work that we do is unremunerated?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Before the Minister responds, I just point out that many colleagues wish to contribute to the debate, so I hope she is coming to her conclusion soon.

Catherine Atkinson: My hon. Friend has been a passionate advocate in relation to legally aided work, and I know that she will take every opportunity to raise concerns about the rates. The amendments mean that the expansion will operate efficiently from the outset, giving bereaved families the support that they need while avoiding delay.

Let me turn to the amendment relating to archivists. They play an important role in preserving historical records, but do not account for the actions within them, so we have tabled Government new clause 8 to ensure that public record officers and keepers of public records are not subject to the duty of candour in relation to their record-keeping duties.

We have worked closely with the devolved Governments on the Bill, and I am grateful for their co-operation and collaboration. We have tabled amendments to ensure that the offence of misleading the public and the two statutory misconduct in public office offences apply on

a UK-wide basis. Those are amendments 40 to 42 and 70, and new clause 9 and amendments 44 to 51 respectively. At the request of the Scottish Government, we have also extended access to legal aid in Scotland for fatal accident inquiries where the state is represented. That will include a power for regulations to establish detailed criteria, which will be agreed by the Scottish Parliament.

Before I close, let me address concerns that have been raised about implementation. The Government are well aware that the Bill is long overdue. Families and victims rightly deserve no further delay, but this is about cultural change, and change of such breadth and depth cannot be achieved by legislation alone. Some measures can come into force quickly; others depend on guidance and systems being in place to ensure that they work as intended. We are therefore stress-testing the earliest possible commencement points for each measure. We will update the House as soon as possible and publish a clear timeline for implementation.

We are, as we have been throughout, absolutely committed to working with the families and other stakeholders to ensure that the Bill delivers real change. Everyone should be able to expect honesty from the state when the worst happens. They should expect a system that helps them establish the truth, rather than forcing them to fight for it. That is the purpose of this Bill.

Yasmin Qureshi: You are probably aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the fact that I have chaired the all-party parliamentary group on Primodos for the last 14 years. The Minister may well be aware that earlier in the Bill's consideration I asked for reassurance that independent panels established by Ministers would be covered, such as the expert working group report on Primodos, which was set up by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency as part of the Department of Health and Social Care. Can the Minister point to where that can be found in the Bill and, if not, will reassurances be given through secondary legislation that those panels are covered by this legislation?

Catherine Atkinson: The Bill allows a Minister to extend the duty and allows the flexibility to apply it to reviews where it would be most beneficial. I know that my hon. Friend has campaigned long on this point, and I would be happy to talk to her about how that takes place.

In conclusion, the Bill is about restoring trust between the public and the state, ensuring that when public bodies fail, they respond with openness rather than defensiveness and with support rather than obstruction. Above all, it is a testament to the families who have, despite every setback, courageously campaigned for change and their determination to ensure that no other families ever again suffer as they have. I know the whole House will join me in paying tribute to their extraordinary bravery. I commend the Government amendments to the House.

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

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): I was nine years old at the time of the Hillsborough tragedy, and I remember listening to the news of the terrible events on the radio,

sitting behind my parents in the car. I was 32 when, while working in the Home Office, I received a copy of the report by the Hillsborough independent panel, which detailed the full horror of that terrible tragedy. In my time in the Home Office I saw many intelligence reports and papers about serious crimes and terror plots, but the Hillsborough report was undoubtedly the most shocking thing I read.

More than two decades passed between the tragedy itself and that moment of truth and transparency, and we can only imagine the pain felt by the victims and their families who fought for years for justice. I pay tribute to them and would like to associate myself with the remarks made by the Minister. They have known grief and suffering none of us would ever wish to experience.

This is not a debate about the need for transparency. I am proud to have played a modest part in bringing that about when I worked in the Home Office. Nor is this a debate about the need for accountability. I have spent many years in different roles making the case for better police accountability and, indeed, working with those who lead and work in our security and intelligence agencies. They themselves would be the first to say—though their work is by definition often secret—that they need to be accountable. They are only citizens of this country, just like everyone else. I am sure that everyone here today agrees on the need for accountability.

The question is, how should this accountability work? Today we are considering one specific issue among several: is the proposal to extend the duty of candour to the intelligence agencies, the military, military intelligence, Counter Terrorism Policing and the National Crime Agency, which all necessarily work to some degree in secret, appropriate? Does it deliver accountability, and does it allow these sensitive services to do their work to the best of their abilities? Our job today is to consider that question and that question alone.

Of course, we may be informed by the trauma, pain and emotion that come from terrible tragedies—tragedies that have, in some instances, been compounded by undue secrecy and even outright dishonesty from the state itself—but it is our job in this place to get the law right, for if we do not, we may find ourselves back here in future debating another tragedy that could have been stopped had it not been for the unintended consequences of what we are debating today.

2.45 pm

It is our job in the House of Commons to get this right. It is also the Government's job to put their proposed law to us in a timely, considered and responsible manner, but that is not what Ministers have done. The Prime Minister adopted the Hillsborough law as policy in 2022. He put it in his manifesto in 2024, promising that it would be one of his first acts in office, and announced its introduction at the Labour party conference in 2025. But he never worked out how the Bill should apply to the intelligence services and others who work to ensure our national security. The Bill was introduced without a carry-over motion, which meant the Government believed that it would pass during the last Session of Parliament. Then it had to be carried over when they ran out of time, and now we are being asked to approve another motion to extend the carry-over motion because the Bill has taken so long.

We were supposed to give the Bill its Report stage and Third Reading in January, but it was pulled at the last minute because campaigners told the Government that they were unhappy with its provisions relating to the intelligence agencies. Now we have the Report stage, and Members are being asked to give the Bill's new provisions scrutiny—all with less than 24 hours' notice. Those who had been briefed on the contents of the Bill found out over the last day or two that what is now being proposed bears no resemblance to what they had been told to expect. It is, I am afraid, a shambles, and the reason it is a shambles is that the Government originally made contradictory promises to the campaigners for this law and to the intelligence agencies and others who work to keep us safe. They knew they had created this problem, which is why they pulled the Bill in January, but now they pretend there is no problem.

Desperate for a legacy and to claim the credit before the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) takes over, the Prime Minister has chosen; the Government have watered down the protections they specifically proposed back in January for MI5, MI6 and GCHQ. Today they pretend that those protections are not necessary, but in January, Ministers believed that they were vital. Those protections would have allowed those in charge of the agencies to determine whether secret information could be revealed to an investigation or an inquiry, giving them the power to withhold information if it was considered unnecessary for the investigation or inquiry, or if it was necessary for national security to keep the information secret.

Our security and intelligence agencies, as with soldiers and others such as those working in counter-terrorism policing and the National Crime Agency, all necessarily deal in secrets. They have to protect their sources, methods and capabilities. They have to protect information provided to them by agencies from allied countries, which are equally concerned with protecting their sources, methods, capabilities and, in some cases, live operations. But now this Bill takes decisions about which secrets should be shared over their heads, and gives that responsibility to those leading investigations and inquiries. These people may be non-experts, potentially lacking understanding of serious national security issues. That could lead to intelligence that should, for good reasons, remain secret being published, undermining the way in which the intelligence agencies and others work.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): The shadow Secretary of State will know, given his background working in the Home Office, that a duty of candour is not the same as the duty to disclose sensitive information. The two should not be conflated, and he should not be doing so on the Floor of the House.

Nick Timothy: I am confused by that intervention from the hon. Lady, who was the Minister in charge of this Bill. The argument I am making is consistent with the position she brought to the House in January, only to back down when it became controversial.

As I was saying, this could lead to intelligence that should, for good reasons, remain secret being published, which undermines the way the intelligence agencies and others work. We know this is a matter of grave concern for the agencies, the military and those in law enforcement because they have told us that. The Government know this, because the same people have told Ministers, and

we know that the Government accepted this, because that was why they tabled the amendment in January, which they have since dropped.

Allied military and intelligence partners—most notably, the US and other Five Eyes partners—will look at what the Government are doing today and question what can be done to protect them and their methods. The Justice Secretary is once again not here today.

Derek Twigg (Widnes and Halewood) (Lab): Could the hon. Member point to current legislation that has a gap and does not give the protection to the intelligence services that we all wish to see?

Nick Timothy: I am not sure I follow the hon. Member's question. If he wants to repeat it more clearly, I will happily listen.

Derek Twigg: The hon. Member is saying that the intelligence services are not protected under the current legislation. Could he say why?

Nick Timothy: The point is that this is a new duty, which is backed by criminal sanction, and that is why it is different from the status quo.

As I was saying, the Justice Secretary is a Privy Counsellor. He is the Deputy Prime Minister. He was once the Foreign Secretary—the man to whom MI6 and GCHQ were accountable. He knows that these sources of intelligence from allies are essential. They support our national interest, protect our way of life and save the lives of innocent people. Neither he nor the Minister can, hand on heart, stand here today and say that they know for sure that this Bill does not endanger that intelligence. Nobody can say that, because this Bill will change the behaviour, decisions and actions of those we ask to keep us safe, because it might change the terms of the relationships with our allies, and because we cannot anticipate the decisions made by individual heads of future investigations and inquiries.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that chairs of inquiries and inquests already have the power to hold closed sessions in private if they are looking at information that is sensitive or potentially poses a risk to our national security? That already exists, and the measures in the Bill do not impact that at all—it is already done on a daily basis in inquiries.

Nick Timothy: What the hon. Lady says is not entirely relevant to this proposition. This is about the provision of information to particular investigations and inquiries, and we do not know—indeed, we cannot know—the identities of the people who lead those investigations and inquiries. That is one of the reasons why this is such a step into the dark.

Yasmin Qureshi: I used to be a prosecutor before coming to this place. We were able to find perfectly good ways of dealing with confidential sources of information—informants and others. There are procedures already in place for that.

Nick Timothy: We are sent here to scrutinise legislation. That is what we are doing. We have talked to people in the intelligence agencies, the police and others who are very concerned about this. The concerns that I am

expressing were shared by Ministers themselves, which is why the amendment we are proposing today reflects the amendment that the Government themselves brought to the House in January.

Mr Andrew Snowden (Fylde) (Con): The interventions and the shadow Secretary of State's responses are indicative of what he said earlier: we should not be discussing something as technically complex as this, which could have wide-reaching ramifications, with 24 hours' notice and without any opportunity to have a proper discussion and raise these points.

Nick Timothy: My hon. Friend is exactly right. The Prime Minister said this was going to be one of his first acts as Prime Minister; it turns out it is going to be his final act as Prime Minister. He is only doing it by the skin of his teeth, because he is presenting a proposal to the House that none of us got to see even this weekend, and those who had been drawn into the consultation process and had been privately consulted say that this bears no relation at all to what they have been shown, even very recently. The Government are clearly doing this on the hoof, and it is very worrying.

It is no exaggeration to say that some of those people who may be appointed to lead investigations and inquiries might be influenced or pressured by those whose purpose is the destruction of the British state and British sovereignty itself.

Sarah Russell (Congleton) (Lab): The people who lead these inquiries are leading public figures and have usually held significant judicial office. Is the hon. Member honestly suggesting that they are going to be successfully pressured by people who want to destroy the British state?

Nick Timothy: I am tempted to say that the hon. Lady should have a conversation with the Attorney General, who used to prosecute British soldiers and was still appointed to one of the highest offices in the land.

Irish republicans, Islamist extremists, useful idiots deployed by Putin's Russia—they will all see the opportunity in this law, as we know they have seen the opportunity in examples of lawfare fought elsewhere, including Northern Ireland. These are known unknowns, but there are also unknown unknowns. *[Interruption.]* There is an additional risk that the security services will be tied up in court cases, thanks to differing interpretations of the legislation, or that the scope of the Bill and the information that must be disclosed will be widened over time. I can hear sighs and complaints from Government Members, but they do not seem to understand that new laws—especially when they are to be taken in balance with existing laws—are tested in the courts, and their interpretation widens. That is a fact, and it is one of the concerns expressed by the intelligence agencies, the police and others. If Government Members think they are above listening to those people, I am very sorry about that.

There are questions, too, about the role of investigations and inquiries set up by the devolved Governments, including in Northern Ireland. I was alarmed by the Minister's earlier answer to a question about the need to reveal information about intelligence agency sources in that context. These are the reasons that my party proposes an amendment, informed in part by the Government's own proposed amendment back in January, to give control of secret material back to service leaders, who

are rightly then accountable to elected Ministers, in not only the intelligence services but the armed forces, the National Crime Agency and counter-terrorism policing.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): One of the hon. Gentleman's former colleagues went to Downing Street just a month ago with a letter that says he believes he was misled by his own Department when he was the Secretary of State for Defence, so why on earth is the hon. Gentleman arguing this particular case? If Defence Secretaries are misled by their Departments, I do not really understand his faith in leaders of intelligence services and others not being able to hide the truth purely to defend their own Departments.

Nick Timothy: I think the hon. Lady, whether it is by design or by mistake, misunderstands my point. Of course, there should be accountability and transparency, and there are many ways in which we can do that, but there are ways of doing it that do not jeopardise the operations of the most sensitive organisations in the country by revealing their sources, their methods and their technological capabilities.

There are also serious flaws in the proposals to create a new duty to prevent death or serious injury and the new crime of misleading the public. Senior police officers are concerned that the new duty will have a chilling effect on operations. Police officers may be deterred from taking vital split-second decisions to give chase or to restrain, for fear of being sued or charged, placing their careers and livelihoods in jeopardy. Those employed in other parts of the public sector, such as the welfare system or the health service, might also be affected. These measures also risk snarling up the police and others in time-consuming and costly litigation.

There is also a serious risk that the new crime of misleading the public could stifle legitimate political disagreement and debate, criminalise honest mistakes, or punish people for making statements that we only later learn are wrong when the facts change. That is why a lock on such prosecutions, with a requirement for the Attorney General to approve them, is absolutely essential, and we invite hon. Members to support our amendment to ensure that this evening.

3 pm

No one denies that there have been tragedies, abuses and cover-ups in the past—I have worked to expose some of them myself. Official cover-ups are always completely unacceptable, but where matters of national security and safety are at stake, responsibility for sensitive information must remain with operational leaders who are accountable to their elected bosses. That is something the Government once accepted. As I have said, we can have a serious discussion about the ways in which the accountability of agencies and others can be improved, and I would be happy to talk to Ministers in a responsible cross-party manner about my own thoughts, based on my own experience. But what the Government propose today does not get close to getting the balance right between transparency and accountability on one hand, and the necessarily secret work that is done to keep us safe on the other.

To seek to make major changes to laws affecting the safety and security of our citizens in the dying days and hours of a premiership, and without sufficient thought or scrutiny, is irresponsible. It is not leadership; it is

reckless. The first duty of any Government is to place the safety and security of the British people first—above politics, above pressure, and above the hopes of a short-lived Prime Minister looking for a legacy. That is why, if the Government do not listen to us today, we will make the same argument in the other place. They should take responsibility and they should listen.

Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): I rise to support new clauses 5 and 6, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter). I welcome the Prime Minister's remarks, and I am relieved that the Government have listened, so that the duty of candour will apply in full to members of the security services, and the Bill will finally reach the statute book.

I pay tribute to all those who have fought so long and so hard for this Bill, including the families, the Hillsborough Law Now campaign, and my fellow Merseyside MPs, in particular my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle) and the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne). I also thank Pete Weatherby KC, Elkan Abrahamson, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham), who introduced the first Hillsborough law Bill in 2017, after addressing the 20th anniversary in 2009 when he was Culture Secretary.

I was stood on the Kop that day, when a lone voice shouted out "Justice", and it then turned into a chorus of voices that was the catalyst for the Hillsborough independent panel. The report of the Independent Office for Police Conduct in December recounted once again the horrifying events that took place, and the disgraceful attempt to blame the victims and hide the truth, as well as the appalling response to the report from South Yorkshire Police Federation. It showed exactly why this legislation is so desperately needed, and why new clauses 5 and 6 are so important.

In the 2017 Manchester Arena attack, MI5 was found by a public inquiry not to have given an accurate picture of the key intelligence that it held on the suicide bomber who carried out the attack. New clause 6 would mandate that the duty of candour and assistance applies to the intelligence services as it does to other public authorities. However, it establishes safeguards for sensitive information, and adjusts individual reporting obligations for intelligence personnel, routing candour requirements through agency record-keeping arrangements and the head of the organisation. New clause 7 would require the Secretary of State to commission and publish an independent report annually. That would serve as a formal oversight mechanism to monitor compliance with the statutory duties outlined in the Bill.

The passage of the Bill has been too long delayed, and we have finally reached this point only because of the strength and bravery of the families of the 97 who died as a result of what happened on 15 April 1989. I am particularly thinking today of my constituents Keith McGrath, who died aged just 17, and Andrew Devine, who was 22 when he suffered horrendous injuries that day, and who died as a result of them in 2021 aged 55, after being cared for devotedly in the years after the disaster by his family, in particular his parents.

The families of the 97 who died have continued to fight for accountability and justice, despite the years of official denials, and the deliberate attempt to hide the

truth of what occurred that day. They have fought for a Hillsborough law worthy of the memory of the 97, but not just for them, which shows their decency, resilience, and wider sense of public spirit. They refused to accept legislation that would have allowed an exemption for the security services because of their concern for others who have suffered injustice: the families of victims and survivors of the Manchester Arena bombing, the Grenfell Tower fire, nuclear test veterans, the Post Office Horizon scandal, and so many other tragedies where it has taken far too long for the truth to emerge.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston said in her intervention, there are still points to address. For example, the Bill does not provide for full equity of arms, funding, and legal resources for public authorities and bereaved families. Nevertheless, it is important that the Bill will finally pass into law before the summer recess. The families of all those who died or were injured at Hillsborough should not have had to wait 37 years for this legislation. They have been cruelly denied accountability and justice, but they have fought with incredible courage to ensure that in future other families will never have to fight for decades, as they have had to fight for the truth to come to light. This is their day, and I pay tribute to them once again. Justice for the 97.

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

Jess Brown-Fuller: I wish to speak to the amendments and new clauses tabled in my name on behalf of my party. Up and down the country, those who have been failed by state institutions, unheard and ignored for years, will today be relieved that this hurdle has been cleared and the Hillsborough law can finally progress. I pay tribute to those campaigners, many of whom are with us in the Gallery, for their courage and perseverance through years of campaigning, and for never saying, "That'll do", and instead making sure that the Hillsborough law was delivered in full.

This is known affectionately as the Hillsborough law, but it represents many victims and their loved ones. Be it the Post Office scandal, the Manchester Arena attack, the contaminated blood scandal, Grenfell Tower, nuclear weapons testing veterans, the pelvic mesh scandal, LGBT veterans, or any of the many others, those individuals have stood up for the voiceless and demanded change. These are scandals in which countless individuals have lost their lives or livelihoods, or suffered life-changing injuries.

Liz Jarvis (Eastleigh) (LD): My constituent Gary is one of the victims of the infected blood scandal. He was a pupil at Treloar's College, and 120 boys from Treloar's were given contaminated blood. Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to those boys who have fought so hard for justice, and does she agree that it has taken far too long?

Jess Brown-Fuller: My hon. Friend has been a tireless campaigner on behalf of her constituents and the victims of the contaminated blood scandal, and she is right to highlight how long it has taken to get here. I commend the Government for ensuring that we eventually got to this point.

These scandals have been uncovered despite the best efforts of public institutions to keep them buried. Institutions that should have been transparent and accountable instead used public money to protect their reputations and deflect blame. Every single victim deserved better. The efforts of campaigners are what have brought us to the point at which we can begin to level the playing field and address the imbalance between the power of the state and that of the ordinary individual. That is why we Liberal Democrats have, at every stage, welcomed the provisions in the Bill, but it was clear at the beginning of this year that there were major gaps in relation to the carve-out for the security services that needed to be addressed.

Campaigners rightly pointed to the role that the intelligence services have played in the past in covering up mistakes and failing to take accountability. Last week there were reports that MI5 had lied in court about Agent X, who had violently abused his partner. Likewise, last year we had the Stakeknife inquiry—Operation Kenova—which raised serious questions about the running of, and collusion with, British informants, while once again highlighting the immense difficulties of obtaining information from the security services. It is clear that these organisations have at times suffered from the same protectionist, inward-looking faults that other public organisations have suffered from. It would have been completely unacceptable for there to have been a carve-out, especially considering that mechanisms already exist to allow for information with national security implications to be heard behind closed doors.

The breakthrough announced over the weekend is welcomed by the Liberal Democrats and will come as a relief to all those wanting to see this Bill progress. I commend Members on the Government Front Bench who secured it, and those no longer there, particularly the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), who worked so hard to get the legislation to the place it is today. I know from her contributions in debates, her willingness and openness to meet me and Liberal Democrat colleagues to hear our concerns, and her engagement with campaign organisations and families, that she has fought to deliver the Hillsborough law as it was intended by those involved in the campaign.

The Bill Committee took place eight months ago, so it was fun going through all the notes to remind myself exactly what was said. I pay tribute to hon. Members from across the House who scrutinised the legislation, including my hon. Friends the Members for Cheadle (Mr Morrison) and for Wells and Mendip Hills (Tessa Munt). I know they sought to ensure that victims and their loved ones remained at the centre of the Bill and that their concerns regarding the drafting were heard. We have worked alongside them to ensure that no stone has been left unturned in seeking to secure the best possible outcomes in this legislation. Our amendments are all aimed at tightening the gaps that we can see in the legislation.

First, there is the importance of whistleblowers, who, in many of the tragedies mentioned today, have provided vital information at great personal risk for the public good. The Liberal Democrats have long called for stronger whistleblowing protections to ensure that wrongdoing within organisations and public bodies is swiftly exposed and brought to justice. Amendment 3 ensures that public authorities involved in an inquiry or investigation

demonstrate that they have taken steps to ensure that individuals can safely disclose information relevant to that investigation.

Amendment 6 would require that a public authority's code of ethical conduct includes information about to whom a person can make a protected disclosure and how that person will be protected. The Minister talked about additional guidance being provided with the legislation, so will she, when she sums up, set out whether there will be an expectation that that will include how to make a protected disclosure? We would have liked this Bill to go further on whistleblower protection, but much of what we proposed was considered out of scope for the Bill. I urge the Government and the new Administration to look more widely at what can be done to protect those who attempt to expose wrongdoing in the future.

A statutory duty of candour in the NHS has existed since 2014, yet we know that there remains a culture of retiring or firing staff who dare to speak up. Our new clause 2 would create an offence for anyone who wilfully destroys relevant records after a major incident that could lead to an inquest or inquiry. New clause 3 is aimed at providing a national oversight mechanism through the publication of an annual independent report on compliance with the Act, as has been mentioned multiple times already in the debate. Many hon. Members spoke of the need to have an overnight mechanism, and similar amendments have been tabled by the right hon. Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle) and the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter).

Amendments 1 and 2 would ensure that the legislation is fully up to date with modern investigations by making it clear that digital messages must be provided as evidence to investigations. The Bill includes provisions for the inclusion of subcontractors under the duty of candour, but we do not believe that they go far enough. Amendment 4 would therefore extend those provisions to all subcontractors throughout the chain of provision. We need only look at the way local authorities subcontract to understand that most working within the public sector are subcontractors of subcontractors of subcontractors. We believe that the scope needs to be extended to include those.

The extension of non-means-tested legal aid to bereaved families at inquests is also long overdue and greatly needed. For too long the system has been weighted against ordinary people seeking justice. Those attempting to bring these scandals to light have faced well-resourced and highly motivated public bodies intent on protecting their reputations, but we do not believe that the provisions go far enough and we will be seeking to amend them in the other place. Amendments 11 and 12 would ensure that public officials do not escape their responsibilities when they cease to hold public office, and that they remain accountable for their actions even if they have since resigned, retired or been shuffled out.

3.15 pm

The Hillsborough Law Now group has raised the lack of command responsibility within the Bill. Amendment 5 addresses that by placing responsibility for breaches of the duty of candour on the chief executive of the relevant public body. Amendment 9 ensures that the Act comes into force immediately upon Royal Assent,

save for a small number of sections that require supporting codes. We see no reason for any unnecessary delay in the process.

Finally, I would like to mention the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo), which places privatised water companies under the duty of candour. It serves as an important reminder of the harms caused by companies on which the public are wholly reliant.

For too long, victims and survivors of horrendous tragedies across the country have been prevented from receiving the justice that they deserve. They have been denied the truth, denied accountability and denied the confidence that what happened to them will not happen to someone else in future. I hope that today will be a day of celebration for many of those families, who have fought tirelessly—not for their own gain, but to ensure that nobody else suffers in the way they have. I am pleased that we have reached an important milestone in the journey of this legislation, and I look forward to seeing the Bill return from the other place in the strongest form possible.

Derek Twigg: I support the Bill and the amendments put forward by the Government. Back in May 1998, when I first spoke in a debate about the Hillsborough disaster, I could never have imagined that 28 years later I would be debating new legislation to address the state's failings in respect of that disaster. My right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle) was there with me. She and I first uncovered the altered statements in the House of Commons Library; she played a very important role in getting to the stage we did and in getting justice for the Hillsborough families.

I speak from a unique position, in that I was at the Hillsborough disaster, I have worked closely with the Hillsborough families to obtain justice and there are families in my constituency who lost loved ones or were injured at the Hillsborough disaster and in the Manchester Arena bombing. More recently, I have become a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which has oversight of the intelligence community. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), also a member of the ISC, in his place, although unfortunately he is unable to speak in today's debate because he co-chaired the Bill Committee.

I will keep my comments primarily to aspects of intelligence and controversies around the Bill. Our intelligence services keep us safe every day. Our intelligence officers and agents do difficult and sometimes dangerous work so that we can live safely. They deserve our sincere thanks and praise for the job that they do and it is right that we hold them to the highest standards. As a member of the ISC, which has oversight of the intelligence services, I been involved in trying to find a way forward with colleagues in addressing the concerns about the impact of the Bill on the intelligence services.

I support the Government amendments and the Bill as a whole. It is welcome that the Government have listened to the campaigners and the ISC. I particularly praise Pete Weatherby KC, who has always been available to talk to me and others about the issues, and help us get to the point where the legislation gives clear protections. As I say, we have listened to the campaigners and the ISC has accepted a way forward that addresses the

concerns raised in respect of the security services. However, I believe that could have been achieved much earlier, and I would like to make a few comments about that.

I genuinely believe that if the ISC had not got involved in these matters, we would not be discussing the Bill today. That is not to take anything away from all those who had been working so hard on the Bill before that, but it had reached an impasse. I praise the work of the ISC Chair, Lord Beamish, and the Deputy Chair, the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright), who is in his place.

It is the view of the ISC that the concerns about the Bill could have been addressed much sooner, as I have said. There has been a lack of direction and grip, with no one taking control. It seemed all too difficult for some, and that has caused the lengthy delays that we have endured. We should not ignore the fact that that has added to the anxiety and concerns of the families and campaigners.

As I stated earlier, the ISC has oversight of the intelligence community. If it felt that the Bill did not address the concerns aired about the impact on the intelligence services or threatened the safety of agents or officers and the security of our country, we would say so—and I, for one, would not vote for it. I do not believe that that is the case; I believe that this Bill, with its amendments, addresses those concerns. Establishing a new duty of candour is key, but I am particularly pleased that the Bill will also bring forward the largest expansion of legal aid in a decade, so that any family facing the might of the state will no longer have to beg and borrow to afford a lawyer, as the Hillsborough families know too well from the early stages of their campaign.

Many of my colleagues have made important contributions to the Bill and ensured that we got to this stage; my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne) have been instrumental in that. I put on the record my thanks to them. There has also been support from the Prime Minister. Whatever the problems faced by the Government in getting to this stage, they clearly wanted the Bill to go through and have worked very hard to try to do that. It could have been done better, but I believe that, in the long run, we will look back on the tenacity and drive of the families as being what got us to this stage.

Today is a landmark day for the Hillsborough families and other campaigners. It will help to ensure that the truth will out in the future. The state will not be able to repeat the appalling cover-up that we saw with Hillsborough. This landmark Bill will have a profound influence in helping prevent future injustices.

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Widnes and Halewood (Derek Twigg), my colleague on the Intelligence and Security Committee. I agree with everything that he has said.

It is important to begin by recognising the remarkable determination of everyone who has sought to translate immense personal pain into an improvement in the way in which the state treats its citizens. That applies to the families who have campaigned so hard and to Members of this House who have applied their own determination to that task.

As the hon. Member for Widnes and Halewood and many who have spoken in this debate have said, the obstacle to delivering this legislation has really very clearly been the extent to which the duty of candour should apply to the intelligence services and to others for whom full candour may be inconsistent with professional duties, as well as the additional safeguards and modifications that would need to apply to the Bill to enable it to safely cover such people without preventing them from doing their vital work effectively.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the Government asked members of the Intelligence and Security Committee, including me, to become involved in the process of resolving that challenge. As the House would expect, we engaged with that process as diligently as we could, with no partisan politics, in an effort to make good law in the pursuit of greater state transparency while preserving our national security equities. As the hon. Gentleman will recall, we spent many hours on the task, engaging with both the Government and those representing the Hillsborough families.

It probably would not be right or practical, in the time available, to go into the detail of all the positions taken over many months, but it is fair and important to say that throughout that time, those representing the Hillsborough families have maintained that measures and protections in existing law would prevent national security from being jeopardised if the duty of candour applied to the intelligence services. The Government, for their part, have maintained throughout this period of many months both consistently and robustly that that is not so.

The Government have maintained that the only way to protect national security is to build additional safeguards, protections and exemptions into the Bill. That appeared still to be their position until very recently. Even yesterday, Government amendment 147, which gives the head of an intelligence agency the right to withhold information altogether in certain circumstances, appeared in the amendment paper for the Bill, as it had done in many previous iterations of that document. In today's version of the amendment paper, for the first time, that amendment has disappeared and been replaced not with the detailed compromise that Intelligence and Security Committee members, who have been engaged with this process, have been working towards, along with many others, but with Government amendment 157.

Government amendment 157 says, in effect, that protections already existing in the law are good enough after all—the Minister made that clear in what she said—and that no substitute further protections or exemptions need to be built into the Bill. That is a remarkable change of position, and a remarkably fast one. It is up to the Government to decide what legislation they propose to this House, and it is perfectly within their rights to propose amendments to their own legislation. We can all cynically speculate about the reasons why this sudden about-turn has taken place this week, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy), who spoke from the Front Bench, said earlier, it is our job to scrutinise this legislation and to ensure that whatever we put in place does justice to the determination of the Hillsborough families and everybody else to put in place a law that does not just sound good, but does good—makes real change and sticks in that task.

I simply have to observe to the Minister and the House that, after all the painstaking work and hours spent, until late last week, on the basis that further safeguards were required—all the amendments drafted, redrafted and redrafted again—the Government have suddenly said that none of that is necessary. What on earth is going on? It seems to me that there are two possibilities. The first is that, for whatever reason, the Government have now cobbled together a rushed compromise that does not adequately protect our national security and that, inevitably and logically, does the job less effectively than their previous amendments sought to do. The Minister has been very clear that that is not the case. I want to take her at her word, because this is an important subject.

That leaves us with the second possibility, which is that the settlement before us—a settlement that effectively replicates what the advocates for the Hillsborough families have been saying for months—could have been delivered to this House a very long time ago. That needless delay has brought a waste of ministerial time, official time, the ISC's time, frankly, and the time of the intelligence agencies. That time could certainly have been better spent. But, far, far worse than any of that, it has brought an additional, agonising wait for the Hillsborough families and others for the law that they were promised—an additional wait that, it seems, they did not need to endure. I appreciate that the Minister has come to this matter reasonably late, but, whatever else she may need to answer, I am afraid she needs to explain all that to us and to the Hillsborough families.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Chair of the Justice Select Committee.

Andy Slaughter: I welcome the Bill, and thank the Government for introducing it and bringing it back to the House before the summer recess. It is the result of years of committed campaigning, led by the families of the victims and survivors of Hillsborough. Many of the worst corporate miscarriages of justice, from infected blood to Grenfell, would have been exposed years or even decades ago, had the Bill become law sooner. We should celebrate a landmark piece of legislation that—like the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000, introduced under the last Labour Government—gives power to the citizen and makes the state accountable.

I will focus my remarks on two new clauses that I have tabled, which build on growing calls for a national oversight mechanism. This would be a new, independent public body that collated, analysed and followed up on the conclusions and recommendations made after official investigations into deaths and state failings, in order to improve oversight and implementation of them. At present, there is a critical gap in accountability between the issuing of a report or recommendation and its eventual implementation. It can be extremely difficult for bereaved families, victims and the general public to get information on what changes have actually been made following the identification of failings.

3.30 pm

In her last annual report for 2024, the chief coroner noted that 713 prevention of future death reports had been issued. Those reports identify key issues that

contributed to someone's death and need rectifying to prevent the same thing happening again. There is a duty to respond to those reports, but evidence from the charity INQUEST and others, such as the independent advisory panel on deaths in custody, has shown that responses are often absent or delayed. Further, as the previous Justice Committee said in 2021,

"there is no follow-up to see if coroners' reports have had the desired impact."

It is often the case that no change has in fact been made by a public authority. That has drawn serious concern from coroners and inquiry chairs.

My new clauses are supported by INQUEST and over 40 organisations, including the Law Society, Amnesty International UK and JUSTICE. The need to improve systems for monitoring action on inquests and inquiries has been raised repeatedly during debates on this Bill. The Prime Minister himself stated on Second Reading that

"when there are inquiries, there needs to be a better way of ensuring that they are followed through."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2025; Vol. 774, c. 654.]

However, despite Government interest in this area, there has been no formal commitment to implement this proposal. My new clauses would ensure that the Bill extends to the aftermath of inquiries. There needs to be candour and transparency in how public authorities respond to, and act on, findings and recommendations by improving central oversight; otherwise, these costly, lengthy legal processes are futile.

A further step that the Government may want to consider is creating and maintaining a database, so that all information gathered by coronial investigations is recorded and analysed to prevent future deaths. Dr Georgia Richards from King's College London has been doing vital work in that area, and I recommend that the Government use her expertise to find a solution for how to harness all the information gathered by coroners to protect public health. Beyond that, the coronial service needs to be more responsive and proactive, as successive reports from the Justice Committee have urged.

In the light of the number of people who wish to speak, I do not have time to go through the other amendments and new clauses that I support, but I will mention new clause 1, which is in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle) and calls for the independent public advocate to have a greater role. Earlier in the year, the Select Committee interviewed the current—and first—independent public advocate, Cindy Butts. She is an excellent appointment, but she needs more powers and resources to ensure that she can play her full role in making sure that the provisions of this Bill come into effect. I will also mention amendment 4, tabled by the Liberal Democrats, which deals with the role of subcontractors. In my view, the lack of provisions on subcontractors is an omission from the Bill; it is worth noting that during the Horizon scandal, Fujitsu relied heavily on subcontractors to maintain and operate its services.

Finally, I will mention amendment 25, which is in the name of the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr Morrison). It would extend the offence of misleading the public to

"a public authority or public official providing misleading information to a recognised news publisher."

South Yorkshire police defamed the Hillsborough families and survivors, but it did not do so alone—its lies and smears were promoted by several newspapers. It was the culture and the connections between the newspapers and the police that enabled that to happen, and there is no evidence that this has changed. Just as South Yorkshire police was protected by *The Sun* after Hillsborough, the Metropolitan police was responsible for astonishing oversights in the investigations into phone hacking at the *News of the World*. This Bill's focus on the role of public officials is welcome, but the Government should also look at collaboration between public officials and the media.

Finally, may I say what a relief it is to see a compromise reached between the Hillsborough families and the Government on the application of the duty of candour to the security services? While I understand the Government's desire to strike a balance in this area, a carve-out would erode the effectiveness of the Bill. As we have seen on multiple occasions, including in the investigation of the Manchester Arena bombing, the Stakeknife case in Northern Ireland and the Attorney General *v.* the BBC—the "Beth" case, as it is known—it is vital for public confidence and accountability that there is transparency in cases where there have been failings in the conduct of the security services. In the Attorney General *v.* the BBC, I note that MI5 was found to have provided false evidence to the courts, and it paid damages to "Beth", alongside giving an apology, but that was only after repeated interventions by the BBC and the courts. That demonstrates the importance of the duty of candour applying to the intelligence services.

Tessa Munt: Can the hon. Member spot the irony in the fact that today, while the Government are considering this legislation, which is designed to prevent public bodies from obstructing the truth, the Ministry of Defence is in the High Court in London, trying very hard to silence the Chinook families by saying that they are out of time in seeking an independent inquiry on why their loved ones were allowed to board a Chinook helicopter that the Ministry of Defence knew was unairworthy, positively dangerous and not to be relied on in any way? There is surely an irony in that. It is absurd. I know that the hon. Member was talking about the intelligence services, but the Bill surely has to cover the Ministry of Defence and how it behaves, too, because it is utterly inappropriate.

Andy Slaughter: I know that case means a huge amount to the hon. Lady as a constituency MP, and I thank her for all the work she does on the Justice Committee. I think we have only begun to scratch the surface. This Bill will be a transforming piece of legislation.

I will make one final comment. Several Members have welcomed, as I do, the huge increase in the provision of legal aid that will come, but for that to be effective, we have to look at legal aid rates and the availability of legal aid practitioners. Simply having the funding available does not ensure that there will be representation and equality of arms, which I think we all wish for.

Tessa Munt: My sense is that we could have some equity in the amount of legal aid given to families and individuals fighting big organisations, such as public bodies. If the rates of the specialists and professionals

who are supporting the public bodies came down, and matched the rising rate of legal aid for the support of those individuals and families, we might be in a situation where could be some equity. That would make investigation much simpler for the courts and inquests dealing with such cases, because they would have people who understood the process better.

Andy Slaughter: I think I have taken enough time, but I thank the Member for that intervention. This afternoon, the Justice Committee signed off a new major report on legal aid, which will be published on Friday. Those who are interested can read more there. In conclusion, this is a landmark piece of legislation, which we should all welcome, and I commend it to the House.

Sir Jeremy Hunt (Godalming and Ash) (Con): I will speak to two amendments, but first, I pay tribute to the Hillsborough families, and to two people in particular, with whom I have dealt personally. The first is Margaret Aspinall. As a new Culture Secretary in 2010, I made some ill-chosen comments about the Hillsborough tragedy, and I met Margaret Aspinall afterwards. I apologised, and she graciously accepted that apology. I have always been struck by not just her tenacity, but her dignity and decency. Today has been a long journey, but if the Bill saves lives, as we all want it to, she will deserve more credit than any politician, as will every one of the families of the 97.

I also want to mention Bishop James Jones, who was chair of the independent panel. He gave the world the phrase that summed up more than any other what went wrong: the patronising disposition of unaccountable power. What is remarkable about Bishop James is that he did not hang up his hat after publishing the report in 2012, but went on to advise successive Home Secretaries on how to implement his recommendations, and then chaired the Hillsborough families' experiences review panel. I asked for his help in chairing the Gosport independent panel, and he went on to chair the Gosport family forum, from which he has just stepped down for health reasons. To me, he exemplifies Senator John McCain's famous words about

"the honor we earn and the love we give if at a moment in our lives we sacrifice for something greater than self-interest."

I know that the whole House will want to mark his public service.

Let me turn to my new clause and amendment. New clause 11 addresses a profound failure in the way that the duty of candour works in the NHS. In 2014, I put in place the regulations that applied that duty to the NHS, and when I tell the House what those regulations require of the NHS, Members will immediately see why they are failing so badly. They state that if severe harm or death is caused to a patient, the hospital must tell the patient or their family promptly, or as soon as is practically reasonable. It must give a truthful account of what is known and what happened, and it must offer a sincere apology. As witnesses to countless subsequent inquiries affecting the constituents of many Members here have said, that simply does not happen. Families have to fight for years to find the truth about what happened to a loved one, and all too often, they find that mistakes are ignored or covered up. When a tragedy is covered up, it is then repeated time after time, which is precisely what those families are campaigning to stop.

Why do those cover-ups happen? There are many reasons, but one in particular is that trust lawyers advise trusts not to say anything at all when there is a risk of legal action. Let me tell the House about baby Ben Condon, who died at eight weeks old in 2015, when I was Health Secretary, after delays in giving him antibiotics. His father Allyn says that consultants apologised to him privately, saying that they had got it wrong, and then said the exact opposite at an inquest a few months later. I believe that that was a breach of the duty of candour regulations that were already in place, and that lawyers, even today, are giving unlawful advice to clinicians and trusts. As a result, the duty of candour in the NHS is being widely bypassed, and that will continue until we deal with this loophole. New clause 11 requires the Department of Health and Social Care

"to ensure that legal services provided to NHS bodies...are consistent with the statutory duty of candour and the principles of openness".

It requires the Department or designated body to ensure that those standards are met, and that the situation be dealt with appropriately when they are not.

Amendment 150 does a different job. The Bill requires people working for public bodies to tell the truth to those conducting investigations or reviews, but it does not require them to tell the truth to families, who then have to wait, often for years, until the review is published. The amendment requires that information to be provided to a person or family who has, or may have been, harmed.

I recognise that the House will not divide on either the new clause or the amendment, so neither will become law as part of this Bill. My request to Ministers is that they include them in the Health Bill; they would be in scope, and would have a dramatic impact in preventing the anger of NHS-bereaved families, which is absolutely the equal of the anger of the Hillsborough families that we are trying to address today. My reason for wanting to do that is straightforward. A Health Secretary can pass new laws, introduce new technology and bring down waiting lists, but the only real change that stands the test of time is culture change. Culture change means replacing cover-ups, buck-passing and a blame culture with openness, trust and learning, but there will not be trust if patients and families are not told the truth. We will never learn from mistakes if we cover them up. We need real change—culture change—to put that right.

David Baines (St Helens North) (Lab): I started my speech on Second Reading in November last year by saying:

"This has been a long time coming."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2025; Vol. 774, c. 681.]

Even more time has passed since then, but thanks to the determination, strength and effort of many survivors and campaigners—some of whom are in the Gallery today—and of those on the Labour Benches, and to the support of a number of dedicated people in this place, we are here at last, with the finish line in sight again.

3.45 pm

It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Sir Jeremy Hunt). I have a lot of sympathy for his new clause 11, and I heard him make the same point to the Health Secretary this morning. I hope that a time and a place can be found for such a

provision, because what he says is important. He expressed it very well and with passion, and I certainly support him in that.

I welcome the Government amendments, and I also welcome the fact that, importantly, they have the support of the families and campaigners. I am assured by the comments that we have heard from members of the ISC, and I am certain that they will continue to keep a close eye on the Bill as it progresses and in its implementation.

I will keep my remarks relatively short, because I have spoken on this topic several times and I know that a lot of colleagues want to speak, but some things need to be said. We need to remind ourselves that this Bill and its provisions are here before us because, after suffering incredible trauma and when faced with a wall of lies, ordinary people decided to say no, including the families affected by Grenfell, the Manchester Arena attack, Primodos, Orgreave, the infected blood scandal, the Post Office/Horizon scandal and many more, such as maternity scandals in the NHS. This is their Bill, not Westminster's Bill.

Not least among those people are the Hillsborough families and campaigners, some of whom I have had the privilege to meet. I have met lots of remarkable people in both my personal life and my professional life in politics, and I have no hesitation in saying that I have never met a group of people who have shown such bravery and resilience in the face of so many obstacles, so many lies and so much profound injustice. It is because of the efforts of families and survivors that people will be helped in the future. The truth will be easier to find, and justice will be easier to secure. We all owe the campaigners our deepest thanks.

To all those who have made this Bill possible, and to all those who have worked so hard and for so long to make the case, to reach a consensus and to win the argument, I say thank you. I hope the House will forgive me if I say once again to the Hillsborough families and campaigners in particular: you have my utmost respect, you have my deep gratitude, you are the best of us. You have been a light in the darkness. You'll never walk alone.

Mr Tom Morrison (Cheadle) (LD): I wish to speak to amendment 25, which has been tabled in my name, among others. Hillsborough, the infected blood scandal, Windrush, Grenfell and the Manchester Arena are all tragedies that everyone across the country knows too well, because the campaigners, the survivors and the families of those who have been lost have bravely made sure that we will never forget what happens when the state not only ignores them, but actively works against them to protect its own interests.

As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the journey to this point has been far too long for the Hillsborough families. It is 14 years since the independent panel finally confirmed that public officials had hidden the truth. It was a day of hope that, finally, we might see justice be done. I remember sitting in Liverpool's council chamber after the news broke. I remember the joy and relief that spread throughout that room, and the way that councillors from all parties came together to unite behind the families and campaigners who fought so hard, and for so long, to get that verdict. But there were more blocks and heartbreaking moments to come.

This Bill has taken far too long to get here, but it is really important to acknowledge Members from across the House and in the Government, especially the Prime Minister, in getting us to this point. I know how much has been said about legacy over recent weeks—especially by the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy)—but I genuinely believe that this a legacy worthy of any incumbent in No. 10. Today, it is long overdue.

What has been achieved by the families and all the campaign groups pushing for this legislation is nothing short of astounding. To take the most unimaginable heartbreak, and the most unimaginable grief and suffering, and turn it into positive action that will not only make our country safer and more just, but make the legacy of the 97 synonymous with a country that protects its people and gives them a true level playing field in the eyes of the law, is quite simply remarkable.

It must not be forgotten that the campaigners and families worked so hard to find common ground to progress this Bill, and that needs to be celebrated. The campaigners at Hillsborough Law Now have worked relentlessly to push the Government to the position they have reached, and I am sure the whole House will join me in applauding them. This Bill will change the way that this country works and operates. A legal duty of candour on all public authorities will bring groundbreaking change not only legally, but culturally, and a cover-up culture will no longer thrive.

In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Wells and Mendip Hills (Tessa Munt) and I analysed the Bill in detail and learned how true accountability could and should be built into institutions. It became clear that command responsibility over corporate liability was badly needed, and that no organisation should be exempt from the duty of candour, no matter how secret, important or unique their role in our society may be. I was proud to support the amendments put forward by Hillsborough Law Now to ensure that the Government properly addressed these issues.

It also became clear that there were other gaps. For example, we believed that the issues of wilfully destroying records and the provision of legal aid were not sufficiently addressed. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Jess Brown-Fuller) has tabled new clauses 2 and 4, to make the legislation watertight. I believe other gaps still need to be filled, so I have tabled amendment 25, which outlines explicitly that a public authority or public official providing misleading information to a recognised news publisher would be an offence of misleading the public.

We all in this House know well how intertwined the relationship is between the state and the media. There is a continuous cycle of give and take, and it is vital that this is not misused or abused. The impact of the briefings given to the press by the police and senior politicians and advisers after Hillsborough is still felt today. It was a despicable smear campaign that demonised communities and a whole city, and even worse, it made the victims of the disaster appear to be at fault and somehow to blame for what happened. All those responsible for that disgraceful act will never be forgiven. This situation can never be allowed to happen again, and amendment 25 would ensure that misleading the press has direct consequences under the legislation.

This Bill still has many stages to undergo in the other place, but today we can truly celebrate in the knowledge that we are one giant step closer to justice. We see a future where people are protected from the powers of the state when the state fails our residents and moves to protect itself over those it should serve. We see a future where victims are cared for by the state, not treated as villains. We see a future where lies and deceit can no longer cover up public scandals, and where public officials are empowered to do the right thing. Today belongs to the 97 and their families, and I could not be prouder of them.

Maria Eagle: Before he leaves the Chamber, I say to the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Sir Jeremy Hunt) that I agree very much with what he said about transparency and its importance. He made the point that lawyers are sometimes a problem. Obviously, the legal system, in which I used to be a participant, is adversarial. A bit like in this Chamber, we have the defence and we have the prosecution, and it is not the fault of the lawyers themselves if they are perhaps not as helpful as they could be.

My new clause 1 tries to deal with some of the issues that are outwith the scope of the Bill, but it also reminds right hon. and hon. Members, and the Ministers charged with making this Bill work, that something else happened to get us to the truth of Hillsborough, and that was the Hillsborough independent panel report. That was not a legal action; it was about transparency, freedom of information and being open.

I know that the right hon. Gentleman has his frustrations about the fact that his well-intentioned health reforms are not operating as he would have wished. He mentioned Bishop James Jones, who led the Hillsborough independent panel report process so well. I believe there has to be something alongside the Bill which enables families, should they wish in the aftermath of a public disaster, to choose a transparency and freedom of information way forward, rather than just lining up to get lawyers. I am sure that each family would have a lawyer, but lawyers operate within a legal system that is adversarial and is not necessarily there to get to the truth. Each advocate supports the side they have been instructed by, for their best interests. That has led to problems in the aftermath of disasters such as Hillsborough.

My new clause 1 relates to the Independent Public Advocate, which was legislated for. I do not believe that the role has sufficient powers or resource. It has been established and set up, and the appointment of Cindy Butts has been made. She has already started to operate and was called upon in the aftermath of the attack on the Heaton Park synagogue. She does not have the powers that I envisaged in the Public Advocate Bill, which I promoted in this House from 2016. It has been promoted in the other place by Lord Wills since 2014, so Members can work out who wrote it—it was not me.

The powers in the Public Advocate Bill, which I hope my new clause will enable us to consider alongside those in the Bill before us, would enable the families, should they wish, to embark on a transparency and freedom of information process. That would be something like the Hillsborough independent panel, but at a much earlier stage in the aftermath, in order to ensure that the full gamut of possible responses that might work for the families can be pursued.

Although such powers are not in this Bill, because it is too narrow in scope for them to be included, I hope that my new clause 1 on producing a report within 12 months of the passing of this Bill on how the Independent Public Advocate is working and the impact of the Act's provisions on increasing public confidence—a public advocate with such powers to help families can increase public confidence as well—will lead to a conclusion that she needs more powers and resource, as she has very little at the moment, so that there will be another option that some families, in the aftermath of disasters, may choose to go to, rather than just having to have a series of legal actions that may succeed and then fail, followed by appeals and different kinds of actions. That is what happened to the Hillsborough families. We must bear in mind not only the inequality of arms, but the length of time taken to get through the legal actions, even if they proceed swiftly and well. In considering that measure alongside the duty of candour and the provisions in the Bill, I hope it may, in future, aid families who get caught up in public disasters to choose the best way forward for them.

One key thing about the Hillsborough families was the way in which they organised themselves. They got themselves together, set up the Hillsborough family support group and had a democratic procedure so that the families themselves could decide the next steps. One or two families peeled off when they did not agree with the conclusions and ploughed their own furrow, sometimes very successfully. Anne Williams springs to mind. She wanted to focus very much on overturning the inquests. She was right in the end. She knew absolutely what had happened to her son, because she went and found out. She knew that the inquest verdicts were wrong, so she wanted to focus on that. But on the whole the families kept together and were able to decide how they would go forward.

Any public advocate has a role in facilitating that kind of process, to give families the collective strength to decide how they wish the aftermath of a disaster to be dealt with. Each family will have a lawyer to advocate for them, but that does not necessitate their getting together and deciding what to do among themselves in so far as they can. I think a public advocate who is looking at establishing a process like the Hillsborough independent panel could facilitate that and could assist in some instances.

4 pm

Obviously, I am glad that the Bill has come back and that it is going to complete its Commons stages today. I am relieved about that. I think the duty of candour is a good thing, if it can be made to work effectively—it cannot be a bad thing. If this duty of candour already exists, it will help to focus minds, hopefully at an early stage, in the aftermath of any disaster in a way that the common-law duty that has, one assumes, always existed did not really do at the time of Hillsborough. This is, therefore, entirely good.

I am glad to see that the problem of being between a rock and a hard place that has delayed the Bill has been resolved between the campaigners and the Government. I know of and commend the work of the Intelligence and Security Committee in trying to get to a resolution of that problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Widnes and Halewood (Derek Twigg) has done a lot of

work on that, as has the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright). I used to be on that Committee, so I know how hard it works, and I for one am willing to take at face value their assurances about what will and what will not work for the intelligence community.

I welcome the fact that that problem has, one hopes, been solved, and that the Bill can now complete its Commons stages and go off for consideration in the other place, where I am sure it will be looked at fairly closely. There are a number of people in the other place with experience of disasters—Hillsborough and Grenfell in particular—who, I know, will want to submit the Bill to some serious scrutiny. We will no doubt see how that goes in due course.

In addition to getting the Bill on to the statute book, I hope that some serious consideration will be given, perhaps through the mechanism that I suggest in new clause 1, to whether a non-legal approach might be an option for some families, should they choose to take it. I do not believe that we should just say to families in the aftermath of a disaster, “Here’s some legal help—off you go.” If we can cut short the many years and decades that many families have to endure in the aftermath of public disasters by finding a way to circumvent that, I believe we will have provided an additional option for those families that will be well worth some of them taking.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): I rise to speak as a member of the Bill Committee and principally in support of amendment 20 in my name, which seeks to provide a necessary layer of democratic parliamentary scrutiny of the actions of the intelligence services.

I listened very carefully to what the members of the ISC present—the hon. Member for Widnes and Halewood (Derek Twigg) and the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright)—had to say. Ultimately, behind my amendment was the fact that democratic accountability does not lie with a High Court or with the head of an intelligence service, but here, with us. We are where the buck of democratic accountability stops. That is why I gave prominence to the ISC in my amendment.

Before turning to my amendment, I must acknowledge the work of the Hillsborough families and their supporters for their courage, tenacity and determination over the past 37 years, which has brought us to this point today. We in the SNP and the Scottish Government fully support the aims and objectives of this legislation so that never again will people face lies, injustice and wilful cover-ups by public bodies without accountability under the law. That is why tonight, with the exception of new clause 3, which we will support, we will vote with the Government in support of this legislation.

That said, I cannot let today pass without making some reference to the fact that, considering the long journey that we have been on—considering the meetings; considering the way in which the Bill Committee was forced to truncate its work into a very limited period; considering the negotiations that followed; considering the pulling of the Bill, the series of amendments and the counter-proposals—the indecent haste of the Government these past 24 hours to push this legislation through is actively working against proper parliamentary scrutiny. That is my view.

Amendment 20 has not been selected for a vote tonight. The intent of the amendment, which is supported by Members from a wide range of parties across the House, was to ensure that we here in Parliament, who are elected by the people, would, through the Intelligence and Security Committee of the House, have had oversight of any decision by the head of an intelligence service to hide information from public scrutiny under the cover of national security.

I have concerns not about the Bill’s use today but about the possibility that a future right-wing Government of this country—perhaps even a far-right Government—might use this legislation as it currently stands to escape the scrutiny that we all seek and support. It is not scaremongering to say that. We should learn the lessons of history. I have seen in my own lifetime, in the land of my birth, how information can be hidden in the name of national security when in fact the interest is not that of the nation but of the Government of the day. That is why I believed that amendment 20 was important, and I am glad to say that 24 MPs from across the House agreed with me.

Before I conclude, I have to make reference to something that the Minister said earlier. She talked about stress-testing elements of the Bill and said that a full timetable would be brought forward in due course. It sounded to me as if, even if the Bill passes through all its final stages, some of these elements will still be subject to a future timescale. Perhaps she might address that point in her closing remarks.

The only other thing I want to say before I finish is the old French saying, “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”. We need to be careful about the implementation of this law, so that we do not see the repeat of these mistakes at some point in the future.

In conclusion, I reiterate our support for this legislation. I commend the work of the many determined and tenacious individuals who have brought us to this point, not least the Hillsborough families, who suffered the terrible loss of their loved ones and the industrial-scale cover-up that followed. Today is about them and everyone who will benefit from their efforts.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Bromborough) (Lab): It is very welcome to see this Bill back in the Commons to complete its final stages, even though we all expected to see it on the statute book by now. While I understand why there have been frustrations and concerns about the last-minute nature of the Bill’s reintroduction, it is important that we do not let process take precedence over substance.

Fundamentally, in this debate we are considering amendments to the Bill, so it is important that we address those, but I think we should start as we always should: by recognising the unwavering determination that the Hillsborough families and campaigners have shown to this point. We should continue to recognise that they have fought so hard over decades not just to get the truth and justice for their loved ones but to bring about a structural change in the way that the state operates to ensure that public interest is paramount and is not placed behind institutional reputation.

I am delighted to see that the Government have found a way through the problems that halted the Bill’s progression earlier this year. I know that it will bring my

constituents great relief that we have found a way to amend the Bill to deliver on the commitment that we made to the Hillsborough families. I welcome the amendments that the Government have put forward. The fact that they have been welcomed by the Hillsborough Law Now campaign is testament to the hard work that has been put in by so many people to get this Bill to the right place. I thank the campaigners, the Minister and the former Minister—my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones)—and my many hon. Friends, many of whom have spoken today, who have worked closely with the Government to get the legislation to where it is today.

When this Bill was introduced, I said to the House that the standard against which it must be held is “Never again”. It is clear that in most areas the Bill had already met that standard, as it was welcomed by campaigners, but it is clear that there were still concerns about the way that the Bill treated members of the security services and the potential for them to be absolved of the duty of candour.

That is particularly important given the concerns raised by victims’ families in the aftermath of the Manchester Arena bombing about the security services not providing an accurate picture of the key intelligence they held on the bomber. Not including those officers would weaken the Bill’s central duty of candour. The Government amendments, if accepted by the House, will ensure that the security services will no longer be exempt from the duty. However, being bound by that duty, it is necessary that there are safeguards to ensure that secret and sensitive material is handled securely and that the safety of individuals working at those authorities is protected. That is an important balance to strike as it will ensure accountability and transparency in investigations while not compromising national security.

I am grateful to the Minister for explaining in detail how the amendments will work in her opening comments. However, when she winds up the debate, will she explain a little more about how amendment 157 will operate in practice—particularly the application of subsection (2G)—and who comes within the ambit of representations that will be made to the Minister?

Many concerns have been expressed both publicly and privately about how this duty might impact the workings of the security services, but I do not think for a minute that any Member in the Chamber would want to pass legislation that would, by accident or design, risk national security. I am delighted that we have found a formula that assures most hon. Members that that balance has been struck.

There have also been concerns about how the duty will impact relations with countries with whom we share information, but I took particular heart from the evidence that Pete Weatherby gave to the Bill Committee. I add my thanks to him for his work on the Bill. He said:

“The more candid that we can make this, the better the relationship with international partners.”—[*Official Report, Public Office (Accountability) Public Bill Committee*, 27 November 2025; c. 9, Q9.]

I found that a helpful way to look at things.

More than anything, the Bill will set new expectations for what it means to be a public servant. The vast majority of those working in our state institutions will not require the provisions of this legislation—they are

already acting in this manner—but the Bill makes it clear that the duty of candour is not an optional extra; it is a core tenet of public service. Too often in the past, we have seen institutions forming a ring around people, more interested in their own reputations than in finding the truth and acting in the public interest. As we know, the Hillsborough independent panel found that 100 statements made by junior police officers had been deliberately altered by South Yorkshire police. That is as clear an example as there can be of institutional cover-up and a festering culture that we must never see again.

We have seen that culture far too often, as hon. Members have referred to: in Grenfell, Manchester Arena, the Post Office Horizon scandal, contaminated blood, Windrush, Cammell Laird, Orgreave, the Shrewsbury campaign and many others. We have all recognised in those scandals the similar patterns of institutional defensiveness, delayed disclosure and an inequality of arms. The Bill will end that pattern and culture once and for all. As the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Sir Jeremy Hunt) reminded us, the law does not change things—it is the culture that needs to change—but the law gives us the basis on which we will see that change.

As hon. Members have recognised, it is incumbent on us to ensure that once the Bill gets on the statute book, it does not stay static. We must regularly ensure that it is working as intended. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle) said, there is more work to do, particularly on how it works in practice. I am concerned that the legal aid provisions may not mean that we get parity of arms in reality, but let us welcome where we are, because I believe that the Hillsborough families have waited far too long to see justice.

On days like today, I think in particular about the families of Christopher Edwards, James Delaney and Jimmy Hennessy, who left Ellesmere Port on 15 April 1989 to watch a game of football and never returned. We remember all those who died and we repeat our vow: never again.

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): I start by paying tribute to the victims and survivors who have got us to this point, and to the many hon. Members across the House who have shared personal testimonies and those of their constituents from many different disasters, including Hillsborough.

If the House will allow me, I will change the context of the debate a tiny bit and talk about amendment 149, tabled in my name, which seeks to include water companies in the scope of the code of conduct and duty of candour. The amendment has been sponsored by 33 Members from across the House. Under the Bill, privately owned water companies do not have to follow the same code of conduct as publicly owned water companies in Scotland or Northern Ireland, which is absurd. Although privately owned water companies operate under the Water Industry Act 1991 and are designated as statutory undertakers, they exercise public functions of fundamental importance to health, the environment and daily life; they hold exclusive regional monopolies, meaning that consumers have no alternative provider; and they benefit from statutory powers and privileges normally associated with public authorities.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): We actually have examples of water companies lying. We had South East Water coming to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in January and giving false evidence—so much so that the Chair considered bringing it back for being in contempt of Parliament.

4.15 pm

Freddie van Mierlo: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. We have seen docudramas such as “Dirty Business”, in which water companies have sought to evade scrutiny. This amendment would correct that anomaly.

The companies are supposed to perform the same public functions with the same public impact, but without the discipline of market competition. In the Bill, publicly owned water companies such as those that exist outside of England and Wales must follow standards of ethical conduct, including following the principles of integrity, accountability and openness. They must adopt a code that sets the standards expected for those who work at the authority, and make people aware of the consequences of failing to act in accordance with it. There must be a clear way for people not working at the authority to complain about their conduct. Requiring companies in England, such as Thames Water, to adopt such a code of conduct by law is one clear and immediate way the Government could reduce the problems we currently see with such companies.

Constituents of mine tell me just how much they struggle to raise a complaint with Thames Water and are often ignored when they do so. They include Judy Washington, whose case I raised directly with the Prime Minister at PMQs. Time and again, we have seen Thames Water prioritise its own shareholders and debt, taking more from consumers in bills and delivering less in quality of infrastructure and water. These actions would simply not be acceptable under the code of conduct in this Bill. There would be ethical standards for these companies to follow and clear consequences for subverting these goals.

By holding these companies to the same standard, we can reinforce the public interest obligations inherent in their statutory role and ensure consistent ethical standards across all providers of essential services. If the Government are serious about holding the water companies to account, they must close the loopholes that allow them again and again to escape judgment for their wrongful actions. It should not be one rule for them and another for everyone else.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): I rise in support of new clauses 5 and 6, and Government new clause 8, and I would like to declare my interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on miscarriages of justice. As we all know, Hillsborough stands as one of the greatest miscarriages of justice this country has ever seen.

I want to start by joining my colleagues in recognising the strength and resilience of all those who have got us to this point today, including, first and foremost, the families who fought for decades to expose the truth. Some of them have joined us in the Chamber today. They kept the flame burning for 37 long years to get us to this point. I say to them: your refusal to give up the fight for truth and justice has been a guiding light for so many in times of darkness, and today you have succeeded

in making sure that other families facing the unthinkable will not have to face the same obstruction, lies, deceit and blame that you had to endure. This Bill will provide families with the certainty that state actors and those in power will be held accountable for their actions. This victory belongs to you and to the 97 who were unlawfully killed in 1989, and who we remember today.

For me, as a very proud Scouser, today is an emotional day. For the people of Liverpool, the fight for justice is deeply personal, born out of tragedy, betrayal and an unbreakable demand for truth. We are a city that knows what institutional failure looks like, and what courage, solidarity and persistence can achieve in the face of it. Too many have campaigned to get us to this point, but I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne) for his amazing job in championing the Hillsborough law campaign in Parliament and for refusing to give into pressure when it looked like the duty of candour would be watered down.

Nadia Whittome: My hon. Friend is making an incredibly emotional speech. I know, from the Nottingham maternity review, the harm and hurt that is caused when people with knowledge and involvement in institutional failures are allowed to dodge accountability and scrutiny. Does she agree that it is therefore vital there is no exemption from the duty of candour, including for the security services, and that campaigners, including our hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne), have been right to fight for so many years for a Hillsborough law that is worthy of the name and that can truly end cover-ups?

Kim Johnson: I totally agree with my hon. Friend that no one should be exempt, and I pay tribute to everybody who has got us here today.

I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle), who has campaigned over so many years in Parliament, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Andy Burnham), whose relentless campaign for justice for the Hillsborough 97 has helped get us here today. I have no doubt that he will do everything he can to get us across the line. The Hillsborough Law Now legal team, Elkan Abrahamson and Pete Weatherby KC, fought very hard to ensure that the duty of candour in the Bill was strengthened and not watered down. This would not have been possible without all their tireless endeavours, and we owe them the biggest debt of gratitude.

Today is not just about the past; it is also about preventing future cover-ups, corruption and police wrongdoing. Today we ensure that no worker, family or community is ever left to fight the state alone. I add my support to new clauses 5 and 6, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter) and supported by Inquest, which would establish a national oversight mechanism for inquests and inquiries. The amendments are vital to ensuring that recommendations do not sit gathering dust on shelves, and that we establish a body responsible and accountable for implementing them to prevent future harms.

For too long, working-class communities and the families who should have been given the dignity of being able to grieve their loved ones in peace were instead left to deal with industrial-level cover-up. The

Bill is a legacy for the victims of Hillsborough. Never again will families have to endure that level of corruption and cover-up and the fundamental failure of police who blamed victims. Never again will police and state actors be allowed to go unchallenged.

Today brings hope to the families affected by other state miscarriages of justice: the victims and survivors of Grenfell; those impacted by the infected blood, Windrush and Post Office Horizon scandals; the nuclear test veterans, who are still fighting for justice; the Cammell Laird 37; the descendants of the Chinese seafarers deported from Liverpool in the 1940s, who are still fighting for truth and an apology; the survivors of the “educationally subnormal” scandal, who are yet to be given the dignity of an apology and compensation for what they were put through; or those black families who are still seeking justice for those who died as a result of police interactions—it is a bitter injustice that, just like Hillsborough, no one has ever been held to account for, and all the police involved walked free. I fully support the campaign to have the former chief superintendent of South Yorkshire police stripped of his knighthood and to have his Queen’s policing medal rescinded.

This Bill has taken far too long to get here, but the fight is not over. More work has to be done in the other place and on implementation. For the victims and so many others, the fight goes on for the justice they deserve but for far too long have been denied. No justice, no peace.

Ian Byrne (Liverpool West Derby) (Lab): Back in 2015, I had the number 96 tattooed on my wrist. It was not simply a tattoo; it was a promise. It was a promise that whenever life became difficult, I would never forget one simple truth: I was one of the lucky ones. I walked away from Hillsborough, but 96 did not. Today we remember the 97. That number on my wrist and the people it represents has become my compass. Every time I look at it, I think of those who never came home. I think of their families and of survivors like my dad, who was seriously injured. I think of every campaigner who has spent decades refusing to accept the lies, refusing to surrender to injustice and refusing to allow the truth to be buried. They have shaped my life far more than they will ever know. I owe them more than I could ever repay.

In the years after Hillsborough, one question followed me everywhere. It is a question every survivor knows—every survivor of Grenfell knows it; every survivor of a public disaster knows it. It arrives uninvited in the silence of the early hours of the morning: “Why did I get to walk away when others didn’t?” For years, that question haunted me. What responsibility do you carry when your survival comes at such a terrible cost to others? What do you owe those who never got the chance to live the life you have lived?

I began to find my answers long before I entered this place. In 2009, after finishing an early shift at my printing factory, I went with my dad and my mates—people who had stood beside me at Hillsborough—to the 20th anniversary memorial service at Anfield. We stood shoulder to shoulder with thousands of people. We remembered. Then came the chant that echoed around the stadium: “Justice. Justice. Justice.” Not because it was a slogan, but because it was all we had left. For two

decades we had been lied to, families had been ignored, survivors had been smeared. Those who should have protected ordinary people protected themselves instead, and this House—with honourable exceptions—too often looked the other way. That is a stain on our democracy that I will never forget.

But that cry for justice could no longer be ignored. It forced this place and the country to confront the truth and, ultimately, it led to the Hillsborough independent panel. At last, the truth broke through. It confirmed what the people of Liverpool had always known: the supporters were innocent. The lies were exposed, the cover-up was exposed, and the culture of unaccountable power was exposed.

The families, the survivors and the people of Liverpool will never forgive those who deliberately vilified innocent people and orchestrated that cover-up. They will never forget what Rupert Murdoch, Kelvin MacKenzie, *The Sun*, Norman Bettison and South Yorkshire police did not only to the victims and survivors, but to an entire city. The wounds they inflicted went far beyond any newspaper headline; they damaged lives, reputations and trust in our institutions. That is why I will continue to campaign for Leveson part 2 and for Bettison to be stripped of his knighthood.

The new inquests in 2016 finally recognised what should have been stated from the very beginning: the victims of Hillsborough were unlawfully killed. Those words mattered because the truth matters. But truth without accountability is never enough. Truth without justice leaves a wound only partially healed. The families deserved justice. The survivors deserved justice. We never got it for Hillsborough.

Then, Bishop James Jones gave us not just a report, but a warning that should echo through every public institution in Britain:

“The patronising disposition of unaccountable power”.

Those six words alone should be studied by every public authority in this country, every Minister, every chief constable, every permanent secretary and every senior public official, because if we do not learn those lessons, we will carry on repeating them. Few reports have ever described the British establishment with such devastating accuracy. When power is unaccountable, truth becomes negotiable, justice becomes optional and ordinary people are sacrificed.

The Hillsborough law was born from that understanding. Its purpose is simple: never again should a grieving family have to fight the state simply to discover the truth. In 2021 I was asked by my friend, now my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham), to carry the baton for a Hillsborough law in Parliament and to bring the voices of the families and survivors into Parliament, to make sure no family ever again goes through what the Hillsborough families and survivors went through. There are moments in politics that define why we are here—why we have been given this privilege. This was mine. I never saw this as my campaign. It always belonged to the families; I was simply trusted to carry their voices into this House.

4.30 pm

I cannot lie: there were moments when this journey tested me in ways I could never have imagined. There were moments when compromise was presented as victory; moments when those more powerful than me said,

“Take this or leave it”; and moments when I wondered whether we would ever get here. But every time that happened, I thought about the Hillsborough memorial at Anfield. Every time I walk past it, those 97 names remind me who this fight has always been for.

I thought about the families. I thought about the survivors. I looked down at that number on my wrist. It reminded me that I was one of the lucky ones. It reminded me why compromise could never, ever be an option—not just for Hillsborough, but for Grenfell, for the infected blood campaign, for the Post Office Horizon families, for Primodos, for Truth About Zane, for the nuclear test veterans, for the Chinook families, for the Manchester arena families and for every family forced to spend years fighting the very institutions that should have stood beside them: different tragedies and different families, but the same fight for truth and justice. This law has never belonged to politicians. Politicians did not build this movement—families did. It belongs to the people. It belongs to every family that has ever buried a loved one while the state watched on and buried the truth.

Today I feel something I was not sure I would ever feel: hope. For so many years, this place was part of the problem. Today, I believe it can become part of the solution. Today is not the end of a campaign; it is the start of doing things differently. It is about people in power telling the truth. It is about public bodies remembering who they exist to serve, and it is about making sure that no family is ever again left to fight the state on their own. That is the promise before us today, and we must not waste it.

To the families of the 97—those still with us and those we have sadly lost along the way: you will never, ever be forgotten. You carried a burden that should never have been yours. You fought with dignity when others showed none. You taught this country that ordinary people can overcome the most extraordinary abuse of power. To every survivor, I hope today brings some measure of peace, not because it can erase the past—nothing ever will—but because your suffering has brought about lasting change for generations to come.

For decades, I asked myself why I survived. Today, I think I understand—not because I have done anything extraordinary, but because I was given the privilege of standing here and carrying the voices of people who could no longer speak for themselves. If, in some small way, I have honoured the memory of the 97, if I have been worthy of the trust that the families and survivors have placed in me, if this Parliament finally ensures that no grieving family ever again has to fight the state simply to uncover the truth, then every setback, every disappointment and every sleepless night will have been worth it.

This law is about far more than Hillsborough. It is about the kind of country we choose to be—a country where power tells the truth, where public servants serve the public, where justice is not delayed until campaigners grow old, and where no family is ever left to walk alone. If we pass this law in the spirit in which it was conceived, the greatest legacy of the 97 will not simply be that they are remembered; it will be that, because of them, this country has finally, finally learned the lessons of Hillsborough. Every time I look at the number on my

wrist, I will not simply remember those we lost; I will remember that they changed this country for the better. Never again! *[Applause.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I call Alex Davies-Jones.

Alex Davies-Jones: It is more than a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne), and to speak in support of the Government amendments and in favour of the Bill as a whole. This law represents far more than legislation; it represents a promise—a promise that the suffering endured by the Hillsborough families, and all those who have been sadly failed by the state, will never be repeated. It is a promise that no bereaved family will ever again be forced to spend decades fighting and fundraising to challenge the very institutions that should have been helping them to uncover the truth.

For far too long, we have seen a devastating pattern emerge after major public tragedies. Families are left grieving the loss of those they love, only to find themselves caught in secondary trauma, battling against secrecy, defensiveness, delay and denial. Instead of compassion, they encounter obstruction; instead of openness, they face silence. Instead of truth they are met with half-truths—or worse, with lies, missing evidence and institutional self-protection. That is why the duty of candour matters.

A duty of candour is not about punishing honest mistakes. It is about ensuring that public authorities and officials understand that their first duty is not to protect reputations or institutions; it is to protect the truth. Because when institutions close ranks, ordinary families pay the price. When evidence is concealed, justice is delayed, and when facts are distorted, truth is destroyed. When those in positions of power fail to tell the truth, confidence in our public institutions is eroded for generations.

The Hillsborough families know that better than anyone. For 37 years they have carried a burden that should never have been theirs. They have fought not only for the memory of the 97 people who lost their lives, but for something much bigger: the principle that no institution is above accountability, and that no grieving family should ever have to fight the state simply to establish the truth about what happened to their loved one. Their courage has changed this country. They have exposed failures that many hoped would remain hidden. They challenged narratives that should never have been allowed to stand, and they refused to give up, even when the odds were stacked against them.

The Hillsborough families' determination has become a beacon of hope for countless other families seeking justice. We owe them so much more than our admiration—we owe them action. We cannot stand here, praise their courage and thank them for their persistence, only to fail to deliver the very reforms that they have spent decades fighting for. If we do, what message does that send to every family still waiting for answers? What does it say to those affected by Grenfell, the infected blood scandal, the Post Office Horizon scandal, the Manchester Arena terror attack—and so on, sadly—and to every future family who may one day find themselves seeking truth after tragedy? It says that lessons are spoken about but not learned.

The duty of candour is the mechanism by which we begin to rebuild trust between the public and the institutions that serve them. It changes the culture from one of defensiveness to one of openness; from protecting organisations to protecting people; from asking families to prove the truth, to requiring public authorities to tell it from the very beginning. That is not, and should not be a radical principle or idea. It is the minimum standard that the public should expect from those who exercise public power. That is why I support the Government amendments, as they finally allow the Bill to have the worthy title of “the Hillsborough law”. The amendments stand as a testament to the families, victims and survivors who would never give up—the Manchester Arena attack victims, nuclear test veterans, the Chinook disaster families, and anyone who has had to fight for the truth against the army of the state, and then the intelligence services on top.

If we are to have a true principle and a true duty of candour, then that principle must be applied consistently. It cannot be the case that we champion transparency and accountability with one hand while creating an exemption with the other. A duty of candour that applies only when convenient is not a true duty at all.

Amanda Hack (North West Leicestershire) (Lab): One of the things that has always struck me about this law is how we can change accountability. Just a couple of weeks ago, Donna Ockenden’s report about the Nottingham maternity scandal set out the fact that public officials did not come forward to tell the truth about those tragic incidents. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill addresses issues that go far wider than the Hillsborough disaster and that although the Hillsborough families have had to go through so much, many other families have suffered and endured as well?

Alex Davies-Jones: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. She is making a powerful point about the Nottingham maternity scandal, and I know that the Hillsborough families have been supporting those families in their fight for truth, justice and accountability. That is why this law is so important: it is so much more and has become so much more than just being about the Hillsborough families. It has encompassed everything that we know that we need regarding our public institutions and the duty of candour. That is why the Government amendments regarding the intelligence and defence services are so vital.

I recognise, of course, that the work of our security and intelligence services is unique. They perform an essential role in protecting national security, keeping our citizens safe and responding to some of the most complex threats that our country faces, some of which we will never and should never know about. I know from first-hand experience that this has not been an easy position for the Government to reach. It has been difficult to try and meet the necessary balance of maintaining and securing information that must remain confidential to protect ongoing operations, intelligence sources and national security.

I place on the record my sincere thanks to the whole army of amazing, dedicated public servants who have fought to bring the legislation to this place today, so that we are able to take forward this Bill with the Government amendments intact; and to the families

who never gave up, even when the process of developing this legislation took an emotional, physical and mental toll on them. I say to the Hillsborough Law Now campaigners, and to all the campaigners and organisations who have become part of that wider family: you have been bonded by grief, trauma and the failure of the state to provide you with truth and justice, so thank you for adopting me into that family and for giving me support, friendship and inspiration to drive forward this meaningful change.

The principle at the heart of the legislation is that public authorities must act honestly, must not mislead, must not conceal wrongdoing and must co-operate fully with investigations and inquiries when, sadly, tragedy strikes. Those principles should not cease to exist simply because an institution operates in a field of national security. Indeed, where public power is exercised most extensively, the need for accountability is arguably at its greatest.

Public trust in our institutions is not strengthened by blanket exemptions. It is strengthened when the public can be confident that every institution, regardless of its status, influence or function, is subject to the same fundamental expectation of honesty and integrity. The Hillsborough families did not spend decades fighting for a culture of accountability only for Parliament to decide that accountability should have limits. They campaigned for a principle that no public body should ever be able to place institutional reputation above the truth. That principle must be universal, because once we begin carving out exceptions, we risk undermining the very foundation on which this legislation rests. We risk creating the perception that some institutions are accountable while others are not, and that candour is expected from some public servants but not from others. That cannot be right.

If the duty of candour is a moral obligation, as I believe it is, then it must be a moral obligation that applies across the whole public sector. Appropriate safeguards for national security can and should exist—and they do exist, as we have heard from the Minister. Sensitive information can and should be protected where necessary, but those safeguards must not become a shield behind which truth, accountability and justice can be denied.

All the families who have fought for this law have spent decades challenging the idea that powerful institutions should be allowed to mark their own homework. They have taught us that accountability is not a threat to public confidence; it is the foundation of it. We honour their legacy not by creating exemptions from candour, but by embedding candour as a universal principle—a principle that says no institution is above honesty, no authority is above accountability and no family should ever be denied the truth because of the organisation they happen to be seeking answers from.

If you will indulge me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will reflect on the words that have come to symbolise not only my beloved Liverpool football club, but the Hillsborough families’ extraordinary campaign for truth and justice—“you’ll never walk alone”. For millions, that is an anthem sung from the Kop before kick-off, but for the Hillsborough families it has become something far deeper. It has become a promise that, even in the darkest moments, they would not face their fight in isolation. It was a reminder that when institutions failed

[Alex Davies-Jones]

them, communities stood beside them. When others sought to rewrite the truth, it was ordinary people who refused to let their voices be silenced. When grief threatened to overwhelm them, they found strength in one another. That spirit has carried them through more than three decades of heartbreak, resilience and determination.

4.45 pm

Those words—“you’ll never walk alone”—must not remain simply a song that we sing, or a sentiment that we admire; they must become a principle that shapes how the state treats bereaved families. No family should have to walk alone through years of legal battles because public bodies refused to tell the truth. No family should have to walk alone against institutions with vastly greater resources and power. No family should have to walk alone in the search for answers, after losing someone they love. That is why the Hillsborough law matters, why the duty of candour matters, and why this legislation must apply wherever public power is exercised. No institution should be beyond accountability when the truth is owed to grieving families. If we truly believe in the words “you’ll never walk alone”, we must ensure that they are reflected not only in our compassion, but in our laws.

The Hillsborough families have walked an unimaginably long road. They have carried the weight of grief, while shouldering the burden of securing justice for generations that follow. Their courage has changed the country for the better, and today, in this place, it is our turn to finally walk alongside them. We honour the memory of the 97 not only by remembering them, but by ensuring that no family is ever left to fight alone again. That is the promise of the Hillsborough law. That is the promise of a true duty of candour. That is how we ensure that the words “you’ll never walk alone” are no longer simply an anthem of remembrance, but a lasting commitment from this Parliament to every family who seek nothing more than the truth.

Emma Lewell (South Shields) (Lab): Before I speak to the Government’s new clauses and amendments, which ensure that there is no carve-out from the duty of candour for the intelligence and security services, I put on record my utmost respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne) and all my hon. and right hon. Friends who have been relentless in pushing this Bill forward. However, it is the Hillsborough families and campaigners, who have fought doggedly through their pain and heartache, who deserve all our respect. In memory of their loved ones, through their courage and refusal to be silenced or ground down, they have fundamentally changed the relationship between the state and the public, ensuring the services that are there to protect and serve us are always accountable.

There is something deeply wrong in our country that caused us to need to legislate for these services to tell the truth, and to face criminal sanctions if they do not. Telling the truth should have always been their position, not something that they were forced to do. The rest of us face reprisals for not telling the truth. At the very least, we should expect that from the state.

Chloe and Liam, the children of my dear friends and constituents, Lisa and Mark Rutherford and Caroline Curry, were killed in the Manchester terror attack. They

sat through utterly agonising years, months, days and hours of inquiry hearings, which revealed that MI5 had not given an accurate picture of the key intelligence held on their children’s murderer. The chairman of the public inquiry also found that MI5 missed a significant opportunity to take action that might have prevented the attack. Lisa, Mark and Caroline were signatories to the Hillsborough Law Now campaign letter to my right hon. and learned Friend the Prime Minister earlier this year. That letter says:

“Despite MI5 lying to a public inquiry in this way, no one has been held to account. This lack of accountability needs to change. Creating a full duty of candour responsibility on MI5, MI6 and GCHQ is the clearest route to creating this change.”

The letter went on to say:

“Every security and intelligence officer should be required to tell the truth, and the leaders of the organisations should also bear full responsibility.”

That is absolutely right, and I am relieved today that the Government have listened.

Caroline, Lisa and Mark are not in the Gallery today. They told me that they feel that by not being here, they are letting their children down. They are not. Their loved ones will know that they, like everyone who has fought so hard and has been involved in getting us here today, have never, ever given up. They have fought with every breath, every single minute of every day since their loved ones were so brutally taken from them. This law will not be retrospective; it cannot right past wrongs. However, it will send a very clear signal to the state, and in doing so will instil a culture in which the truth, not the cover-up, is the primary focus. This is so important for everyone who is fighting for justice—the nuclear veterans, Chinook, Grenfell, the Post Office scandal, the infected blood scandal, the covid-19 bereaved families, and many others.

As MPs in this place, it is now our job to make sure that this Bill becomes an Act, to make sure that every single word of it is fully adhered to, and that the people we represent are never again treated in such a despicable way. In a democracy like ours, truth and justice should never have taken decades; it should never have been this hard, this relentless or this painful. It is a real honour to have met all those involved with the Hillsborough law campaign, although I wish I had met them under different circumstances. I thank all of them. We all owe them, and I sincerely hope that now they have got Parliament to this stage, they are able to find some small element of peace.

Sarah Russell: I join my many colleagues in paying tribute to the Hillsborough families—those in the Gallery today, and those who, for very understandable reasons, felt that they could not be here. Your quest for justice is truly inspirational to all of us, and I thank you so very much for your perseverance and everything you have done. I do not doubt that it will make the country a better place.

Many people have raised concerns about the duty of candour in this legislation, and its application to the security services. I am sure that when the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) raised this issue in the Chamber, he did so in good faith, but no one who has raised those concerns has been able to point to any case in which the existing law protecting the security services and the secret

information that they hold has actually failed, or to any problems resulting from the existing arrangements. Those concerns seem to be entirely hypothetical. Giving the security services a huge carve-out from the duty of candour when there were known problems with, for example, the evidence given to the inquiry on the Manchester Arena bombing seems completely unsustainable and unreasonable. There is literally no evidence to suggest that this Bill presents any risk to national security. I join my colleagues in saying that if there were evidence to suggest that the existing arrangements had ever failed us, many of us would think again about the drafting of this Bill, as it has been presented by the Government. We would all put the country first, but I cannot see anything that should prevent this law from going ahead as drafted.

It is so important to get to the truth, and I hope that the duty of candour will help to move things forward significantly. We owe it to the Hillsborough families, and the many families affected by the many other disasters that we sadly hear about too often in this place, to ask the other question: what comes next? That is why I rise to speak in support of new clauses 5 and 6, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter), through which he calls for a national oversight mechanism that follows up on the actions taken by public authorities in response to the conclusions and recommendations of inquests and inquiries. We must get to the truth, and we must have recommendations on how to avoid future catastrophes, disasters and unnecessary risk, but we then have to do something to stop those things happening again.

At the moment, prevention of future death reports and inquiry reports are all too often not followed up—or not followed up consistently across the board. All too often, including after the Ockenden report and the maternity scandals, systemic change has not followed from inquiry recommendations, despite the considerable resources and effort put in by individuals to improve systems. We think about justice for the Hillsborough families, the Grenfell families and many other families who have sadly lost loved ones in terrible circumstances, but we must make sure that we bring into play the mechanisms that ensure proper follow-up after all these disasters. We must follow through on inquiry outcomes, and ensure that the right mechanisms are in place.

I thank very much everyone who has worked to get us to where we are today—the many families, but also the Members of Parliament who have worked across party and for a great deal of time on bringing this legislation forward. Let us keep this work going.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): It is a true privilege to have been present for this debate, and to have heard some of the most incredible contributions that I have ever heard in this place.

I will be mercifully brief. I recognise that it is to the Prime Minister's considerable credit that he has fulfilled his manifesto commitment and got the Bill to this point within a year of his remarks at the Labour party conference in Liverpool last year. I also put on record my recognition of my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) for his persistent work on this subject for many years. Principally, however, it is the families of Hillsborough victims, the Hillsborough Law Now campaign, Pete Weatherby KC, my hon. Friend the

Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne) and many others who have to be recognised for not letting the matter rest, and for their tireless determination to get us to where we are today. We must not forget the Manchester Arena victims, the Grenfell families, the Chinook families, the contaminated blood families, the British nuclear test veterans, and all those who have been part of this campaign.

The duty of candour on the NHS did not deliver for the families of my constituents Christie Harnett, Nadia Sharif and Emily Moore, and many others who died in the scandal at the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys mental health trust. I have welcomed confirmation of a public inquiry, and the information that applications have been received to chair it, but families need that inquiry to be up and running. I hope that the Health Secretary can progress that urgently this summer.

We are being asked to support dozens of Government amendments today that were tabled with little notice, and without our having been able to scrutinise them in detail, but I am led by the families to support those amendments. I recognise the calls for oversight and monitoring mechanisms, such as those set out in new clause 5, tabled by the Chair of the Justice Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter), and in new clause 1, by my old friend and doughty campaigner, my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle). Those measures would assure us that the new Government amendments will function effectively and, among other things, allow us to hold to account police officers and members of the armed forces and the security services, as we are led to believe.

I sense that many Members across this House would like to hear more from our Front Benchers about commitments made to ensuring oversight and monitoring. Perhaps the Minister can address that when she responds to the debate. The expectation of honesty and transparency is not, and never can be, a threat to national security. Will the Minister set out how the application of the duty of candour and the prevention of carve-outs will be applied to the work of the Northern Ireland Legacy Commission, which is being established by the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill? Perhaps the Minister can confirm that the Government will table amendments to that Bill, or can otherwise provide guarantees that the measures in the Bill cover the families who have suffered so much in Northern Ireland.

The common characteristics of these appalling human tragedies are the most unimaginable trauma, pain and grief, and the demands are the same. They are for truth, justice and accountability, and today provides the means to deliver on those demands. I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member from Liverpool, West Derby: if anything tells us why we come to this place to change the country for the better, surely it is what we are doing today, and I very much welcome this landmark legislation.

5 pm

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my constituency neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald). I share his views about the need for action on the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys inquiry.

[Luke Myer]

When I first considered running for public office, my wife said to me that she was sure that at some point I would end up voting for things with which she did not agree, but that I must promise her that I would do one thing, and that was never to engage with *The Sun*. That is one small snapshot of the depth of feeling in her family, who are from Wavertree and Kirkby, and in families across the Merseyside region. They are well represented today by all my colleagues from that part of the world, but in particular by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne), whose speech was one of the finest I have heard in this place—and outside it as well.

I also, of course, pay tribute to the Hillsborough families whose courage and determination have brought us to this point. For decades those families were forced to fight not only with their grief, but against institutions that should have served them. They faced delay, denial and the closing of ranks. They were made to prove the truth again and again, while those in positions of authority avoided responsibility. No family should ever have to endure that. It is a credit to them that they did not give up, and their campaign has changed our country's understanding of public accountability.

The duty of candour in the Bill makes it harder for public bodies to hide the truth, mislead the public, or obstruct those seeking answers. It says that public service must mean honesty, especially when things have gone badly wrong. I pay tribute to the Ministers who have led the Bill through the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), who is sitting in front of me and who also made an excellent speech. It takes great bravery for the Executive to agree to restrict their own power, and I think that applying the offence they have created of misleading the public to senior members of the Government is a courageous thing for a Government to step up and agree to do. I therefore support clause 11, but I also feel strongly that it ought to apply to all of us as politicians, and I am grateful to the more than 30 Members on both sides of the House who supported my amendments 13 to 18 to that effect. In the age of disinformation and the rise of autocracy, politicians who intentionally or recklessly engage in serious or repeated dishonesty on a matter of significant public concern must face consequences, and I hope to hear more from the Minister about that.

None the less, I am firmly in support of the Bill. Nothing can bring back those 97 people who went to watch a football match on a sunny afternoon, or return the years taken from the families in their long struggle for truth, but we can learn from that injustice. We can support bereaved families at inquests, and we can ensure that future families do not face the same walls of silence and obstruction. I pay tribute again to all those who have campaigned for justice, and I am pleased to support the Bill today.

Clive Efford: I decided at a very late stage to speak in this debate, because I chair the all-party parliamentary group on haemophilia and contaminated blood and I wanted to add my voice on behalf of all the people who campaigned on that scandal and express their appreciation for the work of the Hillsborough families and what they have achieved for our country. Ordinary

people up and down the country will have a power to take on the state in the future and not to be crushed, as the state has attempted to do in respect of so many other scandals that have been mentioned today.

I pay tribute to the MPs from the north-west—not just Liverpool—who, over the many years that I have been in this House, have campaigned consistently on this issue, particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle) and my hon. Friend the Member for Widnes and Halewood (Derek Twigg). I should also acknowledge Steve Rotherham, who spoke out very powerfully on behalf of the Hillsborough families, and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne), who spoke so passionately earlier. I pay tribute to all of them, but it tells us something: in spite of the fact that some very fine Members of Parliament have been raising this issue over a very long period of time, it has taken this long to get to where we are today.

That shows us how important it is that we are tenacious and stick with our campaigns, and also that we have oversight of the Government and can hold them to account, to make sure that they do not treat people in the way that they have attempted to do. The cover-up, and the opposition to the campaigns for justice, tells us that we can never drop our guard in holding people and the state to account, so I really welcome the fact that we will pass this Bill today.

I could stand here and read out many examples of the way that individuals were treated by the state in the contaminated blood scandal, but one particularly springs to mind. At the age of 18 months, a baby was experimented on, without anybody being told. The baby was infected with hepatitis, but this was not discovered until the baby became a teenager. The parent found out, and the state made her believe that she had given consent for her baby to be experimented on at the age of 18 months. That parent went on to attempt suicide. It just shows the scale and depth of the cruelty that people have had to endure in that scandal and others. It is one of the most powerful testaments that I have come across, and it shows why we need to fight for justice in this place for the people who suffered in all the scandals that we have spoken about.

I will discuss two issues. First, I see the duty of candour as part of a framework that we need to put in place, and we must have a national compensation body. The Infected Blood Compensation Authority, the independent body for the contaminated blood scandal, is a unique body that has been set up to pay out compensation. It is learning a lot about how to go through this process, and it would be wrong to have to relearn the process all over again with every subsequent scandal where compensation is paid out. We should set up a national body for compensation to perform that task, to ensure that we keep in place the knowledge and expertise that has been learned and do not lose it.

Secondly, we need a national body for oversight of the recommendations of inquiries, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter) has set out in his new clauses 5 and 6, which I fully support. We have had over 400 recommendations from inquiries since 2024, but who has oversight of those recommendations and how the Government are responding to them? Sir Brian Langstaff, who chaired the contaminated blood inquiry, reported in July 2024,

but he deliberately kept his inquiry open because he wanted to see how the Government reacted to his recommendations. In 2025, he reconvened that inquiry, took further evidence and gave further recommendations because of the tardy way in which the Government were responding to his recommendations. We cannot be in that position again, and we cannot rely on the Sir Brian Langstaffs of this world to be that guarded and to protect our rights in that way every time. We must have a body that is independent of Government, and that will scrutinise how they behave and how they react to the recommendations of public inquiries that we the public pay for.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Hillsborough families. We all owe you a debt of gratitude.

Catherine Atkinson: With the leave of the House, it is an honour and a privilege to close today's debate. This Bill exists because people refused to be silent, and because families who had lost everything were told to move on, stop asking questions and accept half-truths at best, bare-faced lies at worst. Instead, they chose to fight. For too long in this country when a disaster has struck, the balance of power has lain with the state, not with the people who suffered harm. The people it should have protected were left to battle institutions with limitless resources, lawyers paid for from the public purse and a culture focused on defending reputations rather than discovering the truth. This Bill will finally put that imbalance right. It shifts the system away from secrecy and defensiveness towards openness, honesty and accountability.

I want to thank Members from all parties who have contributed so passionately today and throughout the passage of the Bill. I am so grateful for the way they have worked with us constructively and collaboratively, rightly challenging us, but always with a shared purpose. That is this House at its very best, coming together to rise above party political advantage for justice and the good of the British people. That is what we have done with the Hillsborough law, and it means that we have been able to bring forward amendments that genuinely strengthen this Bill, not water it down.

I will address the points made in the debate. First, on national security, this Bill was paused to ensure we get it right. This legislation is about addressing the wrongs we have seen at Hillsborough and in so many other scandals. The duty of candour is about being honest when things go wrong; it is emphatically not about changing assessments of whether national security information can or cannot be disclosed publicly in legal proceedings, and it is a mischaracterisation to suggest that it does so. The families and campaigners have never wanted information to go into the public domain that would put people at risk. Certain types of legal proceeding can compel national security information—that happens now—and law and practice have been developed over time to protect information.

The Bill and the amendments repeatedly make it clear that the Bill does not override existing laws, but instead draws on existing safeguards. We have always had the tools in law to protect national security information—for example, restriction orders and public interest immunity applications. Determining what and how sensitive information could be published was my main area of practice as a barrister for many years

before coming to this place. Nothing in this Bill takes those away, and we have used the past months to stress-test these provisions rigorously and ensure that is the case.

The right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) asked about the time taken and if our position had changed. The Government have been consistent that the risk comes from individuals who may not be aware of the full picture, and it has therefore been essential to be able to address that. The shadow Justice Secretary's amendment and the Government amendments are based on the same premise: that there needs to be a corporate check on national security information going from an individual employee to an inquiry, because individuals may not know the full sensitivity. But the Government amendments provide a more precise process for what the head must do with that information, using existing national security safeguards, and so avoid the broad discretion that had caused Members concern.

5.15 pm

Our intelligence services are best placed to assess the sensitivity of information—they do that every day. That is why we have crafted the amendments as we have, so that any information held by individual employees that may be engaged by the provisions of the Bill is routed through the service corporately, so that those proper assessments of sensitivity can take place, and so that intelligence information held by other public bodies cannot be released by other bodies, but only by the intelligence service that is able to make a proper assessment of sensitivity. All that is current practice now, but the Bill is clearer in making it law. That provides more assurance, not less, to our citizens and partners.

Concerns were raised about candour in relation to health. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Sir Jeremy Hunt) for his contribution. We do not disagree with the intent of his new clause 11 and amendment 150. Our concern is that the detail is not necessary on the face of the Bill and that it would be disproportionate to do so. The Bill requires public authorities to set out how a professional duty of candour must be met with clear professional sanctions. We will work with organisations on how best to fulfil those obligations and ensure full implementation.

Tessa Munt: Will the Minister give way?

Catherine Atkinson: I am afraid I will not. To respond to as many points raised as I can, I do not have time to take interventions.

The Bill is about the duty of candour to an inquiry or investigation, and the onward disclosure of information will be determined by each inquiry, inquest or investigation as to what is appropriate and relevant. I would be eager to meet the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash to discuss what more can be done through the implementation of the Bill and separately to achieve the culture change that we want to see.

Other Members raised the Nottingham maternity review, which I have followed closely, as I have the work of the Government's maternity adviser, my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood Forest (Michelle Welsh), because of my experience in Nottingham when I was giving birth to my eldest son in 2014. Each contraction meant that his heartbeat stopped and what began as a

[Catherine Atkinson]

normal labour suddenly turned to panic and ended with an emergency caesarean to save his life. I was one of the lucky ones, because I got to take him home. I will always hold in my mind the 500 mothers and babies who suffered potentially avoidable harm or death around that time in Nottingham. The message that we are sending with this legislation is that cover-up culture is over and that women and families must be listened to. Public bodies, including NHS trusts, must be open and candid when things go wrong. We are clear that we will apply the duty of candour to the Leeds and Sussex maternity reviews.

On the national oversight mechanism and the contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter), we have taken steps to improve transparency in how we respond to inquiry recommendations. The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is currently considering how the implementation of recommendations resulting from future public inquiries should be scrutinised. We welcome that and will continue to work with the Committee on next steps. The Office of the Chief Coroner is also continuing work to improve access to the prevention of future death reports while the Government seek to strengthen arrangements for responding to the concerns raised through them, including better and more strategic use of technology.

On the Independent Public Advocate, I welcome the contribution and work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston (Maria Eagle). I thank my right hon. Friend and the others who have raised this, and I take on my right hon. Friend's points. Legislation requires that there be a review on the role within 18 months of the IPA being stood up, and that is in train. The Ethics and Integrity Commission will also be developing guidance on the code of ethics and will have a role in monitoring and overseeing it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Luke Myer) raises in his amendments some serious concerns about disinformation and the risk of eroding trust in our institutions and weakening our country. While Back-Bench MPs are not included in the new offence, as they are responsible for scrutinising the decisions of the Government of the day, Parliament does already have processes for determining whether Members have misled the House and has its own arrangements for ensuring truthfulness and accuracy from Members. However, I would be keen to work with my hon. Friend to look at how we strengthen matters in relation to his concerns.

On whistleblowing and amendments 3 and 6, the Bill provides safeguards for sensitive information and whistleblowers, and the code of ethics must contain information on whistleblowing policies. We are actively exploring opportunities for reform, as set out in the anti-corruption strategy 2025, and a consultation on whistleblowing will be launched this summer.

We have heard many contributions about placing water companies under obligations of a code of ethical conduct, and although the code of conduct provisions do not apply to private water companies in England and Wales, the Bill contains a power to extend this. The Government will consult on that in due course.

The hon. Member for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East (Seamus Logan) raised concerns about the additional work needed and the additional measures coming into force being put in place as soon as possible. We are conscious that families have waited long enough for this law. Putting commencement dates on the face of the Bill could cause practical difficulties, but we are doing all we can to ensure that it is in place as soon as possible.

Members have also spoken about amendments relating to former public officials. To be clear, those individuals will remain subject to the duty of candour, provided that an investigation or inquiry relates to their former role, and the offence of misleading the public will also still apply, even if they have retired.

On subcontractors, the main contractors will be accountable for their subcontractors' performance. The Government are open to exploring further measures to strengthen accountability and candour through supply chains.

Concerns about journalism have also been raised. The Government have already narrowed the journalism exemptions and made it clear that the offence covers misleading recognised news publishers. Sufficient safeguards are provided through the requirement for consent from the Director of Public Prosecutions before any prosecution can proceed.

I wish to thank a number of people before I conclude. I pay tribute to all those who have shaped the Bill, ensured that it delivers as intended, held us to account and made sure that we got to this point. I thank the families and campaigners for their courage and for sharing their experiences, often at great personal cost. They have challenged successive Governments and worked constructively with us, and without them we would not be here today.

I also thank the Members of this House who have stood alongside the families and campaigners over many years, championing their cause and helping to strengthen this Bill. In particular, I thank the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for the Cabinet Office and the Attorney General. I thank the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam for all his assistance and expertise on the Government amendments on the security services. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Garston. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Knowsley (Anneliese Midgley), for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker), for Widnes and Halewood (Derek Twigg) and for Birkenhead (Alison McGovern). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne), whose contribution was so powerful. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (David Baines) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham), whose passion for this matter long predates his return to this House.

Nothing can bring back those who were lost, and we can never undo the suffering that so many families have endured. But what we can and must do is ensure that the truth is never again buried by institutions whose first instinct is to protect themselves. That is what the Bill is designed to combat, and I am incredibly grateful to all involved that we have been able to bring the Bill back before the House.

As Victims Minister, I am determined to see the Bill deliver the lasting cultural change that families have fought for over so many years. I hope that in years to

come it will be remembered not only for the duties and offences it creates, but because it helped to change the relationship between the state and those that it exists to serve.

We have listened, and we have acted. We will continue to listen as the Bill makes its way through the House. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 8 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 9

ABOLITION OF COMMON LAW OFFENCE: NORTHERN IRELAND

“(1) The offence of misconduct in public office under the common law of Northern Ireland is abolished.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to—

- (a) any act which was done before the coming into force of this section, or
- (b) any act which began before the coming into force of this section and continues after its coming into force.

(3) Subsection (1) does not affect—

- (a) the liability of any person for an offence other than the offence of misconduct in public office under the common law of Northern Ireland, or
- (b) the civil liability of any person for the tort of misfeasance in public office.”—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This new clause provides for the abolition of the offence of misconduct in public office under the common law of Northern Ireland.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 2

DUTY OF CANDOUR AND ASSISTANCE

Amendments made: 151, page 2, line 25, leave out “likely to be” and insert “that is”.

This amendment clarifies that information must be provided under the duty of candour and assistance if it is relevant to the inquiry or investigation concerned.

Amendment 152, page 2, line 30, leave out “likely to be”.—(Catherine Atkinson.)

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 151.

Amendment proposed: 3, page 2, line 39, at end insert—

- “(f) ensure all relevant public officials can safely disclose information to an inquiry, investigation or inquest.”—(*Jess Brown-Fuller.*)

This amendment requires public authorities or officials who are assisting an inquiry, investigation or inquest to demonstrate that they have taken steps to ensure relevant persons can safely disclose information relevant to an investigation.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 93, Noes 323.

Division No. 56]

[5.27 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat	Bird, Lara
Amos, Gideon	Blackman, Kirsty
Anderson, Lee	Braverman, rh Suella
Begum, Apsana	Brewer, Alex
Bennett, Alison	Brown-Fuller, Jess
Berry, Siân	Burgon, Richard

Byrne, Ian
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Chadwick, David
Chamberlain, Wendy
Chambers, Dr Danny
Chowns, Dr Ellie
Coghlan, Chris
Collins, Victoria
Cooper, Daisy
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Dance, Adam
Darling, Steve
Davey, rh Ed
Davies, Ann
Dean, Bobby
Denyer, Carla (*Proxy vote cast by Siân Berry*)
Doogan, Dave
Eastwood, Colum
Forster, Mr Will
Franklin, Zöe
George, Andrew
Gibson, Sarah
Gilmour, Rachel
Glover, Olly
Goldman, Marie
Green, Sarah
Harding, Monica
Hobhouse, Wera
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Liz
Jones, Clive
Khan, Ayoub
Kohler, Mr Paul
Lake, Ben
Law, Chris
Logan, Seamus
MacCleary, James
MacDonald, Mr Angus
Martin, Mike
Mathew, Brian
Maynard, Charlie
Medi, Llinos (*Proxy vote cast by Ben Lake*)

van Mierlo, Freddie
Miller, Calum
Milne, John
Mohamed, Iqbal
Morello, Edward
Morgan, Helen
Morris, Grahame
Morrison, Mr Tom
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Susan
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Perteghella, Manuela
Pochin, Sarah
Ramsay, Adrian
Reynolds, Mr Joshua
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Robinson, rh Gavin
Roome, Ian
Savage, Dr Roz
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shannon, Jim
Slade, Vikki
Smart, Lisa
Sollom, Ian
Spencer, Hannah
Sultana, Zarah
Taylor, Luke
Thomas, Cameron (*Proxy vote cast by Wendy Chamberlain*)
Tice, Richard
Voaden, Caroline
Whittome, Nadia
Wilkinson, Max
Wilson, Munira
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wishart, Pete
Wrigley, Martin

Tellers for the Ayes:
Claire Young and
Charlotte Cane

NOES

Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed, Dr Zubir
Akehurst, Luke
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, rh Heidi
Al-Hassan, Sadik
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Anderson, Fleur
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
Atkinson, Catherine
Atkinson, Lewis
Bailey, Olivia
Baines, David
Baker, Alex
Baker, Richard
Ballinger, Alex
Bance, Antonia
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Baxter, Johanna
Beales, Danny
Beavers, Lorraine
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Billington, Ms Polly
Blake, Olivia
Bloore, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie
Botterill, Jade
Brackenridge, Sureena
Brash, Mr Jonathan
Brickell, Phil
Buckley, Julia
Burke, Maureen
Burnham, rh Andy
Burton-Sampson, David
Butler, Dawn
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
 Clark, Feryal
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Craft, Jen
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Doughty, Stephen
 Downie, Graeme
 Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Egan, Damien
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Mr Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gilbert, Tracy
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Ingham, Leigh
 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, Afzal
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kumaran, Uma
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Noah
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Macdonald, Alice (*Proxy vote
 cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty

Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mohamed, Abtisam
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, rh Ian
 Murray, rh James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Dr Peter
 Quigley, Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, rh Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie (*Proxy vote
 cast by Rachael Maskell*)
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Scroggum, Michelle
 Seward, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swann, Robin
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh
 Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 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, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Noes:
 Mark Ferguson and
 Emma Foody

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 3

SECTION 2: FURTHER PROVISION

Amendment made: 153, in clause 3, page 3, line 17, at end insert

“(and see also paragraph 4(2A) of Schedule 1)”.—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 179.

Clause 6

SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION

Amendments made: 26, in clause 6, page 5, line 37, after “applies” insert “(subject as follows)—

(a)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendments 155 and 157.

Amendment 154, in clause 6, page 5, line 37, leave out “an intelligence service” and insert “a relevant public authority”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendments 157.

Amendment 155, in clause 6, page 5, line 38, at end insert—

“(b) to a person who works for a relevant public authority as it applies to other public officials.”

This amendment clarifies that the duty of candour and assistance applies to persons working for relevant public authorities (as defined by Amendment 168) in the same way as that duty applies to other public officials, subject to certain safeguards dealt with in the rest of clause 6 (as amended by Amendment 157).

Amendment 28, in clause 6, page 5, line 39, leave out “But”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 26.

Amendment 156, in clause 6, page 5, line 40, leave out “an intelligence service” and insert

“a relevant public authority (other than the head of that authority when discharging obligations on behalf of it)”.

This amendment clarifies that the obligation under clause 2(3) to give a notification applies to the head of a relevant public authority when acting on its behalf.

Amendment 157, in clause 6, page 6, line 1, leave out paragraph (b) and insert—

“(b) to any other public official, or to a public authority other than a relevant public authority, where compliance with the obligation would result in the provision of protected information.

(2A) Subsection (2B) applies where—

(a) a public authority (‘the recipient authority’) is in possession of protected information provided by a relevant public authority, and

(b) the recipient authority would, but for the application of subsection (2)(b), be required to give a notification under section 2(3) that would result in the provision of that information.

(2B) The recipient authority must inform the relevant public authority that it has relied on the exemption in subsection (2)(b) in relation to the information (and the relevant public authority must act in accordance with section 2(3)).

(2C) Where, in compliance with the obligation under section 2(4), a person who works for a relevant public authority (other than the head of that authority) would be required to provide protected information to an inquiry or investigation, the person complies with that obligation by providing the information to the head of the authority.

(2D) Where the head of a relevant public authority receives information by virtue of subsection (2C), they must (subject to subsection (2E)) provide that information to the inquiry or investigation—

(a) by such time as the person leading the inquiry or investigation may require by virtue of section 3(5)(a), or

(b) where no such requirement is imposed, as soon as reasonably practicable.

(2E) The duty imposed by subsection (2D) on the head of a relevant public authority to provide information does not apply if, or to the extent that, either of the following conditions is met before the head would otherwise be required to provide the information to the inquiry or investigation.

(2F) The first condition is that an application is made, by virtue of any enactment or rule of law, for the information to be subject to restrictions on disclosure in accordance with that enactment or rule of law.

(2G) The second condition is that representations are made to a Minister for the inquiry or investigation to become an inquiry established under the Inquiries Act 2005 (in cases where it is not being held under that Act).

(2H) Where an application is made in accordance with an enactment or rule of law as mentioned in subsection (2F), information must be provided to the inquiry or investigation if, and to the extent that, the enactment or rule of law so requires for the purposes of the application being determined.

(2I) A person leading an inquiry or investigation must suspend it if—

(a) representations are made to a Minister as mentioned in subsection (2G) in relation to the inquiry or investigation, and

(b) the Minister requests the person to do so on the ground that the matters to which the inquiry or investigation relates are likely to be adequately investigated by an inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005 that is being or is to be held.

(2J) Subsection (2I) does not apply in relation to an investigation under Part 1 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (see instead paragraph 3 of Schedule 1 to that Act).”—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This amendment provides for limited circumstances in which the duty to give a notification under clause 2(3) to the person leading an investigation or inquiry does not apply and provides for certain safeguards in relation to the provision of protected information under clause 2(4). The terms “protected information” and “relevant public authority” are defined in clause 8 as amended by Amendments 167 and 168.

Amendment proposed: 199, in clause 6, page 6, line 3, at end insert—

“(2A) Where, in compliance with the obligation under section 2(4), a person who works for an intelligence service, a military intelligence service, the National Crime Agency, Counter Terrorism Command, or one of the armed forces, would be required to provide security or intelligence information, the obligation applies in respect of that information only if the head of the service or agency consents to it being provided.

(2B) The head of an intelligence service, the head of military intelligence service, the head of the National Crime Agency, the head of Counter Terrorism Policing UK, or the head of one of the armed forces may withhold consent under subsection (2A) only if it appears to the head that either of the following conditions is met.

(2C) The first condition is that it is necessary for consent to be withheld in the interests of national security or otherwise for the purposes of the proper exercise of the functions of the service.

(2D) The second condition is that the information would not be of assistance to the inquiry or investigation in meeting its objectives.

(2E) Where the head of an intelligence service, the head of military intelligence service, the head of the National Crime Agency, the head of Counter Terrorism Policing UK, or the head of one of the armed forces withholds consent under subsection (2A), the head must notify the person leading the inquiry or investigation of that fact.”—(Nick Timothy.)

This amendment ensures that the duty of candour and assistance may require a person who works for an intelligence service, military intelligence, the NCA, Counter Terrorism Command or the armed forces to provide security or intelligence information with the consent of the head of their service.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 102, Noes 409.

Division No. 57]

[5.41 pm

AYES

Anderson, Lee	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Anderson, Stuart	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Andrew, rh Stuart	Lam, Katie
Argar, rh Edward	Lamont, John
Bacon, Gareth	Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Barclay, rh Steve	Lopez, Julia
Bedford, Mr Peter	Lowe, Rupert
Bhatti, Saqib (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Lumsden, Douglas
Bowie, Andrew	Malthouse, rh Kit
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Mayhew, Jerome
Brandreth, Aphra	McMurdock, James
Braverman, rh Suella	McVey, rh Esther
Burghart, Alex	Mitchell, rh Sir Andrew
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Moore, Robbie
Cartlidge, James	Morrissey, Joy
Chope, Sir Christopher	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Cleverly, rh Sir James	Mundell, rh David
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Cocking, Lewis	Norman, rh Jesse
Cooper, John	O'Brien, Neil
Costa, Alberto	Patel, rh Priti
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Paul, Rebecca
Cross, Harriet	Philp, rh Chris
Davies, Gareth	Pochin, Sarah
Davies, Mims	Pritchard, rh Mark
Davis, rh David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Raja, Shivani (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)
Dinenage, Dame Caroline (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Rankin, Jack
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver	Reed, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Robertson, Joe
Evans, Dr Luke	Robinson, rh Gavin
Fortune, Peter	Rosindell, Andrew
Freeman, George (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Shannon, Jim
French, Mr Louie	Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Fuller, Richard	Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Gale, rh Sir Roger	Simmonds, David
Glen, rh John	Smith, Greg
Grant, Helen	Smith, rh Sir Julian
Griffith, Andrew	Smith, Rebecca
Griffiths, Alison	Snowden, Mr Andrew
Harris, Rebecca	Spencer, Dr Ben
Hinds, rh Damian	Spencer, Patrick (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)
Holden, rh Mr Richard	Stafford, Gregory
Hollinrake, Kevin	Stuart, rh Graham
Holmes, Paul	Sunak, rh Rishi (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)
Huddleston, Nigel	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Hudson, Dr Neil	Thomas, Bradley

Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen

Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Lincoln Jopp and
Sir Ashley Fox

NOES

Abbott, Jack	Cane, Charlotte
Abrahams, Debbie	Carden, Dan
Adam, Shockat	Carns, Al
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Chadwick, David
Akehurst, Luke	Chamberlain, Wendy
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Chambers, Dr Danny
Alexander, rh Heidi	Champion, Sarah
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Charalambous, Bambos
Ali, Rushanara	Charters, Mr Luke
Ali, Tahir	Chownes, Dr Ellie
Amos, Gideon	Clark, Feryal
Anderson, Fleur	Coghlan, Chris
Arthur, Dr Scott	Collier, Jacob
Asser, James	Collinge, Lizzi
Athwal, Jas	Collins, Tom
Atkinson, Catherine	Conlon, Liam
Atkinson, Lewis	Coombes, Sarah
Bailey, Olivia	Cooper, Andrew
Baines, David	Cooper, Dr Beccy
Baker, Alex	Cooper, Daisy
Baker, Richard	Cooper, rh Yvette
Ballinger, Alex	Costigan, Deirdre
Bance, Antonia	Cox, Pam
Barker, Paula	Craft, Jen
Barron, Lee	Crichton, Torcuil
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex	Daby, Janet
Baxter, Johanna	Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Beales, Danny	Dance, Adam
Beavers, Lorraine	Darling, Steve
Begum, Apsana	Davey, rh Ed
Benn, rh Hilary	Davies, Ann
Bennett, Alison	Davies, Jonathan
Berry, Siân	Davies, Paul
Betts, Mr Clive	Davies, Shaun
Billington, Ms Polly	Davies-Jones, Alex
Bird, Lara	De Cordova, Marsha
Blackman, Kirsty	Dean, Bobby
Blake, Olivia	Dean, Josh
Bloore, Chris	Denyer, Carla (<i>Proxy vote cast by Siân Berry</i>)
Blundell, Mrs Elsie	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Botterill, Jade	Dickson, Jim
Brackenridge, Sureena	Dixon, Anna
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Dixon, Samantha
Brewer, Alex	Dodds, rh Anneliese
Brickell, Phil	Dollimore, Helena
Brown-Fuller, Jess	Doogan, Dave
Buckley, Julia	Doughty, Stephen
Burgon, Richard	Downie, Graeme
Burke, Maureen	Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Burnham, rh Andy	Eagle, Dame Angela
Burton-Sampson, David	Eagle, rh Maria
Butler, Dawn	Eastwood, Colum
Byrne, Ian	Eccles, Cat
Byrne, rh Liam	Edwards, Lauren
Cadbury, Ruth	Efford, Clive
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Egan, Damien
Campbell, Irene	Elmore, Chris
Campbell, Juliet	Entwistle, Kirith
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Eshalomi, Florence
	Esterson, Bill
	Evans, Chris

Fahnbulleh, Miatta	Khan, Naushabah	Murray, Katrina	Slinger, John
Falconer, Mr Hamish	Kinnock, Stephen	Murray, Susan	Smart, Lisa
Farnsworth, Linsey	Kirkham, Jayne	Myer, Luke	Smith, Cat
Fenton-Glynn, Josh	Kitchen, Gen	Naish, James	Smith, David
Ferguson, Patricia	Kohler, Mr Paul	Naismith, Connor	Smith, Nick
Fookes, Catherine	Kumar, Sonia	Nash, Pamela	Smith, Sarah
Forster, Mr Will	Kumaran, Uma	Niblett, Samantha	Snell, Gareth
Foster, Mr Paul	Kyrke-Smith, Laura	Nichols, Charlotte	Sobel, Alex
Foxcroft, Vicky	Lake, Ben	Norris, Alex	Sollom, Ian
Francis, Daniel	Lamb, Peter	O'Hara, Brendan	Spencer, Hannah
Franklin, Zöe	Lammy, rh Mr David	Olney, Sarah	Stainbank, Euan
Frith, Mr James	Lavery, Ian	Onn, Melanie	Starmar, rh Keir
Gardner, Dr Allison	Law, Chris	Onwurah, Dame Chi	Stevens, rh Jo
Gemmell, Alan	Law, Noah	Opher, Dr Simon	Stevenson, Kenneth
George, Andrew	Leishman, Brian	Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena	Stewart, Elaine
German, Gill	Lewell, Emma	Osborne, Kate	Stone, Will
Gibson, Sarah	Lewin, Andrew	Osborne, Tristan	Strathern, Alistair
Gilbert, Tracy	Lewis, Clive	Owen, Sarah	Streeting, rh Wes
Gill, Preet Kaur	Lightwood, Simon	Paffey, Darren	Strickland, Alan
Gilmour, Rachel	Logan, Seamus	Pakes, Andrew	Stringer, Graham
Gittins, Becky	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Patrick, Matthew	Sullivan, Kirsteen
Glindon, Mary	MacCleary, James	Payne, Michael	Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Glover, Olly	Macdonald, Alice (<i>Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin</i>)	Peacock, Stephanie	Sultana, Zarah
Goldman, Marie	MacDonald, Mr Angus	Pearce, Jon	Swann, Robin
Goldsborough, Ben	MacNae, Andy	Perkins, Mr Toby	Tami, rh Sir Mark
Gosling, Jodie	Madders, Justin	Perteghella, Manuela	Tapp, Mike
Gould, Georgia	Maskell, Rachael	Phillips, Jess	Taylor, Alison
Green, Sarah	Mather, Keir	Phillipson, rh Bridget	Taylor, Luke
Greenwood, Lilian	Mathew, Brian	Pinto-Duschinsky, David	Taylor, Rachel
Hack, Amanda	Mayer, Alex	Pitcher, Lee	Thomas, Cameron (<i>Proxy vote cast by Wendy Chamberlain</i>)
Haigh, rh Louise	Maynard, Charlie	Platt, Jo	Thomas, Fred
Hall, Sarah	McAllister, Douglas	Powell, Joe	Thomas, Gareth
Hamilton, Paulette	McCarthy, Kerry	Powell, rh Lucy	Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Harding, Monica	McCluskey, Martin	Poynton, Gregor	Thompson, Adam
Hardy, Emma	McDonagh, Dame Siobhain	Prinsley, Dr Peter	Thornberry, rh Emily
Harris, Carolyn	McDonald, Andy	Quigley, Richard	Tidball, Dr Marie
Hatton, Lloyd	McDonald, Chris	Qureshi, Yasmin	Tomlinson, Dan
Hayes, Helen	McDonald, rh John	Race, Steve	Trickett, Jon
Hayes, Tom	McDonnell, rh John	Ramsay, Adrian	Tufnell, Henry
Hazelgrove, Claire	McEvoy, Lola	Ranger, Andrew	Turley, rh Anna
Hendrick, Sir Mark	McFadden, rh Pat	Rayner, rh Angela	Turmaine, Matt
Hillier, Dame Meg	McGovern, Alison	Reader, Mike	Turner, Laurence
Hinchliff, Chris	McIntyre, Alex	Reed, rh Steve	Twigg, Derek
Hinder, Jonathan	McKenna, Kevin	Reeves, rh Ellie	Twist, Liz
Hobhouse, Wera	McMahon, Jim	Reynolds, rh Emma	Uppal, Harpreet
Hopkins, Rachel	McMorrin, Anna	Reynolds, rh Jonathan	Vaughan, Tony
Hughes, Claire	McNally, Frank	Reynolds, Mr Joshua	Vaz, rh Valerie
Hume, Alison	McNeill, Kirsty	Rhodes, Martin	Vince, Chris
Huq, Dr Rupa	Medi, Llinos (<i>Proxy vote cast by Ben Lake</i>)	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	Voaden, Caroline
Hurley, Patrick	Midgley, Anneliese	Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny	Wakeford, Christian
Hussain, Mr Adnan	van Mierlo, Freddie	Rigby, rh Lucy	Walker, Imogen
Hussain, Imran	Miliband, rh Ed	Rimmer, Ms Marie (<i>Proxy vote cast by Rachael Maskell</i>)	Ward, Chris
Ingham, Leigh	Miller, Calum	Rodda, Matt	Ward, Melanie
Irons, Natasha	Milne, John	Roome, Ian	Waugh, Paul
Jameson, Sally	Minns, Ms Julie	Rushworth, Sam	Webb, Chris
Jarvis, rh Dan	Mohamed, Abtisam	Russell, Sarah	Welsh, Michelle
Jarvis, Liz	Mohamed, Iqbal	Rutland, Tom	Western, Andrew
Jermey, Terry	Moon, Perran	Ryan, Oliver	Western, Matt
Jogee, Adam	Morden, Jessica	Sackman, Sarah	Wheeler, Michael
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	Morello, Edward	Sandher, Dr Jeevun	Whitby, John
Jones, Clive	Morgan, Helen	Sandher-Jones, Louise	White, Jo
Jones, Gerald	Morgan, Stephen	Savage, Dr Roz	White, Katie
Jones, Lillian	Morris, Grahame	Saville Roberts, rh Liz	Whittome, Nadia
Jones, Ruth	Morris, Joe	Scrogham, Michelle	Wilkinson, Max
Jones, Sarah	Morrison, Mr Tom	Sewards, Mark	Williams, David
Joseph, Sojan	Mullane, Margaret	Shah, Naz	Wilson, Munira
Juss, Warinder	Munt, Tessa	Shanker, Baggy	Wishart, Pete
Kane, Mike	Murphy, Luke	Shanks, Michael	Witherden, Steve
Kaur, Satvir	Murray, rh Ian	Siddiq, Tulip	Woodcock, Sean
Khan, Afzal	Murray, rh James	Slade, Vikki	
Khan, Ayoub		Slaughter, Andy	

Wrigley, Martin
Yang, Yuan
Yemm, Steve
Young, Claire

Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Noes:
Emma Foody and
Mark Ferguson

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 6

SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION

Amendments made: 32, page 6, line 4, at beginning insert—

“For the purpose of securing compliance with the obligation under section 2(3),”

This amendment clarifies that the arrangements referred to in clause 6(3) are for the purposes of ensuring that the obligation to notify an inquiry or investigation under clause 2(3) is complied with by intelligence services or those that work for them.

Amendment 158, page 6, line 4, leave out “intelligence service” and insert “relevant public authority”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 157.

Amendment 159, page 6, line 4, leave out second “service” and insert “authority”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 157.

Amendment 160, page 6, line 5, leave out “service” and insert “authority”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 157.

Amendment 161, page 6, line 6, leave out “service’s” and insert “authority’s”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 157.

Amendment 162, page 6, line 7, leave out paragraph (a).

This amendment removes a previous obligation on the part of intelligence services in relation to records of information that is considered unnecessary as a result of other amendments being made.

Amendment 163, page 6, line 10, leave out “service” and insert “authority”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 157.

Amendment 164, page 6, line 11, leave out “service” and insert “authority”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 157.

Amendment 165, page 6, line 12, at end insert—

“(3A) For the purposes of this section—

- (a) references to a person who works for a relevant public authority include a person who used to work for such an authority;
- (b) “Minister” has the same meaning as in the Inquiries Act 2005 (see section 1(2) of that Act) but, in relation to an investigation under Part 1 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, also includes the Lord Chancellor”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 157.

Amendment 33, page 6, line 13, leave out subsection (4).—
(Catherine Atkinson).

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 166.

Clause 8

INTERPRETATION OF THIS CHAPTER

Amendments made: 166, page 6, line 28, at end insert—

““head” , in relation to a relevant public authority, means—

- (a) in relation to the Security Service, the Director General of the Security Service;

- (b) in relation to the Secret Intelligence Service, the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service;
- (c) in relation to the Government Communications Headquarters, the Director of the Government Communications Headquarters;
- (d) in relation to Defence Intelligence, the Chief of Defence Intelligence;
- (e) in relation to the National Crime Agency, the Director General of the National Crime Agency;
- (f) in relation to a police force (other than the National Crime Agency), the relevant senior officer of the metropolitan police force;”

This amendment defines the meaning of “head” for the purposes of the amendment made to clause 6 by Amendment 157.

Amendment 167, page 7, line 7, at end insert—

““protected information” means information that—

- (a) relates to security or intelligence, within the meaning given by section 1(9) of the Official Secrets Act 1989;
- (b) is information relating to defence produced or held by Defence Intelligence, the disclosure of which would be damaging (and “defence” and “damaging” have the meanings given by section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1989);
- (c) relates to the exercise by the National Crime Agency of its criminal intelligence function, within the meaning given by section 1(5) of the Crime and Courts Act 2013;
- (d) relates to the exercise by a police force (other than the National Crime Agency) of its counter-terrorism and other national security functions;”.

This amendment defines the term “protected information” for the purposes of the amendment made to clause 6 by Amendment 157.

Amendment 168, page 7, line 9, at end insert—

““relevant public authority” means any of—

- (a) an intelligence service;
- (b) Defence Intelligence;
- (c) the National Crime Agency;
- (d) a police force (other than the National Crime Agency), in the exercise of its counter-terrorism and other national security functions.

(1A) For the purposes of subsection (1)—

- (a) references (in the definitions of “protected information” and “relevant public authority”) to the “counter-terrorism and other national security functions” of a police force are to any functions carried out under a collaboration agreement made under section 22A of the Police Act 1996 for the purpose of addressing, on a collaborative basis with other police forces, threats posed to national security;
- (b) the reference (in the definition of “head”) to the relevant senior officer of the metropolitan police force is to the officer of that force, of the rank of a Commander or above, with overall responsibility for the conduct of the arrangements made under that collaboration agreement.

(1B) In the application of subsection (1A)(a) to the Police Service of Scotland, the Police Service of Northern Ireland or the Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve, the reference to a collaboration agreement made under section 22A of the Police Act 1996 is to be read as a reference to any memorandum of understanding or other agreement made for the purpose mentioned in subsection (1A)(a).—(Catherine Atkinson.)

This amendment defines the term “relevant public authority” for the purposes of the amendment made to clause 6 by Amendment 157.

Clause 9

EXPECTED STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

Amendments made: 37, page 8, line 7, leave out “code” and insert

“standards of conduct expected of them”.

This amendment is to include cases where some or all of the standards of conduct expected of a person who works for a public authority are contained in legislation or otherwise than in the authority’s code of ethical conduct.

Amendment 38, page 9, line 5, at end insert—

“(11A) For the purposes of this Chapter—

- (a) a person who works at a school maintained by a local authority in England or Wales is to be treated as working for the proprietor of that school rather than for the authority;
- (b) a person who works at a designated institution in England or Wales is to be treated as working for the governing body of the institution rather than for any other body;
- (c) a person who works at a grant-aided school in Northern Ireland is to be treated as working for the Board of Governors of the school rather than for any other body.

(11B) In subsection (11A)—

“designated institution” means an institution that is a designated institution for the purposes of Part 1 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992;

“grant-aided school” has the meaning given by Article 2(2) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (S.I. 1986/594 (N.I. 3));

“proprietor” has the meaning given by section 579(1) of the Education Act 1996;

“school maintained by a local authority” has the same meaning as in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (see section 142(1) of that Act).”

This amendment ensures that the duties under clause 9 to adopt codes of ethical conduct that fall upon governing bodies of schools, and on the governing bodies of designated institutions in the further education sector, will be adopted for people who work at the school or institution but are employed by a body other than the governing body.

Amendment 39, page 9, line 7, at end insert—

“(b) references to a person who ‘works for’ a public authority are to be read in accordance with subsection (3) of section 23 as if paragraph (h) of that subsection were omitted.”—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This amendment ensures that public authority codes of conduct are primarily required to cover those with employment or contractual relationship with the authority, excluding from scope individuals who exercise functions on behalf of the authority but may not be directly accountable to it.

Clause 11

OFFENCE OF MISLEADING THE PUBLIC

Amendments made: 40, page 10, line 2, leave out paragraph (a).

This amendment, together with Amendment 70, provides for clause 11 to extend and apply fully to all parts of the United Kingdom.

Amendment 41, page 10, line 10, after “conviction” insert “in England and Wales”.

This amendment is consequential on amendments 40 and 70.

Amendment 42, page 10, line 11, at end insert—

“(aa) on summary conviction in Scotland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both);

(ab) on summary conviction in Northern Ireland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum (or both);”—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This amendment provides for penalties for offences under clause 11 committed in Scotland or Northern Ireland, in consequence of amendments 40 and 70.

Amendment proposed: 19, page 10, line 23, at end insert—

“(7A) A prosecution for an offence under this section shall not be instituted except by or with the consent of the Attorney General.”—(*Dr Mullan.*)

This amendment requires the Attorney General to consent to the prosecution of anyone for the offence of misleading the public.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 104, Noes 412.

Division No. 58]

[5.57 pm

AYES

Anderson, Lee	Hudson, Dr Neil
Anderson, Stuart	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Andrew, rh Stuart	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Argar, rh Edward	Lam, Katie
Bacon, Gareth	Lamont, John
Barclay, rh Steve	Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Bedford, Mr Peter	Lopez, Julia
Bhatti, Saqib (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Lowe, Rupert
Bowie, Andrew	Lumsden, Douglas
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Malthouse, rh Kit
Brandreth, Aphra	Mayhew, Jerome
Braverman, rh Suella	McMurdock, James
Burghart, Alex	McVey, rh Esther
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Mitchell, rh Sir Andrew
Cartlidge, James	Moore, Robbie
Chope, Sir Christopher	Morrissey, Joy
Cleverly, rh Sir James	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Mundell, rh David
Cocking, Lewis	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Cooper, John	Norman, rh Jesse
Costa, Alberto	O’Brien, Neil
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Patel, rh Priti
Cross, Harriet	Paul, Rebecca
Davies, Gareth	Philp, rh Chris
Davies, Mims	Pochin, Sarah
Davis, rh David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Pritchard, rh Mark
Dinenage, Dame Caroline (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Raja, Shivani (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver	Rankin, Jack
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Reed, David
Evans, Dr Luke	Robertson, Joe
Fortune, Peter	Robinson, rh Gavin
Freeman, George (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Rosindell, Andrew
French, Mr Louie	Shannon, Jim
Fuller, Richard	Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Gale, rh Sir Roger	Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Glen, rh John	Simmonds, David
Grant, Helen	Smith, Greg
Griffith, Andrew	Smith, rh Sir Julian
Griffiths, Alison	Smith, Rebecca
Harris, Rebecca	Snowden, Mr Andrew
Hayes, rh Sir John	Spencer, Dr Ben
Hinds, rh Damian	Spencer, Patrick (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)
Holden, rh Mr Richard	Stafford, Gregory
Hollinrake, Kevin	Stuart, rh Graham
Holmes, Paul	Sunak, rh Rishi (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)
Huddleston, Nigel	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
	Thomas, Bradley
	Tice, Richard

Timothy, Nick
Trott, rh Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Whately, Helen
Whittingdale, rh Sir John

Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Ashley Fox and
Lincoln Jopp

NOES

Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Adam, Shockat
Ahmed, Dr Zubir
Akehurst, Luke
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, rh Heidi
Al-Hassan, Sadik
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amos, Gideon
Anderson, Fleur
Arthur, Dr Scott
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
Atkinson, Catherine
Atkinson, Lewis
Bailey, Olivia
Baines, David
Baker, Alex
Baker, Richard
Ballinger, Alex
Bance, Antonia
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Baxter, Johanna
Beales, Danny
Beavers, Lorraine
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Bennett, Alison
Berry, Siân
Betts, Mr Clive
Billington, Ms Polly
Bird, Lara
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Bloore, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie
Botterill, Jade
Brackenridge, Sureena
Brash, Mr Jonathan
Brewer, Alex
Brickell, Phil
Brown-Fuller, Jess
Buckley, Julia
Burgon, Richard
Burke, Maureen
Burnham, rh Andy
Burton-Sampson, David
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
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
Clark, Feryal
Coghlan, Chris
Collier, Jacob
Collinge, Lizzi
Collins, Tom
Collins, Victoria
Conlon, Liam
Coombes, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew
Cooper, Dr Beccy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costigan, Deirdre
Cox, Pam
Craft, Jen
Creasy, Ms Stella
Crichton, Torcuil
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Dance, Adam
Darling, Steve
Davey, rh Ed
Davies, Ann
Davies, Jonathan
Davies, Paul
Davies, Shaun
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Dean, Bobby
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
Doughty, Stephen
Downie, Graeme
Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Eccles, Cat
Edwards, Lauren
Efford, Clive
Egan, Damien
Elmore, Chris
Entwistle, Kirith
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Fahnbulleh, Miatta

Falconer, Mr Hamish
Farnsworth, Linsey
Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Ferguson, Patricia
Fookes, Catherine
Forster, Mr Will
Foster, Mr Paul
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Francis, Daniel
Franklin, Zöe
Frith, Mr James
Gardner, Dr Allison
Gemmell, Alan
George, Andrew
German, Gill
Gibson, Sarah
Gilbert, Tracy
Gill, Preet Kaur
Gilmour, Rachel
Gittins, Becky
Glindon, Mary
Glover, Olly
Goldman, Marie
Goldsborough, Ben
Gosling, Jodie
Gould, Georgia
Grady, John
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lillian
Hack, Amanda
Haigh, rh Louise
Hall, Sarah
Hamilton, Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Harding, Monica
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Hatton, Lloyd
Hayes, Helen
Hayes, Tom
Hazelgrove, Claire
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hinchliff, Chris
Hinder, Jonathan
Hobhouse, Wera
Hopkins, Rachel
Hughes, Claire
Hume, Alison
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hurley, Patrick
Hussain, Mr Adnan
Hussain, Imran
Ingham, Leigh
Irons, Natasha
Jameson, Sally
Jarvis, rh Dan
Jarvis, Liz
Jermy, Terry
Jogee, Adam
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Clive
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Lillian
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Joseph, Sojan
Juss, Warinder
Kane, Mike
Kaur, Satvir

Khan, Afzal
Khan, Ayoub
Khan, Naushabah
Kinnock, Stephen
Kitchen, Gen
Kohler, Mr Paul
Kumar, Sonia
Kumaran, Uma
Kyrke-Smith, Laura
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Law, Noah
Leishman, Brian
Lewell, Emma
Lewin, Andrew
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Logan, Seamus
Long Bailey, Rebecca
MacCleary, James
Macdonald, Alice (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Nicholas Dakin*)
MacDonald, Mr Angus
MacNae, Andy
Madders, Justin
Martin, Mike
Maskell, Rachael
Mather, Keir
Mathew, Brian
Mayer, Alex
Maynard, Charlie
McAllister, Douglas
McCarthy, Kerry
McCluskey, Martin
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Chris
McDonnell, rh John
McEvoy, Lola
McFadden, rh Pat
McGovern, Alison
McIntyre, Alex
McKenna, Kevin
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
McNally, Frank
McNeill, Kirsty
Medi, Llinos (*Proxy vote cast by Ben Lake*)
Midgley, Anneliese
van Mierlo, Freddie
Miliband, rh Ed
Miller, Calum
Milne, John
Minns, Ms Julie
Mohamed, Abtisam
Mohamed, Iqbal
Moon, Perran
Morden, Jessica
Morello, Edward
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Morris, Joe
Morrison, Mr Tom
Mullane, Margaret
Munt, Tessa
Murphy, Luke
Murray, rh Ian
Murray, rh James

Murray, Katrina
 Murray, Susan
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Dame Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Dr Peter
 Quigley, Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reynolds, rh Emma
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, rh Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie (*Proxy vote cast by Rachael Maskell*)
 Rodda, Matt
 Roome, Ian
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Scroggham, Michelle
 Sowards, Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slade, Vikki
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John

Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Hannah
 Stainbank, Euan
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swann, Robin
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, Luke
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Cameron (*Proxy vote cast by Wendy Chamberlain*)
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Voaden, Caroline
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilkinson, Max
 Williams, David
 Wilson, Munira
 Wishart, Pete
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrigley, Martin

Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Young, Claire
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Emma Foody and
 Mark Ferguson

Question accordingly negated.

6.10 pm

Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 3 November 2025).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

Clause 12

SERIOUSLY IMPROPER ACTS

Amendments made: 43, page 11, line 22, after “must” insert “be directed to”.

This amendments clarifies that a jury must be directed to have regard to certain matters when considering whether an act is seriously improper for the purposes of the offence under clause 12.

Amendment 44, page 12, line 4, after “section” insert “—

(a) in England and Wales,”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Northern Ireland.

Amendment 45, page 12, line 5, at end insert—

“(b) in Northern Ireland, may be brought only by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland.”—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Northern Ireland.

Clause 13

BREACH OF DUTY TO PREVENT DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY

Amendments made: 46, page 12, line 24, after “section” insert

“—

(a) in England and Wales,”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Northern Ireland.

Amendment 47, page 12, line 25, at end insert—

“(b) in Northern Ireland, may be brought only by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland.”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Northern Ireland.

Amendment 48, page 12, line 28, leave out subsection (7) and insert—

“(7) In this section—

“critical harm” means death or serious injury;

“serious injury” means—

(a) in England and Wales and Northern Ireland, grievous bodily harm within the meaning of the Offences against the Person Act 1861;

(b) in Scotland, severe injury (including psychological injury).”—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Clause 14

TERRITORIAL APPLICATION OF SECTIONS 12 AND 13

Amendments made: 49, page 12, line 33, leave out subsection (1).

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 50, page 13, line 2, leave out “England and Wales” and insert “the United Kingdom”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 51, page 13, line 2, at end insert—

- “(3) Where an offence under section 12 or 13 is committed outside the United Kingdom—
- (a) proceedings for the offence may be taken at any place in the United Kingdom, and
 - (b) the offence may for all incidental purposes be treated as committed at any such place.
- (4) In the application of subsection (3) to Scotland, any such proceedings against the person may be taken—
- (a) in any sheriff court district in which the person is apprehended or is in custody, or
 - (b) in such sheriff court district as the Lord Advocate may determine.
- (5) In subsection (4) “sheriff court district” is to be read in accordance with the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 (see section 307(1) of that Act).”—
(Catherine Atkinson.)

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Clause 15

HOLDERS OF PUBLIC OFFICE

Amendments made: 52, page 13, line 8, leave out “Secretary of State” and insert “appropriate national authority”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 53, page 13, line 11, leave out from beginning to end of line 20.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 54, page 13, line 21, leave out “or (4)”.—
(Catherine Atkinson.)

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Clause 16ABOLITION OF COMMON LAW OFFENCE OF MISCONDUCT
IN PUBLIC OFFICE

Amendments made: 55, page 13, line 23, leave out “common law offence of misconduct in public office” and insert

“offence of misconduct in public office under the common law of England and Wales”.

This amendment is consequential on NC9.

Amendment 56, page 13, line 30, leave out “common law”.

This amendment is consequential on NC9.

Amendment 57, page 13, line 31, after “office” insert “under the common law of England and Wales”.—(Catherine Atkinson.)

This amendment is consequential on NC9.

Clause 18

PARITY ETC AT INQUIRIES AND INVESTIGATIONS

Amendments made: 58, page 14, line 35, leave out from “members” to end of line 36 and insert

“where a public authority is, or is represented by, an interested person at an inquest or a participant in a Scottish inquiry.”

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 142.

Amendment 59, page 14, leave out lines 38 and 39 and insert—

““inquest” means an inquest held under Part 1 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (and the reference to an “interested person” at such an inquest has the same meaning as in that Part of that Act);”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 142.

Amendment 60, page 14, line 43, at end insert—

““Scottish inquiry” means an inquiry held under the Inquiries into Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths etc. (Scotland) Act 2016 (asp 2) (and the reference to a participant at such an inquiry is to be read in accordance with section 11(2)(b) of that Act);”.—
(Catherine Atkinson.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 142.

Clause 22

REGULATIONS

Amendments made: 61, page 16, line 32, leave out paragraph (b).

This amendment, together with amendments 62, 63, 64, 93 and 94, make technical changes in relation to Welsh statutory instruments that are consequential on the commencement of section 1 of the Legislation (Procedure, Publication and Repeals) (Wales) Act 2025.

Amendment 62, page 16, line 33, at end insert—

“(4A) Regulations under this Act made by the Welsh Ministers are to be made by Welsh statutory instrument.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 61.

Amendment 63, page 17, line 9, leave out from “procedure,” to end of line 11 and insert

“they are subject to the Senedd annulment procedure (see section 37E of the Legislation (Wales) Act 2019 (anaw 4));”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 61.

Amendment 64, page 17, line 12, leave out from “procedure,” to end of line 14 and insert

“they are subject to the Senedd approval procedure (see section 37C of that Act).”—(Catherine Atkinson.)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 61.

Clause 23

GENERAL INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: 65, page 18, line 16, at end insert “, and

- (b) a children's hearing within the meaning of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (asp 1) arranged by virtue of, or for the purposes of, that Act or any other enactment;".

This amendment provides that the definition of "court" includes a children's hearing within the meaning of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, in addition to any tribunal or body exercising the judicial power of the State.

Amendment 66, page 19, line 31, at end insert

" , or

- (iv) Healthcare Improvement Scotland established under section 10A of that Act;".

This amendment provides that Healthcare Improvement Scotland will come within the definition of an "NHS body".

Amendment 67, page 20, line 28, leave out "maintained school" and insert

"school maintained by a local authority".

This amendment ensures that the definition of "school" includes maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units.

Amendment 68, page 20, line 29, leave out "20(7)" and insert "142(1)".

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 67.

Amendment 69, page 20, line 31, leave out from "Academy" to end of line 32 and insert

"school or an alternative provision Academy".—(Catherine Atkinson.)

This amendment provides that alternative provision Academies are included within the definition of a "school" in relation to England.

Clause 24

EXTENT

Amendments made: 70, page 22, line 23, leave out

"Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2 of Part 2"

and insert "Parts 1 to 3".

This amendment provides for clause 11 (offence of misleading the public) and Part 3 (misconduct in public office) to apply and extend to all parts of the United Kingdom.

Amendment 71, page 22, line 25, leave out paragraph (b) and insert—

- "(b) Part 4 extends to England and Wales and Scotland only."—(Catherine Atkinson.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 70 and also on the provision made by Amendment 142 about legal aid for bereaved family members in Scotland where a public authority is a participant in an inquiry into a death.

Clause 25

COMMENCEMENT

Amendment made: 72, page 23, line 5, after "Schedule 1" insert

"or Part 5 of Schedule 6".—(Catherine Atkinson.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 142.

Schedule 1

APPLICATION OF DUTY OF CANDOUR AND ASSISTANCE

Amendments made: 169, page 24, line 15, leave out from "that" to end of line 17 and insert

"the following condition is met".

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 170.

Amendment 170, page 24, line 17, at end insert—

"(1A) The condition is that—

- (a) the person's acts are relevant to the inquiry or the person otherwise has information that is relevant, and
(b) where the person is an individual, compliance with their obligations imposed by virtue of the direction would assist the inquiry to meet its objectives."

This amendment (together with Amendment 169) clarifies that the duty to give a compliance direction to an individual applies only if the chair of the inquiry considers that compliance with the direction will help the inquiry to meet its objectives.

Amendment 171, page 24, leave out lines 34 to 37 and insert—

- "(c) must include a description of the matters or issues to be covered in complying with the direction and may specify further requirements to be complied with (and may specify the form and manner in which, and the period within which, obligations imposed by virtue of the direction are to be complied with);".

This amendment requires a compliance direction to include a description of matters or issues to be covered when complying with the direction.

Amendment 172, page 25, leave out lines 23 to 29 and insert—

- "(10) A compliance direction that would require the provision of protected information from an individual—

- (a) in a case where the information concerned relates to security or intelligence (within the meaning given by section 1(9) of the Official Secrets Act 1989), may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for an intelligence service;

- (b) in any other case, may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for a relevant public authority,

and an individual is not required to provide any protected information in response to a direction given in contravention of this subsection.

- (10A) Before the chair of an inquiry gives a compliance direction to an individual who works (or used to work) for a public authority (and so far as the direction relates to the individual's work for the authority), the chair must consult the authority for the purpose of ensuring that compliance with the obligations imposed by virtue of the direction will assist the inquiry to meet its objectives."

This amendment, together with Amendment 157, enables a compliance direction to be given requiring the provision of protected information (subject to certain safeguards) to a public official who works for a relevant public authority in place of the previous prohibition on the giving of such directions. The terms "protected information" and "relevant public authority" are defined in clause 8 (as amended by Amendments 167 and 168).

Amendment 173, page 25, line 37, at end insert—

"“protected information” ;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 172.

Amendment 174, page 25, line 39, at end insert—

"“relevant public authority” ;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 172.

Amendment 175, page 26, line 36, leave out from "that" to end of line 37 and insert

"the following condition is met".

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 176.

Amendment 176, page 26, line 37, at end insert—

“(2A) The condition is that—

- (a) the person’s acts are relevant to the inquiry or the person otherwise has information that is relevant, and
- (b) where the person is an individual, compliance with their obligations imposed by virtue of the direction would assist the inquiry to meet its objectives.”

This amendment (together with Amendment 175) clarifies that the duty to give a compliance direction to an individual applies only if the chair of the inquiry considers that compliance with the direction will help the inquiry to meet its objectives.

Amendment 177, page 27, line 12, leave out paragraph (c) and insert—

- “(c) must include a description of the matters or issues to be covered in complying with the direction and may specify further requirements to be complied with (and may specify the form and manner in which, and the period within which, obligations imposed by virtue of the direction are to be complied with);”.

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 171.

Amendment 76, page 27, line 32, leave out “(1) and (2)”.

This amendment applies section 17(3) of the Inquiries Act 2005 (duty on chair to act with fairness and avoid unnecessary cost) to non-statutory inquiries to which the duty of candour and assistance applies.

Amendment 178, page 28, line 38, leave out sub-paragraph (11) and insert—

“(11) A compliance direction requiring the provision of protected information from an individual—

- (a) in a case where the information concerned relates to security or intelligence (within the meaning given by section 1(9) of the Official Secrets Act 1989), may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for an intelligence service;
- (b) in any other case, may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for a relevant public authority,

and an individual is not required to provide any protected information in response to a direction given in contravention of this sub-paragraph.

(11A) Before the chair of an inquiry gives a compliance direction to an individual who works (or used to work) for a public authority (and so far as the direction relates to their work for the authority), the chair must consult the authority for the purpose of ensuring that compliance with the obligations imposed by virtue of the direction will assist the inquiry to meet its objectives.”

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 172.

Amendment 179, page 30, line 38, at end insert—

“(2A) The duty to comply with the obligation under section 2(3) in relation to the inquiry does not apply to—

- (a) a Minister of the Crown, a government department, the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers or a Northern Ireland devolved authority, or
- (b) an individual who is a public official by virtue of working for, or otherwise holding office under, a public authority within paragraph (a).”

This amendment removes the requirement for Ministers and officials in Government and the devolved administrations to notify local authority inquiries of the matters in clause 2(3) of the Bill. The Bill already provides that such inquiries may not demand materials produced or provided by or on behalf of the Government or a devolved administration.

Amendment 78, page 30, line 40, leave out “sub-paragraph (11)” and insert “sub-paragraphs (11) and (11A)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 183.

Amendment 180, page 31, line 3, leave out from “that” to end of line 4 and insert

“the following condition is met”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 181.

Amendment 181, page 31, line 4, at end insert—

“(3A) The condition is that—

- (a) the person’s acts are relevant to the inquiry or the person otherwise has information that is relevant, and
- (b) where the person is an individual, compliance with their obligations imposed by virtue of the direction would assist the inquiry to meet its objectives.”

This amendment (together with Amendment 180) clarifies that the duty to give a compliance direction to an individual applies only if the chair of the inquiry considers that compliance with the direction will help the inquiry to meet its objectives.

Amendment 182, page 31, line 18, leave out paragraph (c) and insert—

- “(c) must include a description of the matters or issues to be covered in complying with the direction and may specify further requirements to be complied with (and may specify the form and manner in which, and the period within which, obligations imposed by virtue of the direction are to be complied with);”.

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 171.

Amendment 79, page 31, line 38, leave out “(1) and (2)”.

This amendment applies section 17(3) of the Inquiries Act 2005 (duty on chair to act with fairness and avoid unnecessary cost) to local authority inquiries to which the duty of candour and assistance applies.

Amendment 80, page 32, line 33, leave out paragraph (c).

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 183.

Amendment 183, page 32, line 39, at end insert—

“(11A) A compliance direction requiring the provision of protected information from an individual—

- (a) in a case where the information concerned relates to security or intelligence (within the meaning given by section 1(9) of the Official Secrets Act 1989), may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for an intelligence service;
- (b) in any other case, may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for a relevant public authority,

and an individual is not required to provide any protected information in response to a direction given in contravention of this sub-paragraph.

(11B) Before the chair of an inquiry gives a compliance direction to an individual who works (or used to work) for a public authority (and so far as the direction relates to their work for the authority), the chair must consult the authority for the purpose of ensuring that compliance with the obligations imposed by virtue of the direction will assist the inquiry to meet its objectives.”

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 172.

Amendment 184, page 34, leave out lines 21 to 24 and insert—

- “(c) must include a description of the matters or issues to be covered in complying with the direction and may specify further requirements to be complied with (and may specify the form and manner in which, and the period within which, obligations imposed by virtue of the direction are to be complied with);”.

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 171.

Amendment 185, page 34, line 43, leave out from beginning to end of line 6 on page 35 and insert—

“(9) A compliance direction requiring the provision of protected information from an individual—

- (a) in a case where the information concerned relates to security or intelligence (within the meaning given by section 1(9) of the Official Secrets Act 1989), may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for an intelligence service;
- (b) in any other case, may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for a relevant public authority,

and an individual is not required to provide any protected information in response to a direction given in contravention of this subsection.

(9A) Before a senior coroner conducting an investigation gives a compliance direction to an individual who works (or used to work) for a relevant public authority (and so far as the direction relates to their work for the authority), the senior coroner must consult the authority for the purpose of ensuring that compliance with the obligations imposed by virtue of the direction will assist the investigation to meet its objectives.”

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 172.

Amendment 186, page 35, line 15, at end insert—
““protected information” ;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 185.

Amendment 187, page 35, line 17, at end insert—
““relevant public authority” ;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 185.

Amendment 188, page 36, line 4, at end insert

“and, where the person is an individual, of the matter in subsection (3A)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 189.

Amendment 189, page 36, line 9, at end insert—

“(3A) The matter is that compliance with the person’s obligations imposed by virtue of the direction would assist the inquiry to which the investigation relates to meet its objectives.”

This amendment (together with Amendment 188) clarifies that the duty to give a compliance direction to an individual applies only if the procurator fiscal considers that compliance with the direction will help the inquiry to meet its objectives.

Amendment 190, page 36, leave out lines 28 to 31 and insert—

“(c) must include a description of the matters or issues to be covered in complying with the direction and may specify further requirements to be complied with (and may specify the form and manner in which, and the period within which, obligations imposed by virtue of the direction are to be complied with);”.

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 171.

Amendment 191, page 37, leave out lines 25 to 31 and insert—

“(13) A compliance direction requiring the provision of protected information from an individual—

- (a) in a case where the information concerned relates to security or intelligence (within the meaning given by section 1(9) of the Official Secrets Act 1989), may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for an intelligence service;
- (b) in any other case, may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for a relevant public authority,

and an individual is not required to provide any protected information in response to a direction given in contravention of this subsection.

(13A) Before the procurator fiscal gives a compliance direction to an individual who works (or used to work) for a relevant public authority (and so far as the direction relates to their work for the authority), the procurator fiscal must consult the authority for the purpose of ensuring that compliance with the obligations imposed by virtue of the direction will assist the inquiry to which the investigation relates to meet its objectives.”

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 172.

Amendment 192, page 37, line 39, at end insert
““protected information” ;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 191.

Amendment 193, page 37, line 41, at end insert
““relevant public authority” ;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 191.

Amendment 194, page 39, leave out lines 21 to 24 and insert—

“(c) must include a description of the matters or issues to be covered in complying with the direction and may specify further requirements to be complied with (and may specify the form and manner in which, and the period within which, obligations imposed by virtue of the direction are to be complied with);”.

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 171.

Amendment 195, page 40, leave out lines 1 to 7 and insert—

“(9) A compliance direction requiring the provision of protected information from an individual—

- (a) in a case where the information concerned relates to security or intelligence (within the meaning given by section 1(9) of the Official Secrets Act 1989), may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for an intelligence service;
- (b) in any other case, may be given only to a public official who works (or used to work) for a relevant public authority,

and an individual is not required to provide any protected information in response to a direction given in contravention of this subsection.

(9A) Before the coroner gives a compliance direction to an individual who works (or used to work) for a relevant public authority (and so far as the direction relates to their work for the authority), the coroner must consult the authority for the purpose of ensuring that compliance with the obligations imposed by virtue of the direction will assist the inquest to meet its objectives.”

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 172.

Amendment 196, page 40, line 16, at end insert
““protected information” ;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 195.

Amendment 197, page 40, line 18, at end insert
““relevant public authority” ;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 195.

Amendment 91, page 41, line 24, leave out paragraph (c).

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 198.

Amendment 198, page 41, line 38, at end insert—

“(5A) Subsection (10) of section 23A of the Inquiries Act 2005 (which provides for safeguards in the case of compliance directions requiring protected information from public officials) (as inserted by Part 1 of this Schedule) applies to a compliance direction given by virtue of regulations under this paragraph as it applies to a compliance direction given under that section.”

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 172.

Amendment 93, page 42, line 42, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert—

- “(a) they are subject to the Senedd confirmation procedure (see section 37D of the Legislation (Wales) Act 2019 (anaw 4)), and
- (b) they cease to have effect at the end of the period of 40 days beginning with the day on which the Welsh statutory instrument containing them is made unless, during that period, they are confirmed by a resolution of Senedd Cymru.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 61.

Amendment 94, page 43, line 31, leave out “this paragraph” and insert

“sub-paragraph (2)(b), (3)(c) or (5)(b).”—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 61.

Schedule 2

MEANING OF “PUBLIC AUTHORITY” AND “PUBLIC OFFICIAL” ETC

Amendments made: 95, page 46, line 8, leave out “or (11)” and insert “, (11) or (11A)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 97.

Amendment 96, page 46, line 8, at end insert—

- “(ca) being appointed as a member of the Children’s Panel in accordance with section 4 of the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (asp 1);”.

This amendment provides for an exclusion from the definition of “public official” for those appointed as members of the Children’s Panel in Scotland.

Amendment 97, page 46, line 32, at end insert—

“(11A) This sub-paragraph applies if the local authority is a local authority in Scotland and the individual is, in relation to the authority—

- (a) a convener elected in accordance with section 4(1) of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994,
- (b) a depute convener elected in accordance with section 4(2) of that Act, or
- (c) a councillor designated by the authority for purposes relating to the payment of remuneration, in accordance with regulations made under section 11 of the Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004 (asp 9), as—
 - (i) the Leader of the Council,
 - (ii) the Civic Head, or
 - (iii) a senior councillor.”—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This amendment provides that certain elected officials of local authorities in Scotland will fall within the definition of a “public official” and therefore be subject to the duty of candour and assistance.

Schedule 3

OFFENCES UNDER PART 2: RELATED PROVISION

Amendments made: 98, page 47, line 38, leave out from “Kingdom” to “unless” in line 2 of page 48.

This amendment is consequential on Amendments 40.

Amendment 99, page 48, line 7, after “5” insert “or 11”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendments 40 and 70.

Amendment 100, page 48, line 21, after “5” insert “or 11”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendments 40 and 70.

Amendment 101, page 48, line 26, leave out sub-paragraph (2).—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendments 40 and 70.

Schedule 4

HOLDERS OF PUBLIC OFFICE

Amendments made: 102, page 49, line 35, at end insert—

“1A A member of the Scottish government (see section 44 of the Scotland Act 1998) or a junior Scottish Minister (see section 49 of that Act).

1B A member of the Welsh Government (see section 45 of the Government of Wales Act 2006).

1C A Minister or junior Minister within the meaning of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (see sections 7(3) and 19 of that Act).”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 103, page 49, line 36, leave out paragraph 2.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 104, page 50, line 4, leave out from “State” to end of line 10.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 105, page 50, line 11, leave out “The condition is that” and insert

“A person does not fall within sub-paragraph (1) if”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 106, page 50, line 16, at end insert “(aa) the Scottish Ministers,”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland.

Amendment 107, page 50, line 17, at end insert—

“(c) a Northern Ireland devolved authority.”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Northern Ireland.

Amendment 108, page 50, line 23, at end insert—

“4A (1) A member of the Scottish Parliament.

(2) A member of the staff of the Scottish Parliament within the meaning of the Scotland Act 1998 (see paragraph 3(2) of Schedule 2 to that Act).”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 109, page 50, line 26, at end insert—

“5A (1) A member of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

(2) A member of the staff of the Northern Ireland Assembly within the meaning of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (see paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 5 to that Act).”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 110, page 50, line 33, after “body” insert

“, within the meaning given by section 101 of the Police Act 1996”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 111, page 50, line 34, at end insert—

“7A (1) A constable of the Police Service of Scotland, within the meaning of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012.

(2) A member of the police staff within the meaning of that Act.

7B (1) A police officer, within the meaning of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 (see section 77(1) of that Act).

(2) A person who is a member of the police support staff, within the meaning given by section 4(6) of that Act.

7C A person who is a member of or works for the Northern Ireland Policing Board.”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 112, page 51, line 28, at end insert—

“(3) A person appointed under section 79 of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847.

(4) A person appointed to be a constable under Article 19 of the Airports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 (S.I. 1994/426 (N.I. 1)).”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 113, page 51, line 33, at end insert—

“(1A) A member of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

(1B) A member of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Board.”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 114, page 51, line 34, leave out “fire and rescue authority” and insert

“body mentioned in any of sub-paragraphs (1) to (1B)”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 115, page 51, line 37, after “exercises” insert “core”.

This amendment, together with Amendment 117, clarifies that, in respect of persons exercising functions at places of state detention, only persons who exercise custodial or escort functions, or functions involving the provision of healthcare or education, are subject to the provisions of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office).

Amendment 116, page 51, line 37, leave out from “detention,” to end of line 39.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 117, page 51, line 39, at end insert—

“(2) In sub-paragraph (1), “core functions” means—

(a) custodial or escort functions, or

(b) functions involving the provision of healthcare or education, so far as carried out at a place of state detention.

(3) Subject to sub-paragraph (4), a person is in state detention if the person is compulsorily detained by a public authority within the meaning of section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

(4) A person is not in state detention at any time when they are detained in circumstances amounting to a deprivation of liberty by virtue of any of the following—

(a) sections 4A(3) or (5) or 4B of the Mental Capacity Act 2005;

(b) the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 (asp 4);

(c) Part 2 of the Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (c. 18 (N.I.)).”

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 115 and on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 118, page 52, line 2, at end insert—

“(2) A member of the Parole Board for Scotland.

(3) A Parole Commissioner for Northern Ireland.”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 119, page 52, line 3, leave out paragraph 16 and insert—

“16 (1) A member of an independent monitoring board, appointed under section 6 of the Prison Act 1952 or section 10 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 (c. 18 (N.I.)).

(2) A member of a Visiting Committee, appointed under section 152 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

(3) A prison monitoring co-ordinator appointed under section 7A of the Prisons (Scotland) Act 1989 or prison monitor appointed under section 7C of that Act.

(4) A person approved under Rule 14 of the Juvenile Justice Centre Rules (Northern Ireland) 2008 (S.R. (N.I.) 2008 No. 427).”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 120, page 52, line 10, leave out sub-paragraph (1).

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 121.

Amendment 121, page 52, line 11, leave out from “person” to “is” in line 12 and insert “who”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 123.

Amendment 122, page 52, line 13, at end insert—

“(aa) the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales;”.

This amendment adds the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales to the list of holders of public office for the purposes of Part 3 of the Bill.

Amendment 123, page 52, line 17, at end insert—

“(ca) the Lord President or Lord Justice Clerk of the Court of Session;

(cb) a judicial office holder, within the meaning of Part 2 of the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008 (asp 6) (see section 43 of that Act);

(cc) a member of the Scottish Tribunals, within the meaning of the Tribunals (Scotland) Act 2014 (see section 13(3) of that Act);

(cd) a member of the Children’s Panel appointed in accordance with section 4 of the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (asp 1);

(ce) a member of the Lands Tribunal for Scotland or Scottish Land Court (including the Deputy Chairman of that Court);

(cf) the President of, or a member of, the Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland;

(cg) the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland;

(ch) a Lord Justice of Appeal in Northern Ireland;

(ci) the holder of an office mentioned in Schedule 1 to the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002;

(cj) the Chief Coroner or a Deputy Chief Coroner appointed under Schedule 8 to the Coroners and Justice Act 2009;

(ck) a senior coroner, area coroner or assistant coroner appointed under Schedule 3 to that Act.”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland and also makes drafting refinements.

Amendment 124, page 52, line 20, at end insert—

“(f) any other member of a court or tribunal in which legal proceedings may be brought.”

This amendment ensures that persons exercising judicial functions are subject to the misconduct offences in Part 3 of the Bill even if the office they hold is not specifically mentioned.

Amendment 125, page 52, line 20, at end insert—

“(3) Any other person (other than a person employed in the civil service of the State) who—

- (a) works for a person within sub-paragraph (2) in relation to the exercise of that person’s judicial functions, or
- (b) works for a court or tribunal in which legal proceedings may be brought in relation to the exercise of the judicial functions of that court or tribunal.”

This amendment ensures the persons who work for a judicial office holder or court (other than civil servants, who are caught by paragraph 3 of Schedule 4 to the Bill) are subject to the misconduct offences in Part 3 of the Bill.

Amendment 126, page 52, line 21, leave out paragraph 18.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 123.

Amendment 127, page 52, line 29, leave out from “authority” to end of line 31.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 128, page 52, line 32, leave out “in England”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 129, page 52, line 32, at end insert—

“(2A) Sub-paragraph (1) includes—

- (a) in relation to a London borough council, a district council or a county council in England, an elected mayor within the meaning of Part 1A of the Local Government Act 2000;
- (b) in relation to a county borough council or a county council in Wales, an elected mayor within the meaning of Part 2 of the Local Government Act 2000.”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 130, page 52, line 34, leave out from “school” to end of line 3 on page 53.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 131, page 52, line 35, at end insert—

“(4) The reference in sub-paragraph (3) to a person who works for a school includes a person who works—

- (a) at a place mentioned in any of paragraphs (a) to (c) of the definition of “school” in section 23(1), or
- (b) at a public school in Scotland within the meaning of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (see section 135(1) of that Act).”

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Amendment 132, page 53, line 18, leave out “or” and insert “, the Scottish Ministers,”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Scotland.

Amendment 133, page 53, line 18, at end insert

“or a Northern Ireland devolved authority”.

This amendment is consequential on the extension of Part 3 of the Bill (misconduct in public office) to Northern Ireland.—(Catherine Atkinson.)

Schedule 5

PART 3: CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: 134, page 54, line 18, leave out

“in subsection (11), omit “England and Wales or””

and insert “omit subsection (11)”.

This amendment is consequential on NC9.

Amendment 135, page 54, line 19, at end insert—

“Investigatory Powers Act 2016

- 4 In section 1 (overview of Act), omit subsection (5)(b)(v).”—(Catherine Atkinson.)

This amendment is consequential on NC9.

Schedule 6

CONDUCT OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES AT INQUIRIES AND INQUESTS

Amendments made: 136, page 60, line 38, after “authority” insert

“or any of the following persons”.

This amendment and Amendment 137 provide for Part 4 of the Bill to apply in relation to inquests where a public authority is represented by its head or another person, if the authority is not itself an “interested person” at the inquest.

Amendment 137, page 60, line 39, at end insert—

- “(a) a chief constable;
- (b) a Provost Marshal of a service police force or the tri-service serious crime unit;
- (c) the Director General of the Independent Office for Police Conduct;
- (d) a person who is an interested person by virtue of section 47(2)(l) of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (persons appointed by a Government department).”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 136.

Amendment 138, page 61, line 20, at end insert—

““chief constable” means—

- (a) a chief officer of police, within the meaning given by section 101(1) of the Police Act 1996;
- (b) the chief constable of the Police Service of Scotland;
- (c) the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland;
- (d) the Chief Constable of the Ministry of Defence Police;
- (e) the Chief Constable of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary;
- (f) the Chief Constable of the British Transport Police;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendments 136 and 137.

Amendment 139, page 62, line 4, leave out

“who has made an application”

and insert

“to whom the legal help may be provided”.

This amendment is to clarify the meaning of this amendment of legal aid regulations.

Amendment 140, page 62, line 10, leave out

“omit the words after paragraph (c)”

and insert

“for the words from “any” to the end of the regulation substitute “civil legal services other than—

- (a) acting as a mediator or arbitrator, or
- (b) issuing or conducting court proceedings.”

This amendment enables the additional legal services being made available to bereaved family members at inquests to be dealt with together for the purposes of administration of legal aid.

Amendment 141, page 62, line 21, at end insert—

“Exercise of other powers in relation to legal aid

7 Nothing in this Part of this Schedule affects—

- (a) the powers conferred on the Lord Chancellor by section 9(2) of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 in relation to Schedule 1 to that Act, or
- (b) any other power of the Lord Chancellor to make orders or regulations under Part 1 of that Act.”

This amendment makes clear that nothing in Part 4 of Schedule 6 to the Bill affects the exercise of the Lord Chancellor’s powers to make orders and regulations about legal aid.

Amendment 142, page 62, line 21, at end insert—

“PART 5

LEGAL AID AT INQUIRIES IN SCOTLAND INTO FATAL ACCIDENTS AND SUDDEN DEATHS

Amendment of the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986

7 (1) The Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 36 (regulations), in subsection (3), after paragraph (bb) insert—

“(bc) is participating, or seeking to participate, in inquiry proceedings within the meaning of the Inquiries into Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths etc. (Scotland) Act 2016 (see section 11(2)(a) of that Act);”’.—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

This amendment enables regulations to be made to extend legal aid to bereaved family members where a public authority is a participant in an inquiry in Scotland into a fatal accident or sudden death.

Third Reading

King’s consent signified.

6.11 pm

The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer): I usually have to ask the King for consent, Madam Deputy Speaker.

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

I still remember the first time I met the Hillsborough families with Bishop James Jones. That was nearly 15 years ago, as the Director of Public Prosecutions. It was a humbling experience, and I was taken aback by their courage. To be able to campaign after such unimaginable loss—it floored me. As a father of teenagers who come to watch football with me, I do not think I could do that myself. To then keep going and going, as the state deployed all its power to obstruct justice and truth—that is a stain on our history. Yet keep going they did, and we are here today because of them. Some of them are with us in the Gallery today, and they were with me in No. 10 just this afternoon.

Indeed, that has always been the motivation for this Bill. The Hillsborough families fought so that no family like them should ever have to endure and suffer what they went through. What they have done will protect individuals and families whom they will never know

and will never meet, but who will never have to go through what they went through. In my view, that is incredibly inspiring and humbling. This is not just a Bill for the 97, although it is that. It is a Bill for every single working person in this country, because let us face it: there is a class element to this. Time and again the cry for justice has been ignored by the British state because of who the victims are—because they are working class, because they are black, because they are women and girls.

I come here today not to take credit for this Government or this House, but as Prime Minister, to put on our national record exactly where the credit belongs. It belongs to the families and to the campaigners, and I pay tribute to every one of them: the Hillsborough families, Hillsborough Law Now, Inquest, Grenfell United, the Manchester Arena families—some of whom were with me again this afternoon and are here today—victims of the grooming gangs, the Horizon scandal, the infected blood campaigners, the Truth About Zane campaign and all the families who engaged with us to share their deeply personal and painful experiences. I thank them all for their time and, most of all, for their courage. While these are different tragedies, they represent the same demand repeated across decades: for truth, justice and accountability to belong equally to every single person in this country.

I am grateful to every Member of this House and in the other place from across the political divide who worked constructively with us to get us to this point and turn this long-denied cry for justice into the law of this land. It is long, long overdue. I pay credit to everybody who has fought so hard for this every single step of the way and thank them for what they have done.

This Bill has been too long coming, but now, as we reach Third Reading, we stand on the precipice of change. This is a moment of real significance for our country. We arrive here with a Bill that is stronger and, above all, worthy of those who fought for it. It is a law that will always carry their name: the Hillsborough law. I commend this Bill to the House.

6.16 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Let me begin, as I have throughout the passage of this Bill, by placing at the forefront my admiration for the campaigners—the families and friends of the 97 who lost their lives in the Hillsborough tragedy. On 15 April 1989 their lives were changed forever. Nothing could be done to bring back their loved ones after they were gone. Anyone who has lost someone close to them suddenly like that knows the experience of their world changing in an instant, when at one point the person they care deeply about is there, and suddenly, in the next moment, they are not. Afterwards, everything—everything else—is different.

While those deaths could not be undone, what could have changed and what could have been different was the truth about what happened to their loved ones being told to them, and it was not—not just as an act of omission, but as part of a deliberate cover-up by the police and others to protect themselves from the consequences of their failings. What might have been solely a tragic experience of grief that would of course never leave them, with a gap in their lives where their

[Dr Kieran Mullan]

loved ones were supposed to be, was in addition turned into decades of torment as they fought so hard for that truth that was kept from them.

The Bill is born of that fight and of that torment, and it is a tribute to their determination. That is why, when I faced the Prime Minister across the Dispatch Box eight months ago, I made clear the good-faith desire of the Opposition to engage constructively with the Government on this Bill. I have sought to live up to that throughout its passage, not just for the Hillsborough families, but for the many others let down by the state and its institutions—the postmasters, the infected blood scandal victims, and those lost in the Grenfell Tower fire and other tragedies and scandals, as Members across the House have highlighted throughout the passage of this Bill.

I feel still the keen interest of the families as we reach Third Reading, but it is our job—mine, the Opposition's and all MPs—to both hold in one hand, sincerely and clearly, the experiences of all those people who have suffered so greatly and, on the other, our duty and responsibility to legislate carefully and in a considered way. I am deeply disappointed that this Prime Minister and this Government have made that task much, much more difficult than it needed to be. [Interruption.] I would challenge any MP—[Interruption.] Any MP, no matter—[Interruption.] I would challenge—

The Prime Minister: Will the shadow Minister give way?

Dr Mullan: No. I would challenge any MP—[Interruption.] Not yet, not yet. No matter how supportive of this legislation, with far-reaching—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way!"] No, I will finish this moment. With far-reaching consequences—[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. The shadow Minister must be heard.

Dr Mullan: I would challenge any MP, no matter how supportive of this legislation—which has such far-reaching consequences for the operation of the Government—to say that its progress, particularly over the last 24 hours, is anything like careful and considered.

The Prime Minister: I just want to record that these families, and families across the country affected by the Bill, have waited years and years too long. I made a promise to these families. I looked them in the eye and said that I would bring this forward as soon as I could. I have kept that promise, and I am proud that this Labour Government are bringing this Bill in.

Dr Mullan: If the Prime Minister wanted to truly live up to that promise, he would not have introduced legislation with less than 24 hours' notice on an issue of national security. As the House has alluded to, I would have wanted the opportunity to make this moment a purely positive one, but I am afraid that the Prime Minister has made it impossible for me to fulfil my duties to the House. To give less than 24 hours' notice for consideration of a Bill before its Third Reading is simply unacceptable. The House, those families, this Bill deserve greater respect than that. There is simply no excuse for the series of mistakes made by the Prime

Minister's Government that have led us here—led us to a place where those of us who engaged in good faith, as I did, cannot possibly be expected to have any trust left on a Bill that has trust at its heart.

The Prime Minister announced this Bill at his party conference in 2024. The media were briefed and told that the Bill and how it would operate had the full support of campaigning families and their legal advisers. They were so supportive, in fact, that they had released statements to that effect—and we now know that that was not true: they had already explained their misgivings. Then, after the introduction of the Bill, a Minister told me directly that the families were entirely happy with how the Bill was being legislated. And that also was not true.

Maria Eagle: The Conservatives were in power for 14 years and could have introduced the Bill. Why did they not do so?

Dr Mullan: I thank the right hon. Lady for raising that point. It was on that basis that I sought sincerely to engage properly with the Bill, and the Ministers and officials who met me repeatedly would be able to attest to that. That cannot be sustained when a Government bring forward legislation with 24 hours' notice of important matters of national security.

The Government say that they have now resolved the central tension that led to the Bill being pulled. After months of negotiations, the central claim made by their Ministers that it needed particular safeguards for the agencies working in national security has now disappeared—apparently no longer needed. A Government who have wilfully misled us repeatedly on this Bill now want us to set aside—[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the shadow Minister needs to be very careful in his use of language.

Dr Mullan: A Government who have, inadvertently, repeatedly misled us on this Bill now want us to take them on trust. I heard personally and directly from Ministers and officials repeatedly that independent safeguards were needed, and now, apparently, they are not. Supposedly, over the weekend, those concerns have evaporated, and that is totally unacceptable. We are suddenly setting aside in a matter of days what the security services have told us for 18 months, in consistent, sober, professional warnings, which coincides perfectly with the Prime Minister coming here to give his final speech on this matter. Are we really going to suggest that that genuine professional opinion has changed overnight? I do not think that it has.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): As an Opposition MP myself, I must say that my party and I have been critical of the handover of power that has taken place in the Labour party, but this particular moment, on Third Reading, should belong to the families. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] We can do our party political point-scoring whenever and wherever we like, but does the hon. Member not agree that this moment should belong to the families?

Dr Mullan: If the Government were so concerned about this Bill passing, they should have organised it.

We have just listened to a raft of amendments to the Bill being nodded through in this House, with absolutely no scrutiny. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I will hear the shadow Minister. I appreciate that temperatures are running very high, but it is important that voices are heard in this House.

Dr Mullan: As I have said, this could have been a Bill that we supported without reservation, but I am afraid that we maintain reservations about it, entirely as a result of its mismanagement by the Prime Minister.

I want to conclude by saying that none of this takes anything at all away from the families. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not want to hear this. It does not take anything away from the Members who have done so much to bring this legislation forward, but what is clear is that the Bill is the legacy of the campaigners and MPs—nobody else is responsible for our being here. I welcome their campaigning over many years and thank them for it.

6.25 pm

Andy Burnham (Makerfield) (Lab/Co-op): I feel tempted to start this speech by saying, “As I was saying 10 years ago in this place,” but it feels fitting to be here tonight, and particularly to be with my right hon. and learned Friend the Prime Minister. I remember very clearly that at the conclusion of the second Hillsborough inquest, he worked with me, as part of the shadow Health team back then, to draft the original Bill that was presented to Parliament. Tonight, it is before this House.

Tonight, it feels like life is coming full circle. In passing this momentous piece of legislation, which will change the way this country thinks about and works towards justice, we are truly rewiring the state and passing power from the authorities to the hands of ordinary people. It is happening because of the Prime Minister’s commitment to a country based on justice and fairness, and we thank him for that. He has honoured his commitment to the Hillsborough families, and what this House will do in passing this Bill tonight is rebalance the scales of justice so that we have justice for ordinary people going forward. That is some legacy indeed.

We have all recognised that we simply would not be here tonight were it not for the dignity and determination of the Hillsborough families, who are with us in this Chamber this evening. They have been supported by the wider group of campaigns as part of Hillsborough Law Now. I want to recognise their lawyers, Pete Weatherby KC and Elkan Abrahamson KC, who are with us this evening; INQUEST’s Deborah Coles, who is with us as well; and all the people who supported the campaign. That is the reason we are here, but we are also here because of the city of Liverpool, which is represented so well by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool West Derby (Ian Byrne), who has been the parliamentary lead on this Bill and has been entirely true to the people of his city, as has my friend Steve Rotheram, a former Member of this House and now the Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, who also carried the campaign to this point.

I cannot describe my pride in being in the House tonight to see this Bill plant the values of the city of my birth at the heart of this country. That is something of

huge and profound significance that has been brought about by the Hillsborough families. We recognise the significance of that tonight.

As Steve Rotheram has said, the Hillsborough law cannot do any more for the Hillsborough families. It will do much more for those who come after them, but that is what makes their campaign so special. They have done this for others, not for themselves. It is important to remind the House of the other campaigns, which we hope will now be lifted by this legislation as we pass it this evening.

We do think this evening, as the Prime Minister said, of the Grenfell survivors and families—I am sure all London Members will want to echo that—who are still waiting for justice and accountability over nine years after the Grenfell fire. We think tonight of the Primodos families, who have fought so hard for fairness, supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East—

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South and Walkden) (Lab): Bolton South and Walkden.

Andy Burnham: I have been away for a while, but I will get there in the end.

I know that other Members in this House have supported those who have suffered other treatment disasters—sodium valproate, mesh, PIP implants. These are still ongoing campaigns, and we need to recognise these campaigns in the House tonight, as we do that of the Chinook families, who were in court today—only just now, I was speaking about that to the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Vikki Slade) in the Lobby—and we pay tribute to them this evening.

Let us not forget in this list, and I know they have support from across the House, the servicemen who served this country in the post-war period in the south Pacific—our nuclear test veterans. How often in this House do we praise our veterans, and how in this case have we left those veterans without truth and justice about what happened to them all those years ago? I think this House needs to hear their call for a special tribunal, which is entirely consistent with the aims of the Bill we are passing tonight.

This Bill advances all of these just causes, and the campaign for truth and justice does not stop here; indeed, it accelerates from here. I hope it ends the cover-up culture that has failed so many ordinary people in this country. We can never forget that for 20 years an entire English city was crying “Injustice!” correctly, yet this place ignored those people for all that time. We cannot forget that, and we cannot take away the hurt that that caused. We cannot forget that postmasters and mistresses serving communities up and down this country were branded as petty thieves, and carried that stigma with them for years. Likewise, those infected by infected blood were blamed for having brought it on themselves through their lifestyle. We cannot forget that.

Let me finish where I started, with the Liverpool supporters who were blamed for harming their own fellow supporters at a football match. That is what was done, and that was left to stand for all those years. The families here tonight had to live with that for all those years. Imagine what that must have felt like. We have had a situation in this country where people suffered the trauma of the initial bereavement—the incident that

[*Andy Burnham*]

took their loved ones away—and then were retraumatised by the behaviour of the state. We cannot take that hurt away tonight, but we can put decency back at the heart of the British state, and that is what this Bill does. I finish by again praising the Prime Minister for making it happen. This truly is his legacy.

6.33 pm

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I begin by echoing the words of the Prime Minister and the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) in paying tribute to the Hillsborough campaigners. Our whole country owes them a debt, and I want to speak about that, but I want to do so in the spirit of cross-party support and working that this moment demands.

I want to pay tribute personally to the Prime Minister for the work that he has done on this, having to overcome the difficulties, as we know, with the security issues. I also want to pay tribute—I hope this is not the last time—to the right hon. Member for Makerfield, who is welcome back in this House. He has for many years paid a very personal role in this campaign, so it is very fitting that he is in the House tonight to see this law passed. I echo the tributes that he has paid, and that others will no doubt pay, because people have campaigned for many years for this moment. The enormous debt of gratitude we owe them for their courage, tenacity and determination is one that I hope this historic moment gives proper credit to.

But let us remember, as others have said, that it is not just the Hillsborough scandal; it is Grenfell, it is Windrush, it is Horizon, it is Orgreave, it is infected blood, it is covid, it is the nuclear test veterans, and the other scandals that have been mentioned. The right hon. Member for Makerfield was right to add Primodos to the list. I hope, by the way, when he takes the office we expect him to take soon, that he will put right those scandals. We will hold him to that in a cross-party manner.

There are many tragedies and scandals that have been compounded by state cover-up. This is an issue of rights between the state and individuals: victims, survivors and families having to fight for years or even decades just to expose the truth and win the justice they should have had straight away.

All too often, when things have gone wrong, we have seen a tendency to cover up mistakes, to close ranks, to protect institutions and, so often, to lie. Victims and families have spent years campaigning tirelessly against a system and an establishment that have tried to find

countless ways of saying no. Thanks to those campaigners, we now take a big step closer to ending that culture of cover up, ensuring that no one has to fight so long and so painfully to get truth, justice and accountability.

There is more to do, and not just on the individual scandals but on the need to protect whistleblowers. That is an issue the Liberal Democrat party has raised and we want to work cross-party with the Government to ensure that we set up an independent office for whistleblowers, so that people come forward to expose scandals and ensure justice happens more quickly.

Many of the people who will benefit from this law will not recognise and will not even know how hard—how painfully hard—the campaigners have had to work over so many years. It is important that we remember that. It is truly remarkable, having suffered so much pain and injustice, that they kept going. What has been achieved in the Bill is something that will change the very nature of power in our country. It will make the lives of so many people better.

I thank the campaigners. I say to them, from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

PUBLIC OFFICE (ACCOUNTABILITY) BILL (CARRY-OVER EXTENSION)

Ordered,

That the period on the expiry of which proceedings on the Public Office (Accountability) Bill shall lapse in pursuance of paragraph (13) of Standing Order No. 80A shall be extended by 136 days until 29 January 2027.—(*Catherine Atkinson.*)

STEEL INDUSTRY (NATIONALISATION) BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 21 May 2026 (Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill: Programme):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

(1) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

(2) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(3) Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*Claire Hughes.*)

Question agreed to.

Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Clause 3

SUNSET FOR EXERCISE OF PRINCIPAL TRANSFER POWERS

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I can inform the House that nothing in the Lords amendments engages Commons financial privilege.

6.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Chris McDonald): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 1.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments 2 to 18.

Chris McDonald: It is a pleasure to be back in the House today to see through the final stages of this Bill. The Government support all the Lords amendments before us.

I wish to pay tribute to my colleague Minister Leong for so expertly guiding the Bill through its passage in the other place. I also wish to place on the record my thanks for the constructive approach taken by peers to the scrutiny of the Bill during its passage through the upper House, including the constructive and careful consideration from His Majesty's official Opposition, Liberal Democrat peers and Cross-Bench peers. I thank them for their contribution.

We have a responsibility to act now to secure the future of the UK steel industry. This Bill will assist in that by ensuring that steel production is secured, helping to restore domestic production to sustainable levels and supporting the Government's economic growth plans where the public interest test is met.

The Lords amendments before us strengthen the Bill in several ways. Amendment 1 ensures that the sunset power in the Bill may be extended only by increments of two years. This means that the Government would have to seek parliamentary approval at regular intervals to keep the principal transfer powers on the statute book.

Lords amendments 2 and 3 place a duty on the Secretary of State to consider the costs that are likely to be associated with the exercise of the principal transfer powers, ensuring that such costs are considered in any decision making over the use of these powers.

Lords amendments 4 and 5 upgrade the parliamentary procedure relating to continuity obligations and enforcement, ensuring that Parliament has increased scrutiny of these matters.

Lords amendments 6 to 18 all relate to the appointment and role of an independent valuer and ensure that key considerations around environmental and health and safety liabilities are taken into account during any valuation exercise.

A final decision on the use of the powers in the Bill has not been taken. Any decision to exercise the powers in the Bill will be subject to satisfaction of the public interest test, based on the relevant facts at the time of the decision.

Steel has shaped our nation's history, and this Bill is an opportunity to ensure its long-term success. The Bill enables decisive action for a strategically vital industry, defending our national security and supporting our critical national infrastructure, our economy and our national interest. I therefore ask right hon. and hon. Members to support the Lords amendments before us today.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I am grateful to their lordships for their work on the Bill. We support the amendments before the House.

Let me be plain from the outset: our objection has never been to steelmaking, or to the men and women who make steel; it is to a Government who have crashed around and used blunt instruments without ever having a detailed plan. Hope is not a strategy, and a blank cheque is not a plan. Nationalisation is a bad idea, and nothing that has yet been said at that Dispatch Box has told the House where the spending stops. The Government are taking us down a fast and expensive road with no idea where the exit lies. Even members of the Government concede in private that they rushed into something that they now repent at leisure.

Let us look at what we have learnt over the passage of the Bill. The Government and their Lib Dem little helpers in the Lords voted against a Conservative amendment in the name of the noble Lord Hunt to limit support to £2.5 billion over three years. That is almost £2.3 million every single day. The cap was not plucked from thin air—that £2.5 billion was the Government's own figure. In their refusal to accept a cap, the Government concede that the figure is likely to be more. That could have been 35,000 new police officers, eight brand-new hospitals or more than double what the Chancellor raised over the course of this Parliament by destroying the livelihoods of British farmers.

6.45 pm

We support Lords amendment 1, which limits by two years the power for Ministers to bring further steel businesses into public ownership without coming back to this House. Powers this sweeping should never have been handed to Ministers without limit. We support Lords amendments 2 and 3, tabled by the Liberal Democrats, which would require the Secretary of State to weigh the likely costs before making share transfer or property transfer regulations. That is a modest ask, and it is hugely damning that it had to be forced on the Government.

We support Lords amendments 4 and 5, which were laid on a cross-party basis. They shift the regulations governing continuity obligations and their enforcement from the negative procedure to the affirmative. If Ministers wish to bind steel undertakings and their suppliers, let them do so in daylight, with the consent of this House—not by regulations that slip through unseen without the scrutiny of Parliament.

We welcome the Government's Lords amendments 6 to 18, which would require, rather than merely permit, the compensation scheme to provide for an independent valuer and would set out plainly the role that the valuer must perform. When the Government listen and act sensibly, we support them—and we have. It is a pity that

the Government did not extend this House the same courtesy on the one amendment that mattered the most: the cap on an otherwise unlimited bill for the taxpayer.

For all the hours we have now spent debating the future of steelmaking in the UK, the Government still refuse to confront the real issue—they know what it is, but they refuse to confront it. It is the Secretary of State for Energy and his addiction to ruinously high energy prices. It is not me who says that but Unite the union's general secretary, who described this as a “noose around the neck” of job creation.

There is no path to profitable steelmaking of any kind in the UK while energy prices here are four times higher than in many of our competitor nations. There is no tariff damaging enough to manufacturers and steel users to compensate for that, even though the Government's botched attempts are clearly already causing manufacturing jobs to shift offshore.

The Government will talk about their British industrial competitiveness scheme, which is welcome, but it is just a sticking plaster on a gaping wound—and the Minister knows it. It is nonsense to claim that their strategy is one of security of supply when the same Government refused to open a coking coal mine, meaning that every furnace is reliant on imports, without which they would close in a matter of hours.

Only the Conservatives have a plan to get Britain drilling and reduce energy costs. We will remove legal obstacles blocking new oil and gas projects like Rosebank and Jackdaw and scrap the energy profits levy to make them viable. We will increase private investment in oil and gas extraction, and we will scrap the carbon taxes and industrial levies that expensively subsidise intermittent renewables that do not generate when the wind does not blow or the sun does not shine.

We will not stand in the way of these amendments. Many of them are ours, and the rest improve a flawed Bill, but let no one mistake improvement for endorsement. The amendments warrant our support, but the so-called plan and the botched decisions behind them do not.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): We have a duty to stand by the steel sector, especially as it navigates unprecedented challenges, including President Trump's unfair steel tariffs, China's anti-competitive state aid practices, and the transition to environmentally sustainable production methods. If we are going to foster a thriving steel industry, we cannot allow more producers to collapse, more jobs to be lost, or the risk of our last blast furnaces going cold.

That is why the Liberal Democrats broadly welcome this legislation as a temporary emergency and targeted step aimed specifically at turning around British Steel before it can be returned to the private sector. I am particularly glad that the Government have accepted Liberal Democrat amendments that will require the Secretary of State to have regard to the costs of nationalisation before they table regulations to nationalise a company, as well as amendments that would ensure the consideration of environmental liabilities. Those Liberal Democrat amendments will strengthen the legislation, ensuring that these measures—and indeed the Government's broader steel strategy—move us in the right direction to set the industry on a truly sustainable footing for the long term, while providing taxpayers with real value for money.

Lords amendments 2 and 3 ensure that if the Secretary of State is to exercise the principal transfer power, the Government must consider the expected cost to the taxpayer. That is important not only for business and industry to have certainty over the nationalisation process, but for taxpayers, who need to know that their money is not being wasted or paid to foreign owners who will leave our industries high and dry.

I am glad that the Government have also agreed to Liberal Democrat amendments that will strengthen the treatment of environmental liabilities in relation to the steel undertaking and ensure that they are explicitly identified and accounted for before compensation payments are made. On top of those legislative concessions, we are glad that the Government accepted other Liberal Democrat calls, including holding a debate in each House within 12 months of Royal Assent and requiring any future chair of a nationalised company to appear before the Business and Trade Committee. Those significant improvements to the legislation promote parliamentary scrutiny and accountability.

We also welcome the Government's having listened to Liberal Democrat peers and introduction of written ministerial statements on the day of acquisition, which will be repeated every three months until we reach a year from nationalisation. Again, that change boosts transparency, enabling Parliament to scrutinise the measures' impact on local communities and jobs. Lastly, we are glad that the Government adopted Liberal Democrat proposals to strengthen the UK Steel Council and its role in facilitating nationalisation within the context of the steel strategy.

Steel is a vital sector, bringing far-reaching benefits across the UK. It provides key materials for our national infrastructure from defence to renewable energy, and creates thousands of good jobs across the UK. The Liberal Democrats welcome the action that the Government are taking to protect British steel, backing a key plank of our critical national infrastructure. I am glad that the Government have worked constructively with the Liberal Democrats and that Ministers have adopted many of our proposals to improve transparency and accountability around the financial and environmental costs of any forthcoming measures. We will continue to constructively scrutinise the Government as they put these new measures in force to ensure that steel producers, local jobs and British taxpayers are properly supported and treated fairly.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): I welcome the Government's acceptance of the Lords amendments. As hon. Members will know, part of my constituency takes in the Scunthorpe steelworks, and hundreds of my constituents work there. My aim throughout the rather tortuous and long saga about the future of the steelworks has been to ensure that their jobs are retained.

As the shadow Secretary of State outlined, the Bill could have been further improved, but I am delighted that we have at least reached a conclusion. There will be a sigh of relief among my many constituents who rely on the steelworks for their employment.

I look forward to engaging with the Minister as we move forward on the future of the steelworks—because, as I think he is well aware, if energy costs in particular

stay as they are, there are future disasters ahead. We must do something on energy costs if we are to maintain any sort of a steel industry and heavy industry in the UK.

I thank the Minister for getting us to this point and look forward to working with him in the future.

Chris McDonald: I have listened carefully to the shadow Secretary of State's remarks and those from the shadow Minister, and I will address them in a moment. I am grateful for the support of the Vice-Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Sir Nicholas Dakin), and of the Minister without Portfolio, my right hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), both of whom are unable to speak in the debate as a result of their positions elsewhere in the House.

I opened by remarking on the constructive and careful consideration that the Bill has had in the other place; it is disappointing to see that the shadow Secretary of State is not taking the same approach. I will pick up a couple of the issues he raised. I am acutely aware of the position in which the previous Government left us, with uncompetitive energy prices for industry. If he had been attentive in some of the debates we have been involved in, he would be aware of some of the measures that I have taken to address that. Those include our energy-intensive scheme, increased relief on our supercharger scheme and our British industrial competitiveness scheme. I am determined to do more.

On tariffs, I am not saying that making the decision on tariffs was easy, but the shadow Secretary of State would clearly throw British industry to the mercy of dumped steel on the global market. We will not make that decision. He mentions coal for coking ovens. He may be unaware that there are no coking ovens in Scunthorpe. They were closed on his watch.

This Government are acting decisively and with purpose in the national interest, but the shadow Secretary of State is blinded by his ideological position on nationalisation. We believe that a steel industry, where necessary run by the Government and owned by the people, at least gives the opportunity to attract private sector investment. If the public interest test is met, that is the right thing to do. But if that does not convince the shadow Secretary of State, perhaps I can appeal to his sense of patriotism. I said on Second Reading that the England men's football team had only ever won the world cup in a year when we had nationalised the steel industry. If he has any sense of duty towards our team and wishes them well, he should support nationalisation this time as well.

Lords amendment 1 agreed to.

Lords amendments 2 to 18 agreed to.

PETITIONS

West Bridgford Local Government

6.56 pm

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): I wish to present a petition on behalf of residents of West Bridgford in my constituency, calling for the creation of a new town council. West Bridgford is home to around 40,000 people, making it by far the largest settlement in Rushcliffe, yet unlike almost every other part of the borough it has no town or parish council to represent its local interests. As

local government reorganisation concludes this week, many residents are concerned that decisions affecting their community will be taken solely by a large unitary authority, leaving local voices further removed or altogether absent from decision making.

For almost 80 years, West Bridgford had its own urban district council, and there is a strong feeling among residents that a new town council would be beneficial. Indeed, an independent survey carried out earlier this year found exceptionally high engagement. The petition I present today therefore reflects that local desire for greater democratic representation and asks the Government to work with Rushcliffe borough council as the process moves forward.

I am pleased to present the petition, which states:

The petition of residents of West Bridgford in the constituency of Rushcliffe,

Declares that there is a need for a new town council for West Bridgford; further declares that a new town council would have a positive impact on community cohesion throughout the area, which would enhance a sense of place, and support the local environment, its communities, and local distinctiveness.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to work with Rushcliffe Borough Council to create a new West Bridgford town council to support local residents.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P003223]

Political Donations and Housing Developers

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): I rise to present a petition alongside a corresponding online petition signed by hundreds of my constituents in North East Hertfordshire calling to ban housing developers from donating to political parties. Developers are some of the largest donors in politics, pouring in massive sums to tilt the planning system ever further in their favour. Cash for access leaves the impression that the same developers are wrecking nature and failing to deliver affordable homes. Those profiting from low-quality, overpriced housing are also writing the rules. This cements inequality at the heart of democracy because the people living with the consequences of a profit-driven housing crisis never get a seat at the table.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that housing developers are among the largest donors to political parties and donate massive sums of money in an attempt to tilt the planning system further in their favour; further declares that cash-for-access leaves the impression that the same developers profiting from low-quality, overpriced housing are also helping to write the rules; and further declares that the corrupting influence of big money should be removed from the planning system and politics should be refocused on genuine solutions to the housing crisis that bring down housing costs for ordinary people and give local communities more of a say over their future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ban housing developers from donating to political parties.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P003225]

Political Donations and Public Contracts

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): I rise to present a petition, alongside a corresponding online petition, which has been signed by more than 4,000 UK residents,

calling for a ban on political donors getting contracts from Governments they helped to fund. Big money donors do not give out of kindness; they pay for access and influence. The evidence shows that it is a smart investment, because the firms have landed billions in Government contracts. If we want to build a better country, we need a better kind of politics, and tackling the corrosive influence of big money is the first step to rebuilding public trust. The petitioners

“therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ban political donors from receiving public contracts with Governments of political parties”

to which they have donated,

“And the petitioners remain, etc.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that companies which donate to political parties have gone on to receive billions of pounds in public contracts; and further declares that this creates a perception that political decisions are shaped by cosy relationships with super-rich donors, instead of a sole focus on delivering better living standards and services for millions of people.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ban political donors from receiving public contracts with Governments of political parties they have donated to.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P003226]

Crystal Palace National Sports Centre

Liam Conlon (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): With 28 world records, the Crystal Palace national sports centre is the spiritual home of UK athletics. It is also an incredible community asset. Residents across Beckenham and Penge speak fondly about using its facilities growing up, or remember their children and grandchildren learning

to swim in the Olympic-sized pool. However, in recent years, the centre has become a boarded-up relic of the past—in 2014, the then Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, even tried to demolish the athletic stadium and turn it into an unwanted free school—but thanks to the work of Fran Bernstein, Ben Woods, the Crystal Palace Sports Partnership and many others, the centre now has a lifeline. The £130 million transformation of the centre, backed by funding from our Mayor of London, Sir Sadiq Khan, will see the reopening of the Olympic-sized pool and diving boards, a revamped athletics stadium, and new facilities for other sports, too. I will be campaigning to bring world-class athletics back to Crystal Palace park once again. The petitioners

“therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to work with the Mayor of London and other relevant partners to support the delivery of the transformation of the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the constituency of Beckenham and Penge,

Declares that the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre is a nationally significant sporting and community facility; further declares that plans have been submitted to transform the site, including refurbishment of the Grade II listed building, a revamped Olympic-sized pool and athletics stadium and new multi-sport and parasport facilities; and further declares that this transformation would benefit residents of Beckenham and Penge for generations to come.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to work with the Mayor of London and other relevant partners to support the delivery of the transformation of the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P003227]

Future of Thames Water

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

7.1 pm

Charlie Maynard (Witney) (LD): I will discuss the future of Thames Water, starting with Thames Water's record of pollution and environmental failure, and how it impacts everyone in my Witney constituency. Thames Water serves the constituency and embodies the systemic failure of the national water sector. Last year, Thames Water pumped sewage into rivers and lakes for 107,822 hours.

West Oxfordshire is very much ground zero for sewage. We have the Thames, the Evenlode, the Windrush, Shill brook and the Cole. We also have WASP, or Windrush Against Sewage Pollution, which has been so active in going after Thames Water's bad behaviour. It has mapped the illegal sewage spills at Thames Water sewage treatment works and found that, between 2021 and 2025, there were 1,231 illegal spills just in the Witney constituency, and 271 illegal spills in just one sewage treatment works, Faringdon.

West Oxfordshire district council has done great work in trying to hold Thames Water to account, as has WASP, which inspired the Channel 4 programme "Dirty Business", which many hon. Members will have seen, so well done to Peter, Ash, Geoff and Vaughan. Despite Thames Water's appalling record, residents have seen their bills skyrocket. I have constituents whose bills have gone up by 50% and 70%; I even have one whose bill has gone up by 93%. That is outrageous, but those bill hikes are not making the situation any better. That is because Thames Water's financial situation is disastrous. Thames has nearly £20 billion of debt.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Gentleman for making his speech, because this is hugely important. Residents in Harlow are also fed up with their bills going up because of what appears to be Thames Water's incompetence. Does he agree that that should not be the case, and that if Thames Water is so incompetent that it cannot sort out this problem, the Government need to step in and do something about it?

Charlie Maynard: I completely agree, and Thames Water's full-year accounts are out at 7 am tomorrow morning. We will see just what they tell us. It is going to be ugly, not least because the company's equity is worthless. The largest equity shareholders wrote down their shareholding to zero value and withdrew their board members more than two years ago. When Thames Water's creditors sought to take on another £3 billion of debt last year, I was given permission to intervene in the High Court and speak for the interests of Thames Water's 16 million customers, who are paying all these outrageous costs and interest expenses, but would otherwise have had no voice in court.

This Labour Government have slow-peddled for the last two years, and have refused to draw a line under decades of Tory bad behaviour by putting Thames Water into special administration. This approach is costing customers an absolute fortune. Thames Water paid £338 million just in interest expenses in the six months

to September 2025. That is £133 million more, just in interest expenses, than it paid in the same period the previous year.

Labour is taking this hands-off approach despite the company's multiple breaches of its operating licence. Let me illustrate some of those breaches. As I have stated, the company has carried out more than 1,000 illegal spills over four years. It must hold two investment-grade credit ratings as a condition of its operating licence, but it last held any investment-grade credit rating two years ago, in July 2024, and it has undergone a change of ultimate controller; yet the Minister, the Secretary of State and Ofwat have repeatedly refused to answer on that point.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): We have a similar problem with South East Water, which is probably the second-worst water company in the United Kingdom after Thames Water. With South East Water, too, this Labour Government have been too timid. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government, by acting, or not acting, in the way that they are, they are privileging shareholders over consumers?

Charlie Maynard: Absolutely. The consumers are getting the raw deal, and there is no end in sight.

To qualify as an ultimate controller—it is a defined term—a party need only have material influence over Thames Water. The creditor consortium right now is negotiating bilaterally with the company, and has put in £3 billion, but somehow that does not make it meet the criterion. It is ridiculous, and frankly, seeing this failure play out was probably the single moment when I most despaired of government and the rule of law. I repeatedly ask the same question, and repeatedly do not get an answer. I find it really, really bad.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): Residents in Wokingham are absolutely sick of the failures of Thames Water's management. In 2025 alone, Thames Water committed 74 sewage spills, for a duration of 684 hours. That means that Thames Water dumped sewage for the equivalent of 456 football matches, and there were certainly no clean sheets. No waterway in Wokingham is safe—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. The hon. Gentleman should be aware that interventions should be short, spontaneous and perhaps not pre-typed and three pages long.

Charlie Maynard: I thank my hon. Friend.

Rather than having customers pay hundreds of millions of pounds of debt at ludicrous interest rates of nearly 10%, Thames Water should be taken into a special administration regime, which is commonly known as bankruptcy on insolvency grounds. I urge the Government to pursue a SAR on the basis of insolvency, as this is a more straightforward way to secure special administration than on a performance basis, and it will give the special administrator additional powers and a stronger position in relation to the creditors.

The Water Industry Act 1991 sets out triggers linked to financial insolvency. Among them is the company being unable, or likely to be unable, to pay its debts. The Secretary of State and Ofwat both have discretion to apply to the High Court for a special administration

[Charlie Maynard]

order if that condition is triggered. I understand that the Government currently do not have, and have refused to publish, a SAR assessment policy. That is despite the Cunliffe review concluding that there is a need for

“broad, judgement-based tests within a clear policy, that has been set out in advance, of how the regulator will assess failing companies against these tests, the factors it will take into account and the indicators it will consider.”

That is from paragraph 793, recommendation 59, of the final report. Clarity around those tests and when a SAR will be used would benefit the water sector and its investors. Importantly, it also increases the Government’s negotiating leverage with the class A creditor consortium by further increasing the credibility of the threat of a SAR. I am interested to hear from the Minister why the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is so reluctant to publish those tests.

A SAR process would allow Thames Water’s debt to be written down substantially, very likely into single-digit billions. This write-down is crucial, and it is not punitive. The write-down should be sufficient for the company to leave the SAR with a balance sheet that is strong enough to manage the huge spend that will be required over the next decade or so on treatment works and pipe networks.

Mr Will Forster (Woking) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that we need Thames Water to go into special measures, so that it can invest in infrastructure? In my constituency, Thames Water has closed a road for three weeks in Horsell because it has not invested, and it dumped over 1,115 hours-worth of sewage last year into our River Wey. That lack of investment is why we need what he is calling for today.

Charlie Maynard: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. That is what is going on up and down the catchment writ small, with treatment works deferred despite being crucially needed. In Aston, we have sewage running down the street year after year, and it is the same in Standlake. It is just disgusting, and there is no end in sight.

A SAR process would allow the Government to use the period while Thames Water is in a SAR to put much of the good work from the Cunliffe review into new legislation, and to do the legwork to enable the company to exit as a mutual. Crucially, a SAR would not ultimately cost the Government anything—this really matters—because they will recoup all the funding spent on a SAR, as this new funding injected by the Government would be super senior to all other funding. I am very grateful to the former DEFRA Secretary, Steve Reed, for setting out in a letter to the—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. The hon. Gentleman means to say, “the former Secretary of State for DEFRA, the right hon. Member for Streatham and Croydon North (Steve Reed).”

Charlie Maynard: My apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am grateful to the former Secretary of State for setting out in a letter to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in June last year that

“we expect that any Government funding required during a SAR would be recouped after the conclusion of the administration”.

The current Secretary of State set out the same point in a parliamentary debate on 16 June. It is also worth noting that the Tories—there are not any in the Chamber—continue to refuse to acknowledge this, and that Teneo, Thames Water’s own expert adviser, stated the same in its report to the High Court in December 2024.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): My hon. Friend is making a powerful argument. Does he agree that the Government’s reluctance to take a company that is clearly now technically insolvent into a SAR is loading costs on to consumers who use other water companies, by creating a moral hazard that means that companies are incentivised to take on ever more debt, with the debt providers being protected by the Government? Instead, the Government should allow companies to fail, if they are going to fail, and to be taken into a SAR, so that there can be investment in the infrastructure that my hon. Friends referred to.

Charlie Maynard: I agree 100%, and that is what is so depressing; by continuing to demonstrate that the regulators have no teeth, we create a bigger and bigger problem for ourselves.

The alternative to a SAR—a deal with the creditors, which, extraordinarily, seems to be the Government’s preferred option at this point—should not be countenanced. Giving these businesses, now operating as London & Valley Water consortium, yet more control of the company at ludicrously high interest rates would allow this downward spiral to continue. The Government must and can change course by using their power to ask for a SAR under existing legislation.

There is now the opportunity for Thames Water to exit special administration as a mutual, owned and run in the interests of its customers, and to break the cycle of financial mismanagement and egregious environmental failings once and for all. Legislation sets out that a water company insolvency SAR can conclude in two ways: rescue, whereby the company is restructured, debts are written down or converted, and the existing legal entity continues in a modified form; or transfer, whereby the regulated undertaking is sold or transferred to a new owner. That does not require a competitive auction, as the legislation provides for a transfer approved by the Secretary of State and Ofwat. Nothing in the legislation states that either route requires a competitive sale, as the overriding objective in a SAR is continuity of public service, not maximising creditor returns.

The Government could therefore set out at the point of SAR entry, or shortly after, that a mutual is the preferred exit route for Thames, and make that clear in the special administrator’s mandate. Work would need to be done in parallel with the SAR process to incorporate and put in place the governance framework for a new mutual, as well as more broadly updating water regulations to take into account the Cunliffe report’s recommendations. Ofwat could then work towards a licence transfer to the mutual, rather than running a market sale.

In conclusion, I have some questions for the Minister. If she is unable to answer them now, I would appreciate an answer in writing if possible. Have the Government sought legal advice on the SAR process from a specialist law firm? I appreciate that FTI Consulting has been instructed for many months, but that is not a substitute

for legal advice. A proper, specialist understanding of the SAR as a legal process, and of the litigation risk—perceived or actual—of applying for a SAR, is critical.

Will the Government commit to publishing a SAR assessment policy, and does the Minister agree that the creditors consortium has material influence over Thames Water, and therefore meets the ultimate controller test? Will the Minister act with Ofwat to enforce the appropriate penalties on Thames Water for having undergone that change without having given notice, and will she provide an update on the negotiations between Ofwat and Thames Water? Will the Minister now take the London & Valley Water deal off the table, and work with the Secretary of State to apply to the court for Thames Water to be put into special administration? Finally, in response to a question about whether she would consider the Liberal Democrat call for water companies to be mutually owned public benefit companies, the Minister said:

“I would be happy to see more mutual ownership of water companies, but the question is how we get there.”—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2026; Vol. 787, c. 728.]

Given that, will she confirm her Department’s position on mutual ownership models for water companies? What are the Department’s plans for exploring how we get there?

7.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy): I thank the hon. Member for Witney (Charlie Maynard) for inviting me to respond to his concerns about the future of Thames Water. I have listened with his interest to his comments, and I hope I will be able to add some facts to the debate. I also accept his sympathy and anger on behalf of his constituents. Indeed, they must feel very angry about the fact that water was left in such a state, and that the Environment Agency’s budget was cut by half by the coalition Government, who also introduced self-monitoring. The Environment Agency was unable to fulfil its duties during the time of the coalition Government, and the regulators did not put forward forceful accountability for the water companies. It was left to this Labour Government to clear up the mess left by the coalition Government and 14 years of the Conservatives. I am sure the hon. Gentleman shares my anger about that—I certainly felt angry about it when I came into government and saw the mess that we had been left to clear up.

Let me remind the hon. Gentleman exactly what we have done. We introduced the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025 within six weeks of entering government, to raise standards, enforce accountability, and make pollution cover-ups a criminal offence. We banned more than £4 million in bonuses, and unlocked money in private investment to rebuild vital infrastructure. Just last week we introduced automatic penalties. There is more I could mention, including 10,000 water inspections, which is many more than happened after the slash and burn of funding for the Environment Agency by the coalition Government. We have restored to the system the accountability that has been missing for so long.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): My constituents are cheering on the work that the Government have done by getting a grip of this situation after the Environment Agency was left to mark its own homework, and the

self-monitoring and regulation framework failed. Will the Minister say more about the dedicated supervisory teams in the White Paper, which will be working to stop this happening again and ensure that Thames Water changes in future?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend is quite right to point out how self-monitoring, which was introduced by the coalition Government, was such an utter mistake that has done so much damage to the water industry. It is why we are in the current situation. The purpose of the supervisory regime is to be able to intervene earlier, and it works alongside the performance improvement regime so that we can hold companies to account. That is why we are abolishing Ofwat—

Charlie Maynard: On that point, will the Minister give way?

Emma Hardy: I have heard quite a lot from the hon. Gentleman, so I would be most grateful if he would not mind giving someone else a chance. We are looking at introducing the performance regime for the same reason, because we want to ensure that we can intervene early to stop the abject failure that we saw under the coalition Government.

Sean Woodcock (Banbury) (Lab): Every week in my surgeries I hear about the consequences of Thames Water’s failures. An elderly widowed constituent was left without running water after it failed and botched the installation of a water meter, and she was forced to shell out hundreds of pounds on an emergency plumber to remedy the situation. Will the Minister confirm that she understands the anger of constituents like mine with regard to Thames Water and its continued failing? Will she confirm that she will keep all measures under review?

Emma Hardy: It is true that I feel angry on behalf of all our constituents who have been so badly let down by the system that we inherited, and that is exactly why we have taken the action that we have. There is, of course, lots more to do—nobody is saying there is not—but we have to acknowledge the dire straits and the mess that we inherited. We are going to bring forward a clean water Bill to deliver on our promise to clean up our rivers, lakes and seas, and not just for today but for generations to come. The reforms will create a single powerful water regulator to act, and we will ensure that it has teeth in the way that the current regulator does not.

Turning to some of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Witney about the consortiums proposal, regarding the recapitalisation proposal being negotiated between Thames Water, London & Valley Water Consortium—a group of Thames Water’s creditors—and Ofwat, I reiterate that this Government will always act in the national interest. Before I turn to the proposal itself, it is important to be clear about the respective roles and responsibilities of the parties involved, because there is so much misinformation and misunderstanding out there. I welcome the opportunity to at least introduce a few more facts into the argument about the proposals.

Ofwat, as the independent economic regulator, is responsible for assessing that proposal and deciding whether it meets the relevant regulatory and statutory

[Emma Hardy]

requirements, including whether it is appropriate to take the proposal forward for consultation. However, section 2 of the Water Industry Act 1991 places a duty on both Ofwat and the Secretary of State to exercise their respective relevant functions in the manner best calculated to further or achieve certain objectives. This includes protecting customers, securing the proper delivery of water and sewerage services, ensuring that companies can finance those services and that statutory obligations are properly carried out.

Mike Martin: Does the Minister think that the Secretary of State exercised those duties well when, under the Blair Government, Macquarie was allowed to come into Thames Water and South East Water and asset strip those companies?

Emma Hardy: Quite clearly, some of the behaviour that we have seen in the past from water companies shows that the regulatory system did not work, and that is exactly why we are changing it. Of course, between Blair and the current Government there were 14 years of Tory Government and five years of coalition Government during which those Governments could have taken the actions that we are taking today.

On 16 June, the Secretary of State gave her preliminary views on the consortium's proposal to Ofwat, with reference to section 2 duties of the Water Industry Act 1991. She was clear that she does not believe that the current proposal goes far enough to protect customers and the environment. She cited three particular concerns in line with her duties: unfair costs to customers, delays to infrastructure investment and delays to environmental improvements.

However, the decision on how to assess the proposal and whether to proceed with consultation ultimately rests with Ofwat as the independent regulator. It is therefore important that the Government respect those boundaries. While the Secretary of State may express views in accordance with her statutory duties, it would not be appropriate for the Government to direct Ofwat's decision making, prejudice the outcome of its assessment or be seen to exert undue influence on an independent regulatory process.

We are working closely with Ofwat, which will engage with the consortium on any revised proposal. It is important to be clear that it is ultimately a matter for Ofwat to decide whether to consult on the consortium's proposal. However, I reassure the House that while the company is stable, we stand ready for all eventualities and the Secretary of State takes her duties very seriously.

I will also use this debate as an opportunity to address some of the misconceptions that have developed about special administration. Too often, SAR is presented as a simple lever that the Government can pull whenever there are concerns about a water company's performance, but that is simply not the case. The reality is that there is a high bar for the imposition of a special administration regime. A company can enter into a SAR only if it becomes insolvent, or if there has been such a serious breach of its principal statutory duties or an enforcement order that it is no longer appropriate for the company to retain its licence.

Where performance is concerned, any application for a special administration regime would have to be supported by a robust and compelling body of evidence and would ultimately need to satisfy the courts. Bringing a case forward without sufficient evidence would not only risk the failure of that case, but waste a huge amount of taxpayers' money. For any case brought forward, the Government and Ofwat would need to be convinced that there was a robust and compelling body of evidence. That is quite different from what is presented out there too often—that this is just a button the Government can press at will.

Calum Miller: I am glad the Minister has moved on to the substance of DEFRA's case. Will she clarify for my residents whether she considers a company that is spending 33% of the income it gets from customers on servicing its debt and paying a 10% premium on that debt is actually viable as a company? Will she set out for the House what she considers to be the measure of insolvency for a privately held monopoly?

Emma Hardy: As I have just said, on the issue of performance, cases have to be brought forward to court, and the court must be convinced that the company is not performing—I will move on to insolvency.

This issue is why regulators start by using the full range of supervisory and enforcement powers available to them where appropriate. Companies must be held to account, put forward credible plans to improve and deliver for customers on the environment. Indeed, that is one of the reasons why we are introducing a new performance improvement regime through the clean water Bill.

The performance improvement regime will help to prevent poorly performing companies from falling into a cycle of decline, allowing regulators to step in before a company approaches the point of failure. It will strengthen accountability, support improvements in performance and provide a clearer pathway for intervention long before special administration may be required.

Let me address another misconception about special administration. Some suggest that placing a company into special administration would simply allow the Government to take over and run the company directly. That is not how the regime works. A special administrator is appointed by a court and has specific legal duties and objectives. It must manage the company's affairs, businesses and property for the statutory purposes set out in the Water Industry Act.

The special administrator's primary responsibility is to ensure the continued delivery of essential water and waste water services while securing a long-term solution for the business. Depending on the circumstances, that could mean rescuing the company, such as through a restructuring, or transferring it as a going concern to new owners. That is why the special administration regime exists to protect customers and maintain vital public services while providing a framework for recovery or transfer. Customers continue to receive their services throughout the process, and the special administrator operates under the supervision of the court and within a clear legal framework.

I know the hon. Member for Witney is particularly concerned about whether the consortium meets the criteria of acting as the ultimate controller of Thames

Water. Let me use this opportunity to address his concerns. The classification of ultimate controller is a matter for Ofwat, as the independent economic regulator, by reference to the terms of the company's licence. Ofwat has given a detailed explanation of why it does not consider the creditors to be the ultimate controllers of the company in its letter to the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North (Liam Byrne), dated 8 September 2025.

Ofwat has stated that one of the reasons why it does not believe creditors are in a position to materially influence the company's policies or affairs is that it does not have the right to appoint directors to the board, and it does not hold any governance or veto rights over the Thames Water business plan or other strategic decisions that the company's board is making. I am reassured that it has reviewed the matter and that the ultimate controller of the company has not changed—

Charlie Maynard: How is that possible?

Emma Hardy: This is the thing with the hon. Gentleman: he makes many assertions in this House when he stands up to comment, but then he refuses to allow me to address and answer them. I am still answering his point about the ultimate controller. If he wants to ask me a question, he should have the decency and respect to listen to the answer.

I am also reassured that Ofwat will continue to keep the position of Thames Water's ultimate controllers under review, and that it has made clear to the company its expectation that the company will continue to monitor whether there is, or may be, a change to the ultimate controller position.

I hope that what I have said has introduced a few facts to what can otherwise be quite an inflamed conversation. This Government are serious about tackling water company failure, acting on behalf of customers and protecting the environment. We have demonstrated this with the action we took on our very first day in office, and the action we have taken every day since. I am always happy to discuss issues related to special administration. I have held a private briefing with the hon. Member for Witney before. I would do so again, but what I do not like is when things are presented to the House in a way that is—I am not allowed to say dishonest, so how can I put this?—incorrect. This Government will always act in the national interest, and while the company is stable, we stand ready for all eventualities, including being ready to apply for a special administration regime if necessary.

Question put and agreed to.

7.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 14 July 2026

[MARTIN VICKERS in the Chair]

Coastal Communities: Isolation and Hidden Deprivation

[Relevant document: Oral evidence taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 11 November 2025, on Work of the Department and its arm's-length bodies, Session 2024-26, HC 415.]

9.30 am

Richard Quigley (Isle of Wight West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered isolation and hidden deprivation in coastal communities.

What a stupendous pleasure it is to serve under your incredible chairship, Mr Vickers. With so much discussion in recent weeks about the north-south divide, I thought that this debate would be the perfect opportunity to bring colleagues from coastal communities together in a time-honoured parliamentary tradition of comparing notes on who has been most overlooked for funding. While that is a joke, it makes a serious point: communities like mine often feel isolated, not just from funding and opportunity, but from the national conversation. In recent years, the challenges facing the Isle of Wight have rarely made headlines or shaped the political agenda. That does not make them any less real or important to those of us who live there.

What is great about securing this debate is that we can highlight in glorious technicolour the deprivation faced by coastal communities, and how that is simply not seen as urgent, visible or politically fashionable to champion by those meant to represent us. I am therefore pleased to have secured the debate and am encouraged to see so many colleagues from coastal communities across the length and breadth of the country coming together to champion the British coast.

One of the biggest challenges I have faced since being elected in 2024 has been convincing policymakers that the Isle of Wight deserves not simply Government attention, but the same level of support and intervention as that of other communities facing similar levels of deprivation, poor education outcomes and lower life expectancy. Often, the island's challenges are treated as serious enough to be acknowledged, but not urgent enough for Government intervention. I believe, however, that deprivation and isolation in places such as the Isle of Wight have reached a point where we can no longer pretend that the challenges are a hidden or unknown phenomenon.

The evidence has been there for years and the experiences of local people speak for themselves. As a 2024 report from the London School of Economics argued, many of the persistent challenges facing seaside communities are driven by, in part,

“a striking degree of complacency and indifference.”

As Professor Chris Whitty said in his 2021 report into the health of coastal areas, even after adjusting for age and deprivation,

“there remains a ‘coastal excess’ of disease”,

otherwise referred to as the coastal effect.

Without falling into the trap of reeling off statistics for the sake of it, I want to highlight a few examples that show exactly why the issue demands greater attention, in particular on the Isle of Wight. It is isolated by the Solent and we are the only English constituencies with only one method of transport on and off, which is privately operated. With 85% of the island classified as rural, delivering services becomes that much more difficult. We have the second highest level of educational deprivation in the south of England, a population whose average age is 11 years higher than the national average, and child poverty rates that continue to sit about 4% above the national average. Taken together, those figures demonstrate a community with clear and pressing needs, but one whose deprivation is too often obscured by neighbouring affluence, leaving it overlooked by the very funding formulas designed to help those who need them the most.

I know that it has become something of a running joke that, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight East (Joe Robertson), I mention ferry travel in almost every speech or intervention I make, but I ask colleagues to imagine what it would be like regularly to pay between £200 and as much as £500 to get to the next county—so to travel from Derby to Nottingham or Southampton to Portsmouth, they would need to find that sort of money. For the island, that is not a hypothetical question; it is a reality.

During the Isle of Wight festival a few weeks ago, the cost of a return car ferry rose to over £500, due to dynamic pricing. For most people, a journey with a maximum distance of 12 miles would be a routine trip. For islanders, it can mean a bill larger than many people's weekly pay packet, simply to reach the mainland and to access the services that many others take for granted. When we consider that islanders earn, on average, £5,000 a year less than their mainland counterparts, yet still rely on the same highly expensive ferries to access specialist hospital appointments, visit family and friends, pursue educational opportunities or simply enjoy the freedom to travel, the scale of our isolation becomes much clearer.

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member, my neighbour, on securing this debate, which is important not only for us on the Isle of Wight, but for so many MPs, hence the wonderful turnout in the Chamber today. In particular, I thank him for highlighting our issues with ferries. I am sure he would agree that it is not just the price we all pay to get back and forth, but the whole impact on our local economy. That is a message we really need to get across, and use the opportunity of a new Prime Minister to do so.

Richard Quigley: The hon. Member, my neighbour, is correct. He will not be surprised to know that I have already raised the issue at least once, if not several times, with the potential incoming Prime Minister.

It is not just islanders' wallets that are impacted, but our council budgets, public services and ultimately the sustainability of the island. Earlier this year, the fair

[Richard Quigley]

funding review left the Isle of Wight council facing a £13 million a year funding shortfall, despite the additional costs and challenges I have already described. If that does not demonstrate that current funding formulas are failing places like ours, I do not know what does. There is nothing fair about a funding review that overlooks the additional costs of island life and then expects local services to deliver the same or more with significantly less.

The truth is that being an island or a coastal area comes with unavoidable costs. Even when positive changes are made nationally, they often take longer to reach us, if they reach us at all. Research undertaken by the University of Portsmouth has identified an island factor: the unavoidable additional costs associated with delivering services on the Isle of Wight. The study found that our island status creates extra costs through self-sufficiency, dislocation and what it termed the “island premium”, estimating an added cost of £380 per resident every year, but costing the Isle of Wight council at least £23 million a year extra just to stand still when compared with a similar-sized authority on the mainland. That is coupled with our deprivation, which is often hidden in plain sight.

Unlike in some parts of the country where deprivation is concentrated in large urban areas, our challenges are widely dispersed across the island. Areas that experience significant levels of child poverty, poorer health outcomes and educational disadvantage sit directly alongside communities that are comparatively affluent and rank far more favourably in the Government’s indices of deprivation. That phenomenon has been described by academics as “nested deprivation”, where pockets of deep need exist in areas that appear on average to be doing relatively well. The consequence is that deprivation can be masked by neighbouring prosperity. That helps to explain but not justify how the Isle of Wight’s two constituencies can rank among the most deprived and left behind in the country on some measures, yet still miss out on funding opportunities such as Pride in Place. In other words, our deprivation is not hidden because it does not exist; it is hidden because it sits behind postcard views, nostalgia and pockets of affluence, fuelled by second-home ownership that can distort the reality.

Such deprivation makes the challenges already facing the country much harder to deal with on the island. Delivering special educational needs and disabilities provision on the island or in a coastal area brings additional challenges, from recruiting and retaining specialist staff to ensuring that there are enough specialist places available. Unlike many mainland communities, families do not have the same range of nearby alternatives when local provision is stretched, and accessing support off the island can mean significant additional cost and disruption. With an ageing and often isolated population, the healthcare inequalities highlighted by Professor Chris Whitty in his 2021 report on coastal communities ring particularly true on the Isle of Wight, where we continue to see higher than average rates of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and dementia, all while patients must travel across the Solent to access specialist treatments such as radiotherapy and chemotherapy.

Sarah Coombes (West Bromwich) (Lab): I know that older and vulnerable populations are often supported by naval clubs, particularly in coastal areas, but also across the country. In West Bromwich, unfortunately, our naval club, which is well used by older veterans, is set to close. I have been campaigning hard to try to save it and will work with everyone to try to do that. Does my hon. Friend agree that community groups such as naval clubs are very important in tackling the health inequalities, deprivation and isolation issues he is talking about today?

[SIR ALEC SHELBOOKE *in the Chair*]

Richard Quigley: I agree entirely that we are almost reliant on community groups in coastal and island communities. There is a danger that such provision no longer exists when funding dries up.

We have no dedicated stroke nurse or cancer nurse. Thankfully, after asking, our integrated care board has agreed to fund an epilepsy nurse for the first time; the issue is now attracting someone to do the job. Despite small positive developments, I continue to hear numerous accounts from residents who have chosen not to pursue treatment at all, or have delayed doing so simply because they cannot face the cost, time and stress of repeatedly making the journey. As I draw to the end of my speech, that is the key point that I want to leave Members with.

The costs faced by islanders and by many people living in isolated coastal communities go far beyond the inconvenience of waiting for a ferry or a lifeline transport link. Too often when we talk about isolation we focus on geography, but the real cost of isolation and deprivation is a human one. It is the opportunity not taken, the treatment not received, the family not visited, and the support that arrives too late or not at all. Until we recognise that, our funding, policymaking and public services for communities like the Isle of Wight’s will continue to face barriers that many others never have to think about.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (in the Chair): Order. I call Jim Shannon.

9.40 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am in a state of shock; I had to fiddle through my papers to get my notes. Thank you, Sir Alec, for calling me to speak. I thank the hon. Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for setting the scene. He is right about the deprivation of coastal communities everywhere in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I will obviously speak about my constituency. I know it is not the Minister’s responsibility, but she is always very responsive and helpful.

When we discuss social isolation and deprivation in this House, the mind naturally wanders to stark images of inner-city decay or urban high-rises. I want to take us to a different kind of hardship, referred to by the hon. Gentleman, that is wrapped in beautiful scenery but is no less cruel to those who live through it.

I am talking, of course, about the Ards Peninsula in my beautiful constituency of Strangford. It is a place of incredible community spirit, from Portaferry to Donaghadee, right down to the village of Ballywalter

where I was brought up from 1959. We have people who look out for one another, a real definition of a community at work. Scrape beneath the surface, however, and stats from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency tell a troubling story. According to the Northern Ireland multiple deprivation measure, the Ards Peninsula suffers under one notable category: the geographic access to services domain. Villages like Portavogie, Kircubbin, Ballyhalbert, Ballywalter, Carrowdore, Cloughey and Portaferry—all the way down—are ranked among the worst in the province.

What does that mean in reality? It means that anyone without a car is trapped. We have an ageing population in Ards and North Down, with around 20% aged 65 or over. Regional data shows that nearly a quarter of those older folks live in social isolation. The local bus service is infrequent and 11 local bank branches have closed down in my constituency in the past few years. I suspect the hon. Member for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East (Seamus Logan) has had a similar experience. The nearest GP's surgery requires a complex, multi-stage journey. Elderly people are being cut off from the world, suffering in silence from chronic long-term loneliness.

Looking at the other side, the cost of car insurance for young people is astronomic, among the highest in the United Kingdom, so they cannot afford to drive. They might get a wee car worth maybe £500 or £600, but the insurance will cost £3,500.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is speaking about the transport challenges that people face in rural communities. We know that the Government have plans to introduce additional charges for purchasing an electric vehicle, which seems paradoxical when we are trying to encourage people to be more environmentally friendly. Does he agree that the Government should think carefully about support for people in rural and isolated areas when they consider that policy?

Jim Shannon: I thank my friend and colleague, whose intervention is now on the record. He is right to focus on that. I hope the Minister will be able to answer. What happens in the hon. Gentleman's constituency happens in mine.

Pockets of the peninsula face employment and income deprivation due to the seasonal nature of the economy. The stigma of poverty and mental health often keeps people from reaching out for help. We have high levels of mental health issues. While healthcare and transport are rightly devolved matters, handled by the Assembly in Stormont, I believe there is an opportunity for the Minister to hold discussions with the relevant Minister at the Assembly. The stats are a warning sign that we are facing a postcode lottery of the highest order. We need targeted infrastructure funding, robust support for rural community transport schemes, as the hon. Member for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East referred to, and digital connectivity to ensure that no rural pensioner or struggling family is left behind.

I welcome some of the schemes introduced by the Ards and North Down borough council, but economies of scale dictate that they cannot reach rural businesses as they should. Councils are limited to their funding pot, which is why I look to the Minister to have discussions

with the relevant Minister in Northern Ireland. When it comes to the block grant, maybe this money could be ringfenced to help.

I am conscious of time and those who want to speak, so I will conclude with this. I urge the Minister to work with the devolved Administration to look closely at the hidden pockets of rural deprivation. Let us show the people of the Ards peninsula—they are my constituents; it is where I live—that although they live at the geographic edge of our nation, they are at the centre of our concerns. They are always at the centre of my concerns as their MP, but they should also be at the centre of the concerns of this House. Respectfully, Minister, let us invest in these worthy communities.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (in the Chair): Order. I am setting an immediate time limit of two and a half minutes. The Front-Bench speeches will start at 10.28 am.

9.45 am

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Alec. I am so pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) secured this debate. Isolation and hidden deprivation in coastal communities is such an important issue.

Cornwall is not an island, like the Isle of Wight, but we are a rural peninsula with sea on three sides. We were identified by the EU as one of the poorest areas of western Europe, and we received the highest level of structural funding from 1999. Since then, we have not often been selected to receive Government funding that uses the indices of multiple deprivation as a measure, because those indices favour more densely populated areas at the expense of sparser, more rural parts of the country.

Poor infrastructure, high housing costs, precarious seasonal employment and lack of access to healthcare, transport and education are major issues for Cornish residents, and they are all drivers of poverty in rural and coastal places. This particularly hits our young people and the opportunities open to them, and in the short time I have, I want to talk about that.

Professor Ovenden-Hope has written about the concept of educational isolation in places such as ours. The problems include recruiting teachers, getting to school, and low aspiration due to the distance that young people have to travel to get further and higher education. The education maintenance allowance, set up in 2004, was a real boon to places such as mine. The two FE colleges in the middle of Cornwall grew massively, but that meant that sixth forms shut. Although there is a great system of education and apprenticeships, the EMA's abolition left a real problem, with students across Cornwall having to travel long distances to those FE colleges without the money to help them do that. There was a bursary, but bus routes were scrapped, the private providers left, and we have been left with young people really struggling to get to education—further education particularly—and to the work placements and job opportunities that are so important for them.

In urban places with mayors, there is free or cheap travel for under-19s. In Cornwall, the college funds most of it, which results in real inequity. We now have

[Jayne Kirkham]

real issues with our young people not being able to access the work opportunities or FE that they would like, and they are therefore dropping out earlier. That has a real impact, and it places them at a distinct disadvantage compared with young people in urban areas. I have raised this issue with the potential new Prime Minister, and I really hope that we can address it.

9.47 am

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Alec. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for securing this debate on our coastal communities, which are so often forgotten. Those of us who represent coastal communities like Honiton and Sidmouth can sometimes forget that we represent such a beautiful, stunning part of the world. Sometimes it is only on a Friday or Saturday, when my mind is here or on work, that I drive over a horizon and see the sea and am reminded what a beautiful place it is. But coastal communities often contain pockets of hidden deprivation. In particular, they are susceptible to low social mobility, which is what I want to spend a couple of minutes speaking about.

The latest report by the South-West Social Mobility Commission highlights a paradox: the south-west region performs really well on some measures, such as employment and economic participation, but it is one of the weakest in England educationally for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. If we want there to be stronger local economies, higher productivity and better-paid jobs, we need a pipeline of young people with the skills, qualifications and opportunities to access them.

The south-west peninsula has some fantastic opportunities for the economy and for the UK as a whole. Our agrifood, our defence industries and our clean energy are second to none. Yet the South-West Social Mobility Commission found that just 41% of pupils eligible for free school meals in the south-west achieved the expected standards in reading, writing and maths at age 11—the lowest level of any region in England. By the age of 19, only 30% of those eligible for free school meals achieved a level 3 qualification. Too often, ambitious young people are faced with a choice: stay in the community that they have grown up in and that they love or leave in search of better-paid and more varied career opportunities. That could be different. If we really value our coastal communities and the economic opportunities that they offer, we can set regions such as the south-west alight.

9.50 am

Patrick Hurley (Southport) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) on securing this debate.

I represent the lovely seaside town of Southport, and like many coastal MPs, I know that our lovely towns can be deceptive because behind the frontage there are lower wages, poor health, seasonal work and young people leaving. That is why I welcome how this debate has been framed, because as well as being economic, the challenge facing our coastal areas is social.

There is the loss of the places that bring people together, such as libraries, youth clubs, post offices, Sure Start centres, village halls and pubs. There has been a wealth of research in the last decade on the hollowing out of those places and the malign long-term consequences of the funding decisions of the last 20 years or so. However, the one that strikes and stays with me the most is Diane Bolet's "Drinking Alone". It charts the correlation between the loss of the local pub and the subsequent propensity of the local population to vote for the radical right at election time. The correlation is striking. It is true that the causal relationship is not fully understood, but what I do understand is that if social isolation is correlated to extreme politics, then it is worth a chance of reversing that ideology by trying to socialise people more in their local areas and geographic communities.

I also encourage colleagues to search out "Nothing to do and nowhere to go". It might sound like the B-side to a song by a second-division punk band from 1978, but it is an academic paper published earlier this year, and the title says it all. It argues that years of losing youth provision, leisure facilities and community spaces has not just reduced opportunities for young people; it has weakened people's sense of belonging. To bring it back to Diane Bolet's thesis about voting behaviour, the research was conducted in Great Yarmouth.

When the general public hear about infrastructure, they tend to think about roads, but social infrastructure matters too. Youth clubs, sports clubs, libraries, community centres, parks and gardens, faith groups—all of that. I say to anybody watching this debate back in Southport: please get involved. Please help to make our town the town it can be in whatever way you can.

9.52 am

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. Britain's coastal communities are among the most beautiful parts of our country, but behind that picture postcard image lies a reality that too often goes unnoticed—isolation, hidden deprivation and a lack of opportunity. As an MP representing a number of coastal communities along the coast of Somerset, through Brean, Berrow, Burnham-on-Sea and all the way to Steart, I know there are many shared issues in those communities that are markedly different from those inland.

The statistics paint a stark picture. Coastal communities have higher levels of deprivation than inland areas, lower rates of educational attainment, higher rates of disability and an older population. Too many coastal towns suffer from poor transport links, economic inactivity, seasonal employment and the loss of young people seeking opportunities elsewhere. The House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities recognised these challenges as far back as 2019, and it called on the Government to develop a dedicated coastal communities strategy.

Today, however, many local businesses in coastal areas face higher costs and greater uncertainty. High streets continue to struggle and tourism operators face mounting pressures. The looming threat of a tourist tax, along with Labour's slew of other taxes on work and increasing compliance costs, such as those related to the Employment Rights Act 2025, all serve to make it harder for small businesses in coastal areas to survive.

I hope the Minister, when she sums up, will consider the effect of the right to guaranteed hours on businesses in coastal towns. Has she considered that, when those businesses take on seasonal workers during a period of good weather, they are compelled to offer those hours for the next reference period, whatever the weather might be? Coastal communities need improved transport and digital connectivity to overcome geographical isolation. They need fair funding that recognises the pressures of ageing populations and vulnerable residents. It is time for the Government to listen, develop a genuine coastal communities strategy and ensure that the people who live and work along our coastline have the opportunities that they deserve.

9.55 am

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Alec. Despite countless studies showing gaping disparities in everything from employment to life expectancy, coastal towns are neglected in discussions about geographical inequality. There are a few reasons for that. They often sit within otherwise affluent areas, and they do not neatly fit into the north-south divide. Places such as Morecambe and Blackpool have more in common with Ramsgate and Bournemouth than, say, Manchester, to pick a random example.

In Morecambe and Lunesdale, 10.2% of people say that they are always lonely. That is staggering, given what we know about the health impacts of loneliness. Social connection is a fundamental human need. It is as crucial to our survival as food, water and shelter. We are biologically wired for social connection. As adults, we cannot just go up to someone in the playground, like my daughter does, and say, "Will you be my friend?"

Communities do not happen by accident. They need the social infrastructure such as parks, libraries, youth clubs and naval clubs. We need to protect that infrastructure and think about the barriers to social interaction, such as poverty. If someone cannot afford to go and do anything, how do they meet people, particularly if they are on a fixed income, as pensioners often are? Transport is an issue. I have two brilliant bus user groups in my constituency, and they fight every day to make sure that everyone can get on a bus to go places and meet people.

Finally, I want to mention the necessity of communities with roots. In Morecambe, we have a deep-rooted community. There are areas of transience, but people have been there for generations. People know each other, and that social infrastructure is important. I am really concerned about the impact of short-term lets, such as Airbnb and others, on social cohesion. In my constituency, we are getting Eden Project Morecambe. That will be fantastic for our town, but I am concerned about the impact of the changing accommodation scene. I am worried about the impact on residential housing, which is why I am supporting calls for licensing, including caps on numbers, for short-term lets. We need to make sure that the roots can stay deep in our community. We need to make sure that people are able to build connections over generations, and then they can be healthier and live longer.

9.57 am

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. There is a version of coastal communities that we like to

tell ourselves, of chocolate-box fishing villages and tight-knit communities where people look out for one another, and there is certainly truth in that. In Tiverton and Minehead, I represent one and I see it. We talk of coastal areas being at the end of the line, but there is no line for west Somerset. It is a cul-de-sac.

The west part of my constituency, for all its natural beauty, suffers from the lowest social mobility in the country, and it ranks among the poorest travel times to employment, at the 96th percentile. Education and employment opportunities for those living along the coast are so limited that teenagers are catching a bus at 6 o'clock in the morning, with a two-hour journey each way, just to reach the further education courses they need. It is a material hit to a young person's aspirations, forcing them to compromise before they have even started and putting them at a direct disadvantage to their peers elsewhere. It creates a profound poverty of aspiration and ambition, brought about by an environment that tells people they have been forgotten.

That is why my party has consistently called on the Government to apply a fair funding formula that properly takes into account the realities of coastal and rural life for education, travel, health and much more. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham), much of whose political brand rests on regional empowerment, might turn his attention to the south-west as he closes in on No. 10, because the coastal and rural premium is real and is felt acutely.

Over the last few months, my office has produced a report into dementia in Tiverton and Minehead. Isolation and loneliness ran through it as a constant, unrelenting theme, not as one issue among many, but as the backdrop against which everything else is experienced. This year alone, the west Somerset coastal area has lost dental services, its post office, hospital scanning equipment and its local citizens advice bureau. They are services that young and old alike depend on, and one by one they are disappearing. Devolution in Tiverton and Minehead means meaningful evolution to prosperity, opportunity and a better future for all my constituents.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (in the Chair): Order. I thank Members for bobbing. I know I am whipping through the speeches, but I am trying to make sure that I get everybody in.

10 am

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): Meur ras. It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Sir Alec. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for introducing this very important debate. It speaks directly to the reality facing my constituents in Camborne, Redruth and Hayle, the furthest southerly Labour seat in the United Kingdom.

When it comes to remote coastal isolation and hidden deprivation, the machinery of Government is simply broken by stereotypes and urban-centric thinking. Purely as a matter of scale, most people have no idea that Bristol, supposedly in the south-west, is closer to Manchester than to Camborne, Redruth and Hayle. When most people think of Cornwall, they have a picture postcard image, yet beneath that image lies deep hidden deprivation: wages are far below the national average, employment is seasonal and insecure and housing

[Perran Moon]

is ridiculously unaffordable to most. While the EU recognised that with objective 1 funding, Westminster simply has not. In fact, Treasury models compound the Cornish misery: in-migration by wealthier English retirees inflates affluence figures, masking the scale of poverty. In my constituency alone, nine neighbourhoods rank among the most deprived in the country, yet wealthier coastal areas create an overall impression of poverty lessening in the region. The indices of multiple deprivation fail those nine communities, because Treasury models consider the overall picture and do not identify the hidden poverty within.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) alluded to, Cornish residents are systemically disadvantaged in housing, healthcare and public transport. On SEND, Cornwall is the 11th least funded of 151 local authorities, receiving less than half the per pupil funding of councils in Kensington and Chelsea, and about £500 less than places in Manchester.

Much of Cornwall's population lives in pretty poverty. It is isolated, deprived and hidden from Westminster. If the Government are serious about tackling inequality, they must ensure that funding reflects need, not averages on a Whitehall spreadsheet. It is time for a radical review of funding models for remote coastal areas.

10.2 am

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): It is a particular pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Alec. I congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) on securing this important debate. I have lived and worked in a coastal community throughout my life, so I can speak with some force about the challenges they face.

Our sea ports are not just transit points for goods but engines of regeneration, holding the unique power to lift coastal areas out of deprivation and firmly reconnect them to national prosperity. Ports are the lifeblood of coastal economic health, explicitly serving to catalyse jobs and drive local wealth where it is most needed. Their activities support 90,000 jobs across the broader region, yet a significant driver of isolation and economic deprivation in coastal communities is the severe lack of adequate transport connectivity. Coastal communities are, by their geographical nature, at the end of the line. When we talk about hidden deprivation, we are talking about young people who cannot easily travel to access further education, local businesses that struggle to attract external investment and residents who face profound social isolation.

Seamus Logan: The hon. Gentleman is speaking very powerfully about the need for connectivity around coastal ports. Is he aware that the two largest towns in the UK with no railhead, Fraserburgh and Peterhead in my constituency, have been left in exactly that position after the Beeching cuts of the 1960s? Does he agree that, if the Government bring forward a new strategy for these areas, they have to look at rail connectivity?

Martin Vickers: I was not aware of the situation of the two towns the hon. Gentleman mentions, but he highlights a key point. I have been campaigning for the last 15 years to reintroduce the direct train service from

Grimsby and Cleethorpes to London King's Cross. What Hull Trains has done for the north bank of the Humber—many Members will be familiar with it—has been a real boost to the local economy. I now look to Great British Railways to do the same for the south bank, but it has to be said that I have my doubts. If we are really serious about tackling hidden deprivation in our coastal communities, we cannot leave them cut off from the capital. A direct rail link would be a real boost to the economy of the south bank of the Humber.

If we are to truly break physical barriers of isolation, we must also strengthen east-west rail freight connectivity. Immingham is the largest port in the country, measured by tonnage, and it needs better access to other industrial centres, which would relieve the M62 of an enormous amount of heavy goods vehicle traffic. When we invest in fundamental infrastructure, private investment and supply chain growth will naturally follow. I urge the Minister to recognise that upgrading transport infrastructure is absolutely key to reducing isolation and deprivation in our local communities.

More in Common recently published a report, commissioned by Associated British Ports, that provides a fascinating array of statistics and opinions gleaned from extensive research. It shows very clearly that the state of high streets and the cost of living are the key issues in our coastal communities. I urge the Minister to focus on that when she responds to the debate.

10.6 am

Lorraine Beavers (Blackpool North and Fleetwood) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. My constituency has enormous potential, but it has been held back by years of austerity, under-investment and managed decline. Coastal communities once stood at the heart of Britain's economy: our ports connected us to the world, our fishing fleet fed the country and our industries sustained skills and secured jobs. Fleetwood was a thriving port, central to our national prosperity.

Today, many coastal communities face deep poverty, poor health, lower educational attainment, insecure work and poor-quality housing, yet the deprivation is hidden. Severe need in one neighbourhood can be obscured by apparent prosperity only a few miles away, and broad funding formulas fail to reflect the reality of individual towns. Those problems are made worse by isolation. When buses are unreliable, railway lines have disappeared and services have closed, geographical isolation quickly becomes economic and social isolation. Young people feel that they must leave to find decent work. The industries that once sustained reliable working communities like mine have disappeared with too little put in their place.

This decline was not inevitable; it is a result of political choices, and it is now the duty of this Government to fix it. Without investment in towns such as Blackpool and Fleetwood, the Government cannot achieve their missions of growth, opportunity, health and clean energy. It is not good enough simply to pump more money into the major cities of the north and south; our towns need support too. The lasting answer to poverty is good work that pays decent wages, and that requires the reindustrialisation of our coastal towns. In Fleetwood, we need a tidal barrage and the train line reconnected.

Transport is not simply about getting from one place to another; it connects people to work, education and healthcare.

We came here to rebuild our communities, build warm homes, restore transport links, create secure jobs and give young people a reason to live locally. It is time to give our coastal towns hope again. Let us all get on with delivering the future we promised.

10.9 am

John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. I congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) on securing this key debate.

The vital question on “Desert Island Discs” is not what luxury a person desires or which tune they would save from the waves; it is how they would cope on their own. Although we all enjoy a bit of peace and quiet now and then, we are in the end social animals, which is why isolation and loneliness, grinding day in and day out, is such torture. The Scottish household survey says that roughly one in four people suffer loneliness, with 16 to 24-year-olds and over-75s disproportionately affected. Coastal areas such as my Dumfries and Galloway constituency have many remote and rural communities, which is, in itself, a problem. A person who has £10 in their pocket in a city can do something with it; they can go somewhere or see a friend. But £10 up an isolated farm track is of little use at all.

The reasons for isolation are myriad. People living longer is of course a good thing, but the harsh reality is that one half of a couple is likely to outlive the other. Although the 2022 Scottish census was utterly botched by the SNP, it indicated that single-person households were the most common, accounting for about 37.1% of all homes. Places such as pubs, which were once the wellsprings of communities, are closing in droves. Rural deprivation, especially in coastal areas, where communities are fragile because of a lack of employment and critical infrastructure, is all too real.

Coastal areas are beautiful, none more so than Dumfries and Galloway, with its rocky cliffs, secluded bays, unspoilt empty beaches and rolling gentle hills, but we cannot eat the scenery or have a chat with the big sky overhead. Loneliness needs to be seen for what it is: a public health issue. Rural people, by nature, have to be resilient and self-reliant, and the fact is that no Government can do everything. I must mention the charity A Listening Ear, which in my community, movingly, has a programme called “No One Dies Alone”. That outreach is compassionate and vital, and it is critical that communities work together to tackle loneliness.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (in the Chair): Order. I am immediately dropping the time limit to two minutes.

10.11 am

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. Hartlepool is a town with a proud coastal and industrial heritage, but above all, it is a town of proud people. We spend a great deal of time in this place talking about the concept of freedom, by which we usually mean freedom from

something—whether that is freedom from regulation, from taxation or from the state. Although those debates matter, there is another freedom that we speak of far less: the freedom to become everything we are capable of becoming. The freedoms to earn, to learn, to build a secure life through our own hard work, to raise a family with confidence and to fulfil our potential—those freedoms matter every bit as much, if not more.

Freedom is not simply the absence of restraint; it is the presence of opportunity, but that is what deindustrialisation and globalisation robbed from communities like mine. It did not simply close factories; it took freedom away from working people. It took away their freedom to earn a secure wage and build a career, or to believe that if they worked hard, there would be a decent job waiting for them at the end. It took away the freedom to know that our children will enjoy a better future than we did. The scars were never just economic; they were social, cultural and deeply personal.

To solve this issue, education must be the engine room of freedom. In Hartlepool, I am so proud that our FE college is taking a visionary approach to ensure that children have that freedom. Not every young person wants the same pathway, and vocational excellence is every bit as valuable as academic excellence. Through our partnerships with X-energy and Centrica, whereby the new nuclear that we are bringing to Hartlepool partners with our FE college, we are once again giving our young people the freedom to believe that their future will be better than the lives their parents had.

10.13 am

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Alec. Time and again, everybody in this debate has come back to the word “community”, and I believe that coastal communities do it like nobody else. Although my Chichester constituency is affluent, that affluence often means that funding does not make it to the pockets of deprivation that are present, especially those on my coast. People look at somewhere like Chichester and say, “They don’t need the support,” so those communities are far more likely to fall between the cracks.

I represent the coastal communities of Pagham, the Witterings and Selsey. Selsey translates directly to “seal island”, because even though it is part of the mainland, there is one road in and out, so if there is an accident on that road, it is literally an island. The people there do community like nobody else. When I think of Selsey, I think of the Selsey Care Shop, the Selsey Venture Club, the Selsey Beach Litter Ninjas and the Selsey Sea Bathing Society. All those charitable organisations and communities come together to support each other in tackling poverty in the area, as well as the isolation and loneliness.

The other thing that happens in Selsey is that the population doubles during the summer, because of all the holidaymakers who come to enjoy our beautiful coastline. Despite that doubling of its population, Selsey does not receive extra police officers to patrol the streets or extra support for an ambulance service, and there are not suddenly fewer cars on the road in Selsey. No extra resource comes in and no extra infrastructure is provided. Instead, it is the community that ends up stepping up and providing support.

[*Jess Brown-Fuller*]

When we think about isolation and hidden deprivation within our coastal communities, I have to say that I see those things all the time in places such as Selsey. I am grateful that we have amazing charitable organisations that help the people affected and try to fix the problems where so often statutory services have failed.

10.15 am

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Alec, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) on securing this important debate.

Like all hon. Members who represent a coastal constituency, I am lucky to represent such a beautiful area. However, one of the first issues we face is that of perception. My constituency has some of the most expensive land in the country, which sits just 20 minutes away from areas that fall within the most deprived 10% of places in England. Such extremes of wealth can often mask what is really happening in a town. Average gross median weekly full-time earnings in Poole are £764, but monthly rent is around £1,400. One in four children in Poole is living in relative poverty after housing costs, which shows the impact of high rents and their effect on the cost of living.

Towns such as Poole are also desperate for good-quality, affordable and secure council housing for local families, rather than the developer-led luxury waterside apartments that have sprung up in recent years. Such apartments are either unsuitable for young families or out of reach for many locals. We know that poor housing can lead to poor health outcomes. Life expectancy, healthy life expectancy and disability-free life expectancy are all lower in coastal areas, and the gap between more affluent areas and poorer areas continues to widen.

In conclusion, I hope that the new Prime Minister will consider appointing a Minister for coastal communities to address these very important and pressing issues.

10.17 am

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for throwing the spotlight on the challenges that many of our communities face. More than 20% of Bexhill's neighbourhoods are among the most deprived in England.

Many of the speeches this morning have focused on what central Government can do, but I will use this opportunity to recognise and thank the organisations that do amazing work in my community to tackle the challenges we face, right here, right now. For example, funded by the previous Government's levelling-up fund, Heart of Sidley has shown what can be achieved through years of grassroots work, local partnership and community leadership, developing a vision for a brand new community hub at the heart of Sidley. I thank Tanya and her team, the chair, Jay Carroll, and all the volunteers involved in that project.

The Pelham is helping to tackle the causes and consequences of social isolation and poor mental and physical health through youth work, counselling and volunteering. It is also home to the suicide prevention-focused running group RunningSpace, founded by

Jacky Youldon, who has direct experience of how exercise helped her. The Bexhill Family Collective provides a local nursery service, Dragonflies, as well as a community pantry, and outdoor learning and gardening activities for families. Bexhill Caring Community has for decades provided affordable and vital support to older, housebound and lonely residents. Freedom Church in Sidley provides a community marketplace, which redistributes food that would otherwise go to waste to households that are struggling. Many others, including Bexhill Foodbank Advice Service, Warming Up The Homeless, and Bexhill and Rother Homelessness Unity Group, are all doing their best to tackle the challenges in the community, and they provide hope, advice and support to so many people.

The Government have a role and I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight West about the funding formula and the challenges it has created. Of course, as a coastal community with a lot of hospitality businesses, the damaging jobs tax and the increase in business rates have made things difficult. However, in Bexhill we are looking ahead to our £20 million town deal, which was awarded by the previous Government. I know that residents are excited about what we can achieve with that money, because Bexhill, at its heart, is a community of positive people who want to get things done and want to improve their lot in life. We will do everything we can with that money to support them in doing so.

10.19 am

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for securing this important debate.

Blackpool is a town with huge potential and pride, but we are also a case study in what happens when national policy neglects the specific needs of coastal communities. The decline of traditional industries, the collapse of secure employment and decades of under-investment in housing, education and health have left scars that no one-off funding round can heal.

In Blackpool, the impact of deprivation extends far beyond income; it affects health, wellbeing and social connection. Last year's community life survey found that adults living in the most deprived communities are nearly three times more likely to report feeling lonely than those in the least deprived areas. Loneliness does not exist in isolation from health; people living with disabilities or long-term health conditions are almost three times more likely to experience chronic illness and loneliness.

Left unaddressed, isolation and poor health feed one another, deepening inequality and creating a cycle that is difficult to break. Tackling isolation is vital to improving public health, reducing health inequalities and helping people live healthier, happier lives. Against that backdrop, I have seen what is possible when people are given a chance to build that connection. I have seen it at Grow Blackpool at The Grange community centre. I have seen it in The Hub in South Shore with the Monday lunch club run by Brian and Karen, and I have seen it at the Forget Me Not dementia café led by Jenny Fitzsimmons and all her brilliant volunteers. Such places are stepping up to fill that gap. I have seen volunteers, community groups and local organisations build connections and create hope where it is needed.

We need a Government who match that determination. We need targeted funding, long-term planning and genuine recognition of place-based disadvantage. That means the scaling up the ambition and speed of projects such as Pride in Place and moving beyond short-term pots of cash and towards sustainable, multi-year investment tied to measurable outcomes in coastal towns, such as better jobs, improved health, higher educational attainment and connected communities. It also means a dedicated coastal communities Minister leading all that change.

10.21 am

Ian Roome (North Devon) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for securing this important debate. I want to speak up for Ilfracombe in particular, and the challenges that will be familiar to coastal communities everywhere. Devon county council has identified Ilfracombe as one of the most vulnerable towns in Devon. Its remote location leaves it badly cut off from wider public services, economic opportunities and emergency intervention. That pattern will be all too familiar for those in this room.

What I can never accept are shameless articles, such as the one recently published in a national tabloid newspaper that I will not name, punching down at Ilfracombe. Trashing a small town's reputation for clicks is not journalism; it is monetising misery and it is not fit for tomorrow's fish and chip paper. I have spoken with local business owners who pour their hearts and souls out into Ilfracombe trying to make things better, and the very last thing that they need is a hatchet job in the national press.

Just yesterday, it was reported that a local teenager, Bradley Blackmore, bravely rescued another boy from drowning. Well done, Bradley. Ilfracombe can boast award-winning manufacturing businesses and several promising new housing schemes supported by North Devon council and the Ilfracombe Community Land Trust, delivering safer social housing for local people. Every year, crowds flock to Ilfracombe for the maritime festival. This August, a daring soapbox derby will again raise thousands for charity, and I am proud to say that Ilfracombe has just been shortlisted for the first ever UK town of culture awards, one of only 15 towns in the country on the list.

I ask the Minister whether the Government will consider re-inventing the coastal communities fund or coastal revival fund for the new generation. How should we talk about challenges without damaging the reputation of coastal towns that deserve our help? How do we deliver what the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Andy Burnham) called

"good growth in every postcode"?

10.23 am

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): In coastal communities such as mine in Scarborough and Whitby, we see persistently high levels of domestic abuse where victims and survivors are hidden and isolated. Scarborough has the highest rate of reported domestic abuse in North Yorkshire. A landmark report found that, on average, victims in rural areas, including North Yorkshire, were subject to abuse for 25% longer and were half as likely to report it compared with victims in urban areas. Referrals to the Independent Domestic

Abuse Services in North Yorkshire, the largest charity supporting victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence in the county, continue to rise. In 2025, it received over 20,000 referrals, compared to 18,000 in 2022.

I have worked on countless heartbreaking cases on behalf of my constituents where women experiencing domestic abuse have been denied the support that they need. A constituent recently told me that she contacted multiple organisations to try to get help so that she and her child could move away from her abuser, but they kept saying, "There's not much help we can give you." Another survivor wrote to me to say she was homeless, and paying to live with her three children in hotels.

My constituents desperately want to move on from their isolating and traumatic experiences of domestic abuse. Sometimes, dispersed accommodation is the answer, and other times the answer is a refuge, but there is no refuge in the North Yorkshire council area, the largest county by area in England. I urge the York and North Yorkshire combined authority to deliver a women's refuge on the coast. I would be grateful if the Minister could outline how she is working across Government to provide targeted support to hidden and isolated victims of domestic abuse in coastal communities.

10.25 am

Richard Baker (Glenrothes and Mid Fife) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for securing the debate, because it is vital to consider the issue of hidden deprivation and isolation in coastal communities. In Methil and Buckhaven in my constituency, which have proud histories in fishing and mining, these problems are there in plain sight. There are too many derelict buildings, too many families scarred by the impacts of substance misuse and too many homes that are hard to heat. A third of children live in relative poverty.

Levenmouth has the lowest employment rate in Fife and the highest economic inactivity rate. That is why the future of Methil yard in my constituency has been such a priority for me since I was elected. If we ensure that British yards benefit from Government procurement, including through the defence investment plan, that could make a big difference for many of our coastal towns, and certainly would in Methil.

If we create more opportunities for work, tackle the pressures on cost of living, improve public services and improve public transport for all our people, coastal communities stand to benefit the most. Government at all levels, including the Scottish Government, must also have a clear focus on their specific needs. That means devolving power further, including within Scotland, so that the people living in these communities, who are both proud of and ambitious for their areas, have a real opportunity to create change where they live.

Methil and Buckhaven will receive £20 million in Pride in Place funding over the next 10 years. Our new neighbourhood board is brimming with ideas on what could be done with these funds to provide better support to local people, to use investment in the public realm to realise the beauty in our local coastline and to improve the quality of life in the community. If we take the example of Pride in Place and go much further, investing in our coastal towns and backing local residents to take

[Richard Baker]

the decisions that can transform their local areas, this Government can make a real difference in improving their communities and lives.

10.27 am

Anna Gelderd (South East Cornwall) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Alec. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for securing this debate. A report by Plymouth Marjon University used the phrase “pretty poverty” to describe places such as mine in South East Cornwall, where visitors see our coastline, fishing villages and tourist economy, but behind the curtain are local families facing low wages, insecure and seasonal work and a shortage of affordable homes.

Poor transport links, patchy digital connectivity and challenges in accessing healthcare, education and employment are part of the challenge. The realities of living in rural and coastal communities cannot be measured by populations, because the distances, travel times and cost of service delivery really matter. They impact whether someone can actually get to an appointment, their college or a job interview. We need more bus provision to enable them to do so.

Those realities should be reflected much more consistently in funding decisions. Tolled crossings, such as the Tamar crossings, which many of my constituents rely on every day, adding yet another cost. High levels of second homes and short-term holiday lets put additional pressure on the local housing market, reducing the supply of homes for local people and often forcing them to move away the communities where their support networks are based.

The social infrastructure in South East Cornwall, made up of pubs, social clubs and other places, is thriving, but these places are under pressure, and we must do more to support them. Property values in Cornwall are driven up by homes that local people could never realistically afford, which impacts our experience. Tourism is vital to our economy, but those visitors cause significant additional pressures; young people often feel they have to leave home to find opportunities.

I want Cornwall to become not only one of the UK’s leading tourist destinations, but a place where young people can build careers in digital industries, defence, clean energy and maritime tech, as well as other advanced manufacturing. We have so much potential; we have led the country before and we will do so again. With greater support from the Government, we can face these challenges head on, because Cornwall certainly does not lack ambition.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (in the Chair): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesman.

10.29 am

Mr Angus MacDonald (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) on securing this debate on a fantastic subject.

What I am about to say is specific to the highlands and Scotland, but it is relevant, to a lesser extent, to all hon. Members in the Chamber. I have written a brilliant

report called “Remote Scotland: Spiralling towards Unviability?”—I imagine everyone will be scrambling for a copy after the debate. It is about education; childcare; health and social care; energy demographics; centralisation; housing; work and economy; transport; and digital connectivity—all subjects that have been covered in this debate.

Isolation comes as a result of many of the issues that I will point out, and deprivation, as has been mentioned, is much less obvious in a small, pretty croft house on the lochside than in a deprived inner-city housing estate. An 82-year-old widow in Gairloch wrote me to say that she is living in her croft house in the winter and paying as much to heat it as she receives in her state pension of £182 per week. There is no daily bus to the town, she does not have a car, her carer comes intermittently and her daughter lives near Glasgow. She is both isolated and deprived.

I will focus on four things. Being part of the EU was extremely important for remote areas. They received funding commensurate with the additional costs of delivering infrastructure and services across a remote, dispersed and sparsely populated area. A week before his election, Boris Johnson promised that not a penny of funding for rural areas would be lost as a result of Brexit. That money funded skills training, community projects and infrastructure, including roads and bridges. Between 2000 and 2018, EU structural funds contributed €1.2 billion to the highlands and islands, while in the past three years, the UK shared prosperity fund contributed £9.4 million to the highlands and islands—that shows the disparity. Boris Johnson’s Government broke his promise immediately, and the Labour Government have not replaced the shortfall.

Centralisation of services in the UK, and in Scotland in particular, has seen powers move from councils back to Whitehall and Holyrood. In the highlands, powers and funding have also been moved back to Inverness city, at the expense of Wester Ross, Skye, Caithness, Sutherland and Lochaber. Capital investments, such as city deals, have been hogged by cities. In January 2024—before I joined it—the Scottish Affairs Committee produced a report showing that the cost of living premium in remote Scotland was up to 30% higher than in urban Scotland. As hon. Members will know, mains gas is really available only in towns and cities, at 7p per kilowatt. Those in rural areas pay for electricity, which costs 26p per kilowatt—four times as much—to heat their houses. Food costs a great deal more in rural shops than in supermarkets. Of course, the distances to central services such as banks, doctors and medical centres are far greater.

The rest of the UK has not had the renewables boom. Scotland has, except that has produced very few local jobs, little legacy housing and minimal community benefit. It is not a boom. Scotland as a whole received only £30 million of community benefit in 2025, and the highlands, which are covered in wind farms, got only £7 million. Westminster could have legislated for community benefits at any time over the last 20 years, but it did not. Rural Britain will be generating electricity for urban Britain, but at the moment there is precious little in it for rural communities.

We have a major demographic crisis; it has come up in debates before. In primary and secondary schools all the way up the west coast, the school roll has dropped

by 50%. The school in Portree on the Isle of Skye was built less than 20 years ago for 1,000 children, but fewer than 500 children go to it. The small schools do not get science, technology, engineering and mathematics coverage; they do not get the physics, mathematics or computing teaching that the big urban schools get. That means that parents with children who are gifted in those subjects move into the cities, so there is a downward spiral at those schools. The University of the Highlands and Islands is a brilliant concept, but, again, it does not teach science, technology, engineering and maths in Fort William or Portree, say.

Our kids leave—they go to Inverness or Glasgow, never to return—so we have a greatly ageing population. The highlands has seen a 71% increase in the number of over-75s, and that is set to increase by a further 34% in the next five years. We have had an 18% fall in the number of care homes, despite the rising number of elderly people; there are only 45 care beds in Skye for a population of 10,000. NHS Highland is paying £77,000 a day for delayed discharges.

In short, people in rural coastal communities earn less money. Their housing, food, heating and fuel for their vehicles cost more, and public transport costs more because of the distances. They have less access to public services, find it harder to access equivalent education, and their young leave. When they need care as elderly people, it is often not available, and if it is, it is more expensive. Remote Scotland is spiralling towards being unviable, and neither the Westminster Government nor the Holyrood Government are stepping forward to support it.

10.36 am

Lewis Cocking (Broxbourne) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. It is a huge privilege to wind up the debate on behalf of the official Opposition. I thank the hon. Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for securing this very important debate. I welcome the Minister to her place; this will be the first time we have had an exchange in this place.

As hon. Members will know, I do not represent a coastal community. The River Lea and the white water rafting centre that proudly hosted events for the 2012 Olympics are the closest my constituency comes to having a coastline. However, many of my constituents grew up visiting our coasts, and have warm memories and strong cultural attachments to the beaches, clifftops and seaside towns of our great island nation. I fondly remember trips to places such as Clacton, Bournemouth, Great Yarmouth and Southend. From my visits to many of our seaside towns, and from hearing hon. Members' testimonies, it is apparent that those places face unique challenges. Unfortunately, many of them have experienced decline in recent decades. The challenges that they face are not always adequately acknowledged or addressed by central Government. Understandably, many feel as if they are overlooked time and again.

Many Members have made eloquent cases about that, providing us with valuable insights from the people they speak to and from their own experiences, but I will touch on some of those challenges again. They include poor or sometimes non-existent transport links, unemployment and changes to a once-reliable and profitable

seasonal trade, a lack of housing supply, and large disparities in income, which mean that many people cannot afford to live in the places where they grew up. That is made even worse by the conversion of former hotels, B&Bs and residential properties into houses in multiple occupation, with councils and Government Departments using them to house people from elsewhere, leading to transient and unstable communities. Another challenge is an education system that receives far less money per pupil than some inner-city areas of London, for example.

Unfortunately, decisions made by this Labour Government have worsened and compounded many of those issues. Businesses such as hotels, ice cream parlours and fisheries have been hit hard by the increase the employer national insurance and by burdensome regulations. Business rates have increased—in some cases massively and seemingly arbitrarily. Many people I meet in the hospitality industry, which is vital to coastal communities, tell me that they are really struggling; they simply have no more to give, and they ask why they should even bother. The Minister's Department is now pushing through local government reorganisation, which in some areas will lump coastal communities together with inland towns and villages that have completely different priorities and challenges, and risks marginalising coastal communities even further. I urge the Government to pay particular attention to that when making decisions on local government reorganisation.

Ultimately, our coastal communities and the whole United Kingdom deserve better. We need a Government who cut rather than increase taxes, reward rather than punish aspiration and success, prioritise quality housing for local people rather than HMOs for illegal asylum seekers, and put the interests of ordinary British people first, not least those in our coastal communities.

10.39 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Nesil Caliskan): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Alec. I also welcome the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Lewis Cocking), to his place—although neither of us represents a coastal town. He and I have known each other a long time.

The Government recognise the importance of coastal communities. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight West (Richard Quigley) for securing such an important and well-attended debate. Places such as the Isle of Wight are often thought of as postcards of national pride, as they should be, but as Members have said so well, behind the postcards, they face a distinctive challenge: geographical isolation, poorer connectivity, deprivation and barriers to opportunity. The Social Mobility Commission found that coastal communities have some of the least favourable conditions for childhood in our country—a disproportionately high number of their children are eligible for free school meals, for example, with parents who have relatively low qualification levels.

The Isle of Wight demonstrates the strengths and the challenges found across many coastal communities. Its economy was worth more than £3 billion in 2020. Health, education, retail, manufacturing and, of course, tourism all play a major role in the island's strengths. At the same time, like all coastal communities, it faces

[*Nesil Caliskan*]

a number of economic and social challenges. The Government are committed to ensuring that no community is left behind—there is no hierarchy when it comes to deprivation. Regardless of where people live, they must have access to the opportunities that they need to succeed.

Dr Mullan: That is fantastic rhetoric, but the reality of the funding formula is that it does exactly that—it creates hierarchies, inefficiencies and unfairness in the funding. Given that so many Members have raised it in the debate, will the Minister pledge to look again at the funding formula and how it negatively impacts on so many of our communities?

Nesil Caliskan: I will address that point later in my speech.

More than 5 million residents live in 169 coastal towns across England and Wales, and they deserve a voice and a future. The Government's commitment to doing that goes well beyond rhetoric. That is why I am particularly proud that the Government support the Pride in Place programme—just one programme, but an important one—through which £6 billion has been allocated for long-term investment in communities across the United Kingdom. I recognise that not every constituency among the coastal communities has secured funding, but the 50 coastal communities that have benefit collectively from more than £1 billion in investment. Those communities are not simply receiving the funds but being given greater voice in how that money should be spent.

Mr Angus MacDonald: After close inspection of the detail on Pride in Place, we found that 50% of the evaluation was based on data that was not available even to MPs. We could not understand in any way how the distribution of that money was decided, and it completely avoided what many of us thought were relevant data.

Nesil Caliskan: The Pride in Place plan sets clear criteria: the first tranche of funding focused on deprivation, and the second focused on deprivation and community cohesion. I am happy to provide more information to the hon. Member. I recognise that not every part of the country has Pride in Place funding, which is why I have always been clear that Pride in Place alone will not see the transformation that coastal communities need.

Perran Moon: Will the Minister give way?

Nesil Caliskan: I will make a little progress. Pride in Place funding is important, because £20 million, including for 50 coastal communities, is not nothing. Alongside that, the Pride in Place impact fund is delivering up to £143 million to 93 local authorities, almost 40% of which are coastal communities.

Coastal communities also benefit from a range of wider Government interventions, as I said, and we recognise that improving education is a key part of that. I thank Members for making so many important points relating to education and the challenges that coastal communities face in respect of the isolation of educational facilities and, in many senses, their viability.

The Government are already acting through initiatives such as Mission Coastal, working with schools, academy trusts and local partners to improve outcomes in disadvantaged coastal areas. Through the local regeneration fund, we are providing local authorities with greater flexibility to deliver projects that support local growth and respond to local priorities.

I recognise Members' frustration about local government funding, and I know that councils deliver valuable services. The Government settlement strengthens the relationship between deprivation and funding. That is a good thing, and coastal communities will benefit from that. By 2028-29, the top 10% of most deprived areas will receive 45% more funding per head than the least deprived.

Several hon. Members rose—

Nesil Caliskan: I am happy to give way, but I will just say that after 14 years of austerity imposed on us by Conservatives and Lib Dems, Members should reflect on the multi-year settlement that local authorities are benefiting from.

Rachel Gilmour: I hear what the Minister says; as a lifelong Liberal, I personally found those years extremely difficult. That said, rurality is not taken into account when the Government give out money for local areas. Accounting for rurality and remoteness in local government funding outcomes would make a massive difference to my constituency and others.

Nesil Caliskan: The hon. Lady and I have worked well together on Select Committees, and she advocates for her area incredibly well. Others across the political divide will agree with her important point. Rural communities are being addressed through a number of different funds, but I recognise the general point about fairness through the local government settlement. I have spent much of my political career advocating for that, so I certainly will not diminish it.

The shadow Minister raised employer national insurance contributions. The Government had to make a difficult decision in order to boost public services spending by £100 billion. That was the right political choice that is ultimately helping coastal communities. I gently say that the challenges that coastal communities face have not emerged in the past two years because of Government fiscal policy. They are long-standing challenges that multiple Governments have failed to properly address.

There is always a balance to be struck when it comes to taxation, how much money we can generate for frontline services and the long-term investment that coastal communities need. We have to constantly review that, but I welcome the £100 billion of additional investment that has been generated by increasing employer national insurance contributions. Half of those who pay national insurance contributions are paying the same as they did previously and, because of the changes to the employment allowances, over 800,000 employers pay no national insurance at all.

Sir Ashley Fox: I want to give the Minister the opportunity to comment on how the right to guaranteed hours affects seasonal workers. We are enjoying some beautiful weather in Somerset. If that were followed by

a period of rainy weather when some businesses have no need of staff, the Government's legislation would compel employers to offer staff the same time. That means those employers are currently deterred from offering employment. Will the Minister comment on that?

Nesil Caliskan: It is as though the hon. Gentleman has read my notes; I was just about to come to that. I welcome the opportunity to address that point, which has long been debated in both Westminster Hall and the Chamber. Flexible working is of course important for a labour market, and that is particularly the case for coastal towns, but the truth is that it has too often been used as a reason for employers not to give people their fair share of payment.

I recognise the seasonal nature of work in coastal towns, but there has to be a balance. The Employment Rights Act includes powers to ensure that zero-hours contracts and the needs of seasonal industries are accommodated. It allows for further regulation and scrutiny, but there is already provision in the Act itself. I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point, but I am confident that the Act provides not only rights for employees, but the flexibility that coastal towns need in respect of seasonal work.

On the points about transport opportunities that were so well put by Members of all parties, and the particular challenge for coastal communities that find themselves isolated, we know that convenient, reliable and affordable transport is essential for giving people access to education, training, employment and jobs. I was particularly shocked to hear about the cost of ferry travel from the Isle of Wight, which is extraordinary. It is particularly shocking when we think about the transport necessary for a local economy to keep going. The Government have announced, through our child poverty strategy, that we will develop a new transport poverty tool to help national and local bodies in England to identify areas of poor transport connectivity and affordability. Access to services depends on connectivity, as does a local economy, and individuals need to be able to use transport and go to work.

I agree with Members that transport infrastructure investment is a key part of economic growth, and I am also pleased that 11 of the UK's 12 freeports, which I think have been mentioned as an important part of our economic growth, are in coastal locations, supporting the Government's drive for economic growth.

Jim Shannon: Will the Minister give way?

Nesil Caliskan: I apologise but I am going to make some progress because I have very little time.

Some coastal communities face the same housing crisis challenges as areas elsewhere in the country but, of course, particular characteristics of that crisis impact coastal towns. The Government's £40 billion for building more affordable and social homes will benefit coastal communities as well as the rest of the country, but I know there are challenges around short-term lets.

The Government are making changes to the tax system to ensure that housing is seen primarily as about people having a home, rather than as an investment—an important point made not only made in this debate but in the main Chamber too—and those taxation changes

will be important for coastal communities. Alongside that, the Government have abolished the furnished holiday lets tax regime, so landlords will no longer be incentivised via the tax system to make their properties available for short-term lets. I believe that will make a tangible difference for coastal communities.

Members spoke powerfully about the need for a more joined-up approach to the delivery of health services, and about the particular challenges coastal communities face because of their isolation. I pay tribute to Members who spoke about social isolation as well as the healthcare challenges for coastal communities. It is distressing to hear that constituents are not receiving the healthcare treatment they need. Someone's access to healthcare cannot depend on whether they are a car owner. That is not right. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has a role to play in making sure that services are joined up, as does the NHS. The Government have made reducing health inequalities a central part of our mission.

Jim Shannon: I do not expect an answer today, but I did ask about Northern Ireland. I know it is not the Minister's responsibility, but would she please do me the favour of discussing with the relevant Minister there how we can be better helped in Northern Ireland?

Nesil Caliskan: I am of course very happy to pick that up separately with representatives from the devolved nations, especially in relation to health, because some of the principles obviously go beyond England.

I thank Members for highlighting the challenges. I particularly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Alison Hume) for highlighting the acute challenges of domestic abuse in her constituency and her region; "There's not much help we can give you" is simply not a good enough answer to anybody. That is the wrong message to give, and I believe there is help. I thank Members for an excellent debate on important issues. Coastal communities are important to the Government, and the potential of the whole country can be achieved only if coastal communities' potential is achieved too.

10.54 am

Richard Quigley: I thank the Minister for her response, and echo the points made by colleagues from across the House. I sincerely thank Members for attending and contributing to the debate. I also want to mention my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Jessica Toale), who could not make it today but shares the concerns raised.

Too often, decisions that appear cost-effective on a spreadsheet can have profound consequences in the real world. A saving identified in a Excel workbook may, in practice, mean an older person on the Isle of Wight being sent to a mainland care home, a student reaching 18 without ever experiencing life beyond their area, or a local authority struggling to meet rising demand with an overstretched adult social care budget. The human cost is always felt by those who can least afford it, and the financial cost is ultimately felt by us all.

True fiscal responsibility is not just about balancing the books for the next quarter; it is about making the investments today that reduce costs tomorrow. In coastal

[Richard Quigley]

communities like ours, that means tackling isolation and hidden deprivation, rather than simply managing their consequences year on year.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered isolation and hidden deprivation in coastal communities.

Rugby in Schools

[MARTIN VICKERS *in the Chair*]

10.58 am

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for rugby in schools.

It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Vickers. It is a privilege to bring this important debate to the Chamber. Rugby is far more than 80 minutes on a Saturday afternoon: it teaches young people that success is earned collectively rather than individually; it instils discipline, respect, resilience and leadership; and it provides a place where people of every shape, size and background have a role to play. There are few sports where a prop, a scrum half and a winger can all become international stars despite having entirely different physiques, skills and strengths.

Rugby's greatest asset is not Twickenham; it is not the premiership, and it is not even the England team or the Red Roses. It is the thousands of volunteers who open the clubhouse on a cold Saturday morning, mark out the pitches before dawn, coach the under-7s, wash the kit, cook the burgers, pull the pints, organise the fixtures, referee junior matches and somehow still find time to mow the grass. Across my constituency of West Dorset, we are fortunate to have extraordinary clubs, including Bridport, Dorchester, Puddletown and Sherborne. Those clubs are about more than rugby; they are community hubs. They bring together generations: parents become coaches and grandparents become supporters. Every membership subscription paid, every burger bought after a match, every pint served in the clubhouse and every raffle ticket sold helps to keep those clubs alive.

A thriving grassroots ecosystem produces world-class athletes, and world-class athletes inspire the next generation to pull on a pair of boots for the first time. But our grassroots game cannot be taken for granted. Over the last 24 years, 174 amateur clubs have disappeared. Many more are under immense financial pressure. Changing rooms are ageing, clubhouses need investment, facilities are often unsuitable for women and girls, and volunteer numbers are hard to sustain. Many clubs that once fielded six senior teams now struggle to put out two. Youth sections increasingly struggle to field full teams at the weekend. We need to support our grassroots teams by encouraging children to start rugby in the first place, and the best place to do that is schools. If we want world-class international rugby tomorrow, we must invest in grassroots and school-level rugby today.

Research has found that physical activity improves classroom behaviour, attention, reading and mathematical performance. Another study found that children who consistently participated in organised sport experienced lower absenteeism, better attention, stronger memory, higher educational attainment and were more likely to progress to university.

Importantly, team sport produces some of the strongest educational benefits. Rugby teaches young people to solve problems together, as well as teaching communication, leadership, decision making under pressure, discipline, trust and resilience when things inevitably go wrong. Those are precisely the skills employers tell us they struggle to find. The Confederation of British Industry

found that 61% of employers were dissatisfied with young people's resilience and self-management, while nearly one third identified poor teamwork skills. Rugby develops those qualities. It teaches young people how to win graciously, how to lose with dignity, how to lead and follow, how to respect officials even when disagreeing with a decision and, perhaps most importantly, that individual brilliance only succeeds when it serves the team.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing this forward. He outlines some of the clubs in his constituency that do great things. In my main town of Newtownards, Ards rugby club is a phenomenal club that seeks to be involved in charitable as well as sporting aspects within the area. On its own initiative, it recently went into schools to provide free training sessions with children, to give them an understanding of and a passion for the game. Both girls and boys were invited to train with the club. Does the hon. Member agree that while the clubs can do so much, they really do need that wee bit of extra help to lift the children aspect of small teams?

Edward Morello: The hon. Member must forgive that my speech is weighted towards English rugby, as he is absolutely right that the important role rugby clubs play in a community is true in all four parts of the United Kingdom.

Research has now described the evidence linking organised sport with improved psychological wellbeing as compelling. Researchers found that with more physical activity they saw improved classroom behaviour and concentration, stronger social relationships, attention, readiness to learn and cognitive function, healthier body composition, improved mood, reduced stress, increased blood flow to the brain and increased oxygen delivery. There is strong evidence that physical activity is associated with lower anxiety, lower depression, better mood, greater happiness, higher self-esteem, greater life satisfaction and better body image. I could go on.

We often discuss young people's mental health in this House, and rightly so. Rural areas like West Dorset have worse access to services, and children often struggle to get the help that they need, but we should also recognise that sport is one of the most effective preventive public health interventions available to us. Children who are active are significantly more likely to become active adults, which means lower long-term healthcare costs. During the 2023-24 season alone, rugby generated over £2.03 billion in value, including £707 million through improved physical and mental health, more than £823 million of wider social value, and over £500 million in economic growth.

The Rugby Football Union's all school programme, originally established as part of the rugby world cup legacy, introduced rugby into hundreds of state secondary schools. Independent research found remarkable outcomes. 73% of participating schools reported improved confidence among pupils; 49% reported improved resilience; and nearly one third even reported improvements in academic performance. Participants themselves reported improved leadership skills, greater confidence, better behaviour, reduced stress and improved self-esteem.

The Sky Sports living for sport programme has supported more than 500,000 young people to gain access to sport. More than 90% of teachers reported improvements in

pupils' confidence, self-esteem and teamwork. Teachers also reported an improvement of 71% in pupils' attendance, 72% in academic attainment, 78% in behaviour, 83% in engagement with learning and 85% in engagement with school life. These are exactly the qualities we should want every young person to develop. They demonstrate why Government support for rugby and sport should never be viewed as just about exercise. It is also about the tangible benefits that follow.

For too long, access to elite rugby in England has been dominated by a relatively small number of independent schools. Although those schools have made enormous contributions to the game and continue to develop exceptional players, the current pathway is simply too narrow and based on privilege. Talent exists in every city, town and village in this country, but opportunity does not. If English rugby is to reach its full potential, we must ensure that a child's postcode or their parents' income no longer determines whether they have the opportunity to excel.

The numbers demonstrate the challenges and the opportunity. Independent schools educate about 7% of pupils in England, yet continue to produce a disproportionately large share of professional rugby players. That is not because talent is concentrated in one part of society; it is because access to coaching facilities, fixtures and clear development pathways often are. Independent schools are more likely to have experienced staff, and sometimes ex-professional. That means that their students have far easier access to such facilities and better opportunities to perfect their sporting skills, compared with those at many state schools.

There are thousands of children attending state schools who have never picked up a rugby ball, not because they lack the ability or enthusiasm, but simply because the opportunity has never been presented to them. If we are genuinely seeking to improve England's competitiveness on the international stage, the answer is not simply coaching the same group of players more effectively. It is finding talented young people who currently sit entirely outside the system.

That is why I welcome the work being undertaken by the RFU. The All Schools programme shows what can be achieved when rugby is brought into state education. Hundreds of schools that previously had little or no rugby provision are now introducing the sport to thousands of young people. Government can play an important role by ensuring that schools have access to suitable facilities, qualified coaches and meaningful links with local community clubs. School sport should never operate in isolation. The stronger systems are those where schools, clubs and governing bodies work together. That now needs to become the norm, rather than the exception.

We also need to look at a model that does not place the burden on teachers to become professional sports coaches, alongside their already demanding and vitally important jobs. We have world-class universities with outstanding sports coaching degrees. We should use that pipeline to develop a new generation of professional coaches, who can support schools, take the pressure off teachers and help build the next generation of athletes across different sports, including rugby.

We should also recognise that not every young person wants or is initially able to play full-contact rugby. Providing a non-contact version of the game—the T1 rugby initiative—removes many of the barriers that

[*Edward Morello*]

might otherwise prevent young people from becoming involved. It offers an accessible introduction to rugby values, teamwork and skills, while giving participants confidence to progress if they wish. Importantly, it also enables schools with limited experience of rugby to introduce the sport safely and inclusively.

One of the greatest successes in English sport over recent years has undoubtedly been the rise of the Red Roses. Their success in winning the rugby world cup and wider participation present an extraordinary opportunity to build on that momentum. When girls are inspired by watching the Red Roses, there must be somewhere local for them to play the following weekend or through the week at school. Evidence shows that children from more deprived backgrounds are less likely to participate in organised sport, despite often benefiting the most from doing so. If we genuinely believe that rugby builds confidence, resilience, leadership and teamwork, those opportunities should be available to every young person, regardless of background. Sport should never become another form of inequality.

That is why partnerships between schools, local authorities and community clubs are so valuable. Community clubs already possess qualified volunteers, coaching expertise and strong local networks. Schools possess young people eager to participate. The challenge is ensuring that those two worlds connect more effectively. We should make it as easy as possible for schools to signpost pupils towards their nearest club and equally as straightforward for clubs to engage with local schools and introduce children to the game.

That is particularly important in rural constituencies such as West Dorset. Our geography means that opportunities can sometimes be harder to access. Transport presents challenges, schools are more dispersed, volunteer recruitment can be more difficult. That is why clubs such as Bridport, Dorchester, Puddletown and Sherborne, continue to play such an important role in growing our game. With greater connection with local schools, they can play an even greater part.

When state schools have been given the right funding and offered support, they have demonstrated exactly what is possible. A powerful example is Northampton school for boys. In the 2025-26 season, NSB achieved the historic breakthrough by winning the national schools cup, defeating Epsom college in the final, and ending a 20-year absence of state school winners. That reflects a deeply embedded and highly effective rugby programme, with 19 players currently part of Northampton Saints under-18 academy and seven players earning England under-18 international honours. Earlier in the same season, NSB also secured the SOCS Daily Mail schools trophy, becoming the first state school ever to lift that title.

Taken together, those achievements represent a watershed moment for state school rugby. For decades, these competitions have been dominated by independent schools. Before NSB's success, the last state school to win the national cup was St Peter's high school in Gloucester in 2006. NSB has shown that when state schools are properly supported with access to coaching and facilities, integrated into local clubs and provided with clear talent pathways, they can compete at the highest levels. Their success challenges long-standing assumptions about

where elite rugby talent comes from, and demonstrates that excellence exists across the entire education system when opportunity is made available.

We can already see the impact of widening those pathways in the players who have reached the very top of the game. Sadia Kabeya of the Red Roses attended a state school. Ellis Genge, a British and Irish Lions player, also came through the state school system. They are outstanding examples of players who did not follow the traditional route into rugby, yet have become some of the exciting and influential figures in sport. Their success shows exactly what can be achieved when talent is given the opportunity to flourish. We must make it easier for more young people to follow that path, because when we do, the game of rugby benefits enormously from the skills, diversity and character that those players bring.

Investment in changing rooms, floodlights, sports kit, state school pitches and time in children's weeks would unlock years, if not decades, of increased participation. It would enable clubs to expand youth sections, to create better facilities for women and girls and to host schools' disability rugby and walking rugby. Rugby contributes more than £2 billion annually to England through improved health, stronger communities and economic activity. Those benefits are felt in every constituency. Healthy young people place less pressure on the NHS. Young people engaged in sports are less likely to become isolated. Communities with thriving sports clubs tend to have stronger volunteer networks and greater civic participation. Businesses would benefit from healthier, more confident and more resilient workforces in the future.

Investment in grassroots rugby and sport more widely delivers dividends across multiple Government Departments. It benefits education, health, local government and the economy. I hope Ministers will continue working closely with the RFU, schools, local authorities and community clubs to develop a genuinely long-term strategy for growing participation. We should ensure that every child has access to rugby during their education, strengthen links between schools and local clubs, and continue supporting the growth of women's rugby. We should invest in community facilities in schools and clubs that are fit for the next generation, because every England international once pulled on an oversized shirt at their local club, every professional player began with a volunteer coach, and every packed stadium begins with a child picking up a rugby ball for the first time. If we continue investing in those first opportunities, the future of English rugby will take care of itself.

Will the Minister work across Government and with governing bodies to deliver the new school sport partnerships and enrichment framework, and provide early clarity on the objectives, priorities, delivery models and timescales? Will the Government ensure that schools have the capacity, facilities and support to deliver high-quality sport, so that every child can participate, especially in deprived communities? Will they guarantee sustainable funding, sufficient staffing and strong professional development for school sport partnerships?

Will the Government support investment in the wider school workforce to help deliver activities such as rugby? Will they reaffirm the importance of PE and commit to a minimum of two hours of high-quality PE each week?

Will they ensure that the curriculum recognises the wider benefits of team sports? If we get this right, we will not only secure the future of English rugby across codes; we will strengthen our communities, improve the health of our nation and give every child the chance to grow, belong and thrive through sport.

11.13 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Josh MacAlister): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank the hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello) for securing this important debate on rugby in schools. When I was asked to sub in for the Minister for School Standards in responding to this debate, I knew that it would not be trying.

I should start with a brief disclaimer. We will talk about rugby in generic terms in this debate, but as a west Cumbrian MP, I have a particular obligation to recognise the role of rugby league in many communities in our country. Rugby league has a long and proud history, with deep roots in towns and communities across the north of England. It is part of local identity and community pride, and it helps form connections between schools, families and local clubs in much the same way as rugby union.

Just this Saturday, as a constituency MP, I saw the amazing impact of Kells in bringing the community together, especially children. That community building comes down to great characters, such as Peter Smith at Kells or Vince and Lana at Derwent Park Rangers, who have all been getting into schools to teach rugby league for well over 20 years. There are so many others I could mention in just my constituency, which reflects the scale of volunteer hours involved—the amazing adults who spend a chunk of their week giving young people the length and breadth of our country an opportunity to do exercise, to build teams and to develop a passion for rugby.

There is so much to celebrate about rugby. At the elite level, both rugby union and league continue to inspire through their outstanding athletes, strong traditions and thriving communities. However, the success of rugby should not be measured only by what happens on professional pitches; it should also be measured by the opportunities available to children and young people in schools and local communities at the grassroots level. Alongside other team sports, rugby helps young people to develop physically, socially and emotionally. Through participation, pupils learn teamwork, communication, leadership, resilience and respect for others. Those are not simply sporting skills; they are life skills that help prepare young people for further education, employment and adult life.

A key reason why rugby supports children to thrive is the contribution of the Rugby Football Union and the Rugby Football League. Through resources, training and support for schools and teachers, they help ensure that young people from all backgrounds have the opportunity to experience and enjoy the sport. Recent work across both codes has highlighted the importance of ensuring that rugby remains accessible, inclusive and relevant to today's schools. We know that some schools can face barriers to participation, whether through concerns about safety, confidence in delivery or access

to expertise. The response from both governing bodies has been to broaden opportunities and provide formats that are easier for schools to adopt and deliver.

Programmes such as T1 rugby and tag rugby, which the hon. Member for West Dorset mentioned, are excellent examples. They provide engaging, non-contact ways for pupils to experience the values and enjoyment of rugby, while helping teachers to deliver the sport confidently and safely. Importantly, those approaches ensure that the future of rugby in schools is not simply about reproducing the adult game; it is about ensuring that every child has the opportunity to participate in a way that is enjoyable, accessible and appropriate.

That principle of equal access is especially important for girls. As the hon. Member has already highlighted, the recent success of the Red Roses has inspired a new generation of young women to demonstrate what they can achieve when girls are given the opportunity to participate fully. However, inspiration alone is not enough. We must ensure that girls in every community have access to high-quality rugby opportunities through curriculum PE, extracurricular activity and inclusive formats that allow them to build confidence, develop skills and enjoy being active. Those approaches can help introduce rugby to pupils who may never have previously considered the sport to be for them, while also supporting broader participation among girls and young people from a wider range of backgrounds and communities.

As the Government develop our new PE partnership approach, the expertise of organisations such as the RFU and RFL will be invaluable, as is already proving to be the case. National governing bodies have a vital role to play in supporting schools through resources, workforce development and sporting expertise. Their contribution can help schools to achieve the right balance between participation and competition. We know that those are not competing priorities, as every child should have the opportunity to participate, develop competence and build confidence through the sport. At the same time, pupils should be able to pursue competitive opportunities built around safety and fairness. Rugby is particularly well placed to support both of those aims through inclusive programmes, strong local partnerships and clear pathways into competition. Rugby can continue to reach more young people while providing opportunities for those who wish to take the sport further.

The hon. Member for West Dorset is right to describe the need to change the model of school sports in this country. That is exactly what we are trying to do with the school sport partnerships model. We recognise that despite the funding of recent years, participation in school sport has remained fairly flat; it is well below what we need as a country in order to have a healthy population of young people who benefit from all that sport has to offer.

We have worked closely with the national governing bodies in this space. They are at the heart of the plan, and the partnership model is designed around bringing their expertise in to support schools, rather than relying on very busy teachers and schools to do the heavy lifting themselves. For small primary schools especially, it is a challenge to navigate the whole range of different sports and national governing bodies, and local competitions can be overwhelming. The changes that we are making will address the objectives that the hon. Member set out in his questions.

[Josh MacAlister]

In closing, I place on the record my thanks to teachers, volunteers, coaches, school leaders, local clubs and national governing bodies for the work they do every day to create sporting opportunities for young people across our country. Their efforts ensure that sports like rugby continue to enrich the lives of children and young people across the country, not only by developing future players but by helping to develop future citizens equipped with the teamwork, communication, resilience and respect that will serve them throughout their lives. Rugby also has a crucial role to play at the heart of so many communities, so I thank the hon. Member for bringing this debate to Westminster Hall.

Question put and agreed to.

11.21 am

Sitting suspended.

Extreme Heat: Preparedness

[SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

[*Relevant document: Oral evidence taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 23 June, on Climate and Weather Resilience, HC 68.*]

2.30 pm

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): I beg to move,

That this House has considered preparedness for extreme heat.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher. This issue affects all our constituents, so I will be happy to take interventions.

Over recent weeks, Britain has experienced an extraordinary succession of heatwaves that have tested the resilience of our communities and public services. We have talked on our way in today about how we have all been personally affected—we might have been uncomfortable at various points—but this succession of heatwaves poses serious risks. We have seen hospitals declaring critical incidents, ambulance services facing record demand, transport disrupted, schools closed and firefighters battling major wildfires following prolonged hot and dry conditions.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): At the moment, there are 19 live wildfires across England and Wales. Last year, a devastating wildfire on the North York moors raged for 40 days over 10 square miles. It was caused by a campfire. Does the hon. Member agree that it is time to ban the use of disposable barbecues in public areas?

Adrian Ramsay: The hon. Member's example highlights just how much of a risk wildfires pose. We need to take greater measures as a country to prevent them, including seriously looking at her suggestion.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Highgate) (Lab): The hon. Member said that he wanted to take interventions. He mentioned schools. On my way into Parliament today on the Northern line, which appropriately for today's debate was boiling, I received a number of emails from worried parents. Schools are closing early in my constituency, a lot of them smaller primary schools in Victorian buildings, because they cannot accommodate children in the heat we are experiencing at the moment. It will not come as a surprise to the hon. Member that it tends to be single parents or parents without secure incomes who suffer the most when schools finish early. Do we need to speak with the Department for Education about getting some funding for extra fans and cooling units for our schools, so that children do not suffer because of climate change?

Adrian Ramsay: I agree with the hon. Member. I will come on to the impact on schools, and the fact that extreme heat does not affect everyone equally, later in my speech. Some communities and individuals are particularly affected, so I support her call, particularly because it highlights the need for a cross-Government response.

The incidents I talked about were not isolated weather events, but a real-world test of our preparedness for a hotter climate, exposing vulnerabilities across our health service, critical infrastructure, emergency response and natural environment. Britain has entered a new climate reality. The Climate Change Committee's latest UK climate risk assessment warns that climate risks are increasing faster than our preparedness, with progress described as slow, stalled or moving in the wrong direction.

Extreme heat is no longer an occasional anomaly, but an increasingly defining feature of the UK's climate. The 10 warmest years on record have all occurred since 2002, and the UK has already warmed by around 1.2° since the pre-industrial period. England has experienced four major summer heat events since 2018, and the three warmest Junes on record have all occurred during this decade. UK Health Security Agency projections indicate that heat-related deaths could more than triple by the 2050s without stronger adaptation.

Extreme heat is now a growing threat to public health, infrastructure, food security, nature and national resilience. It is already a public health emergency. Evidence on rising temperatures and mortality shows that recent heatwaves were not merely uncomfortable; they were deadly. New analysis estimates that around 2,700 heat-related deaths occurred during the May and June heatwaves in England and Wales. These are not abstract statistics; they are the human cost of temperatures for which our society is not adequately prepared.

Unlike floods or storms, extreme heat rarely creates dramatic images. Instead, people die quietly, in hospitals, care homes or at home. The Environmental Audit Committee described extreme heat as a "silent killer". It increases mortality gradually, often among those already vulnerable. Extreme heat places significant strain on the body, increasing the risk of cardiovascular and respiratory illness, dehydration, heat exhaustion and heatstroke. Hospital admissions rise for heart attacks, strokes, kidney injury and respiratory disease, while those with chronic illnesses or pregnancies and the elderly feel the impacts more acutely. Prolonged heat also affects mental health by disrupting sleep, increasing anxiety and impairing cognitive performance.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): On the hon. Member's point about mental health, does he recognise that a number of treatments for depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors and serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, can affect the body's ability to regulate temperature? It is all written in the small print with the medication, but doctors and practitioners do not always pass on the information. Does he agree that people suffering with those conditions need to be more widely informed?

Adrian Ramsay: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that point. It shows the breadth of issues that we need to contend with. Addressing this issue really is a whole-society, whole-Government matter. I very much support raising awareness of her point. It shows the need to review how we can treat people in a way that gives them the support they need but does not make other problems worse in the context of heatwaves.

Where people live also matters. Poorly ventilated homes, upper-floor flats, care homes, social housing and densely built urban areas can trap heat for prolonged

periods. Poverty compounds the risks. Those least able to afford adaptations are often the most exposed. In my Waveney Valley constituency, Friends of the Earth analysis has identified neighbourhoods that are both highly exposed to extreme heat and socially vulnerable, with around one in 10 falling into that category. I am grateful to one of my constituents for drawing my attention to the risk of overheating faced by her neighbour, whose council-owned bungalow effectively became a greenhouse during the latest period of extreme heat.

The consequences extend beyond individuals to our health and care system. The NHS was built for a different climate. During the June heatwave, hospitals declared critical incidents, elective operations were postponed and temporary cooling equipment was required. Ambulance services experienced unprecedented demand, with the London ambulance service recording its busiest week on record. At the Norfolk and Norwich hospital, which serves part of my constituency, MRI scanners stopped working when the cooling systems failed.

Much of the NHS estate was not designed to operate safely during prolonged periods of temperatures approaching 40°, while many care homes remain poorly adapted to protect vulnerable residents. Extreme heat therefore threatens not only individual health, but the resilience of the health and care system itself. Heat health warnings, public communication and targeted support for vulnerable people must become routine.

Extreme heat is also an occupational health risk. Employers will increasingly need practical measures such as water, shade, ventilation, rest breaks and adjusted working patterns. Stronger workplace protections would safeguard both workers' health and productivity. The private Member's Bill in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Gorton and Denton (Hannah Spencer) recognises that existing protections have not kept pace with our changing climate, and that employers need to be supported to ensure that people are working in safe and healthy conditions.

Britain's buildings were designed for a cooler climate. During heatwaves, schools, hospitals, libraries, prisons and care homes can become dangerously hot, placing public services under additional pressure just as demand is rising.

Mark Swards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): The hon. Member is making a good speech on the risks associated with extreme heat. I had the good fortune of being a maths teacher in a brand-new school building in 2023 in Leeds. Just before the building opened, the builders showed us around the place, and I asked how the building would be kept cool. They said it is a passive cooling system. I said I was not sure it would hold up in heatwave conditions. They said, "We've got this revolutionary new technology, Mr Swards—you can open the window." As anybody who has taught or been taught in classrooms during a heatwave knows, opening a window does absolutely nothing for the learning of students. Does the hon. Member agree that it is time for the DFE to consider changing its guidance on new school buildings so that air conditioning is preferred?

Adrian Ramsay: I thank the hon. Member for that point. I will come to the question of how we retrofit buildings and how we ensure that new buildings of

[Adrian Ramsay]

whatever type, including schools, are fit for purpose for the large numbers of mainly young people who use them. His points are well made.

During heatwaves, schools can become unsuitable for learning, hospitals struggle to provide safe conditions for patients and staff, and care homes become hazardous for some of the most vulnerable members of society. The problem does not end when temperatures fall; many buildings retain heat long into the night. One constituent told me her home reached 42.5°, and her young son required urgent care after suffering a severe asthma attack induced by extreme heat in the flat.

The Climate Change Committee warns that, by 2050, 92% of existing homes could overheat during summer heatwaves if we do not have a full programme of adaptation measures. Most of the homes that we will live in then have already been built now, which means that national retrofit programmes are essential to keep people safe, including those that deliver shading, cooling, ventilation and green infrastructure. At the same time, every new home, school, hospital and workplace should be designed for a hotter climate through passive cooling measures such as external shading, ventilation, green roofs and reflective materials. Retrofitting later is far more expensive than building resilience from the outset, and every building constructed today should be designed for the climate we are moving towards, not the one we have left behind.

As well as changes to the built environment, we must also consider making social changes. We need to question whether the summer period will be the right time for exams in future. We must look to protect young people and help them to do their absolute best in exams, in whatever conditions are comfortable for them to work at their best.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): The hon. Member will know that, with the extreme heat and reduced rainfall, a lot of water companies are introducing hosepipe bans to mitigate the risk of drought. Does he agree that that seems a bit redundant, given that artificial intelligence data centres use between 11 million and 19 million litres of water a day? Does he agree that, as we prepare to experience more extreme heat over the summer periods, there is an urgent need to address the water consumption of data centres to reduce the risk of drought across the country?

Adrian Ramsay: The hon. Lady makes an extremely important point. Water conservation, like energy conservation, is critical, and there must be measures to help households to do their absolute best on that. My region is one of those with a hosepipe ban in force at the moment. She is absolutely right that data centres pose a real risk both to our water conservation and energy conservation targets. The Environmental Audit Committee, which I should declare that I am a member of, is currently doing an investigation into that. She is absolutely right that there is limited point in emphasising other ways of reducing water and energy consumption if we allow massive increases in usage in other ways. As a society, we have to get a grip of the environmental risks of data centres and AI before they take hold.

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): The hon. Member is giving a very powerful speech. Water shortage is a very big issue for our farmers as well. At the moment, it is extremely difficult for a farmer to get planning permission for a small on-farm reservoir. It is a big investment for the farmer, so it is a big deal that it takes so long. We really need to make that process easier because food security is as important as energy security or any of the other issues.

Adrian Ramsay: I strongly agree with all the points that the hon. Gentleman made. Food security and water security are absolutely central to this debate, and they are under real threat. I represent a rural area as well, and it is hard to believe that it is so difficult for farmers to get permission to store water on their farms when so many areas have the problem of too much water at some times of the year and too little at others. Surely, we can find an answer by bringing those problems together. As with anything else, Government policies need to support farmers to do things that they want to do that will help with our natural environment and our social preparedness. I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that really important point.

Our transport networks were designed for a cooler climate. Extreme heat causes rails to buckle, overhead power lines to sag and road surfaces to deteriorate, and that leads to delays, cancellations and rising maintenance costs. As heatwaves become more frequent, transport resilience must become a standard requirement for infrastructure investment. Every road and railway built today should be designed for the hotter climate that it will face over its lifetime, because building in resilience now is far cheaper than repeatedly repairing failures later.

Our energy system was designed for a climate where peak demand occurred in winter. As temperatures rise, demand for cooling increases, while extreme heat reduces the efficiency of power generation and places greater strain on the electricity network. Recent heatwaves have demonstrated that hotter summers are creating new challenges for energy security and resilience. The electricity system must become more resilient to hotter summers as well as colder winters.

Extreme heat causes one of Britain's greatest long-term resilience challenges: water security. Hotter, drier summers increase demand, as higher temperatures reduce river flows, lower reservoir levels, dry soils and intensify pressures on supplies, particularly across eastern and southern England. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has repeatedly warned that England faces a serious risk of water shortages unless resilience improves. Ofwat warns that without action, England could face a daily water shortfall of around 5 billion litres by 2055.

This year's record-breaking spring heat provided a warning, with high demand and low storage levels leaving thousands of households in south-east England without water. Building resilience means expanding reservoir capacity, modernising ageing infrastructure, reducing leakage, improving water efficiency and restoring natural catchments. Water security is no longer simply an environmental issue. It is fundamental to public health, food production, economic resilience and national security.

Extreme heat is becoming one of the greatest threats facing farmers and our food system. Predictable seasons, reliable rainfall and healthy soils are at extreme risk from climate breakdown. The National Farmers' Union describes climate change as

“one of the biggest threats to UK food security”,

while 80% of farmers say that increasingly frequent extreme weather is threatening their livelihoods and reducing productivity. Heat stress is also threatening animal welfare. During the 2022 heatwave, when UK temperatures exceeded 40° for the first time, around 18,500 chickens died from heat in transit. Government figures indicate that more poultry died during the heatwaves we have experienced this summer.

Higher temperatures dry soils, increase irrigation demand and reduce crop yields. This year's dry spring brought harvests forward into late June in some areas, with lower spring yields expected as a result. Many farmers can now harvest only in the mornings and evenings because grain becomes too dry during the hottest parts of the day, which increases storage fire risks and, in some cases, necessitates costly cooling before processing. The Climate Change Committee estimates that heat stress already costs agriculture around £205 million a year. Last year's spring, the hottest and driest on record, contributed to one of the poorest harvests in recent decades, costing arable farmers at least £800 million in lost revenue.

The consequences extend far beyond the farm gate. The UK food security digest concludes that climate-related disruption is already pushing up food prices, while the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit estimates that extreme weather added around £361 to the average household food bill during 2022 and 2023. As Britain becomes more reliant on imported food, we are increasingly exposed to climate shocks overseas, with disruption to just five staple foods estimated to have driven 30% to 40% of food price inflation over the past two years. Climate change is no longer just affecting where food is grown; it is affecting what families can afford. Supporting farmers through resilient farming systems, better water management, healthier soils, stronger animal welfare and continued innovation is essential to protecting affordable food, rural livelihoods and the resilience of Britain's food supply. Food security is national security.

Wildfires are becoming a growing challenge for farmers and fire and rescue services. They are occurring earlier, lasting longer and increasingly threatening homes, businesses, infrastructure and rural communities. Hotter, drier summers dry vegetation and soils, allowing fires to spread rapidly and causing devastating damage to crops, wildlife and property. As the climate warms, fire and rescue services will need greater capability, stronger land management and better public awareness. Wildfire resilience must become a central part of Britain's climate adaptation strategy.

Britain's wildlife is experiencing the consequences of hotter, drier summers as well. Rivers and lakes warm rapidly during prolonged heat, reducing oxygen levels and contributing to fish deaths and declines in freshwater biodiversity. Wetlands dry out, placing pressures on amphibians, insects and water birds, while prolonged heat and drought weaken woodlands and leave ecosystems more vulnerable to pests, disease and wildfire.

Those impacts come on top of decades of habitat loss and ecological decline. The Wildlife Trust warns that climate change is amplifying the nature crisis, while

the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has highlighted that important habitats, including peatlands, salt marshes, heathlands and wetlands, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to prolonged heat and drought. The problem we have is a lack of real-time data on ecological impacts.

All of that matters, because healthy ecosystems are part of our national resilience. The Climate Change Committee increasingly describes healthy ecosystems not simply as environmental assets, but as part of the nation's resilience infrastructure. Healthy ecosystems store water, cool communities, reduce flood risk and support biodiversity. Peatlands store carbon and retain water during periods of drought. Wetlands help to regulate river flows, reduce flood risk and provide cooler refuges during heatwaves. Trees and woodlands lower surrounding temperatures, helping to cool both urban and rural environments while supporting biodiversity.

If we continue to lose the natural environments that regulate water, cool our towns and cities, retain fresh water and sustain biodiversity, we will become progressively less resilient to the impacts of climate change. Protecting and restoring nature is therefore not simply an environmental ambition; it is an essential part of preparing Britain for a hotter future.

In conclusion, the costs of extreme heat are already being paid. Dame Emma Howard Boyd, chair of the National Heat Risk Commission, has described extreme heat as a “force multiplier”, because it increases healthcare costs, disrupts transport and energy systems, damages crops, raises food prices and places growing pressure on water supplies and wildfire risk.

The June 2026 heatwave alone is estimated to have reduced UK productivity by at least £2.36 billion and, as that figure reflects only productivity losses, the true economic impact is almost certainly higher. If current trends continue, annual productivity losses could reach £25 billion by 2030. The Climate Change Committee estimates that around £11 billion a year is needed to strengthen the UK's climate resilience, with around a third of that invested in protection from extreme heat. Adaptation is an investment in resilience, and prevention will always be cheaper than recovery.

What is lacking is not evidence, but co-ordinated delivery. Britain needs a heat resilience strategy that is led from the Cabinet Office, with clear ministerial accountability, ensuring that decisions on housing, infrastructure, health, energy and land use are all designed for the climates that we now face. Heat health warnings, public information and targeted support for vulnerable people should become routine before heatwaves strike. Green infrastructure is among the most effective adaptation measures available, but adaptation alone cannot protect us from unchecked warming, and mitigation cannot protect us from the warming already locked in. We need both.

A world that warms by 4° would bring dire consequences beyond the limits of adaptation, making climate resilience and decarbonisation inseparable. The challenge before Parliament is therefore not whether to act, but whether we act quickly enough and with enough ambition to prepare Britain for the climate in which we must now live.

2.53 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Christopher. It was the 1976 New Forest fire in your own constituency

[*Rachael Maskell*]

that woke me up to the dangers of climate destruction. Just last weekend, on Sunday night, I heard about a fire raging in the area of Acomb, on the edge of my own constituency. A field of wheat had caught ablaze, causing fear to residents; I really thank the police and fire service for their rapid response, but the fire obviously came at great cost to not only the farmer, but the community, and it makes us all so alert to the challenges we face in our time.

From discussions about the challenges that our city faces, it is clear that we are not climate resilient. We do not have the necessary strategies and plans to address the urgent needs of our time. The city has done well by focusing on flooding, but heat resilience is a new area to which we must now pay all our attention. Over the last month, schools have had to close, and many of the hospital's wards have overheated. Across our city, we have felt a real and massively challenging swathe of heatwaves.

We recognise that, if we are going to address the issue of flooding in our city, we have to get the hydrology right in the upper catchment area. That means that we have to make certain decisions: can we afford grouse moor shooting any longer, since it drains the land and as a result makes it more prone to catching light? There is much thought that needs to be given to the infrastructure needed, both in agriculture and across our buildings, our public services and so much more.

I want to focus on a few points around health, that being my speciality, and to look at the scale of what we are talking about. We have heard already about the 2,700 deaths so far this year from the climate emergency due to heat alone. We think particularly of the most vulnerable—babies, children under the age of four and older people, whose bodies find it harder to regulate—and those who have cognitive dysfunction, who will find it difficult to make the necessary adaptations to keep themselves safe. Of course, we also know that the challenges bear down hardest on those in lower socioeconomic circumstances.

As a result, we need to look at this in a way that ensures justice, equality and real fairness. Many people can go out and buy an air-con unit or a fan to keep themselves cool, but those without resources clearly do not have that advantage and their health is placed at even greater risk. We know about not only the distress that this causes—respiratory or cardiovascular distress—but the serious risk of kidney dysfunction and so much more we could name. We have heard about the pharma impact and the impact of exhaustion cramps—and then there are the risks of cancer; we have not heard about that in this debate, but greater UV exposure will increase those risks, too.

We also have to think about the environments that people then go into. Our hospitals are just not equipped for this heat. York hospital, built in 1977, is just not heat resilient—it is a greenhouse, as has been highlighted. Anyone struggling to breathe will find it massively challenging in those environments. Therefore, the urgency with which we need to make our public buildings resilient cannot be overstated.

I therefore call on the Minister—I appreciate that this goes way beyond her brief, but it is a cross-Government function—to look at how we build resilience across the

board. What resources are we going to invest in our climate resilience? Will we have a single Minister, leading cross-departmentally, to ensure resilience? How will we ensure that we are not just looking in Westminster? We know that real change and impact happen on the ground in localities, so how are we empowering our local authorities with the resources and the plans to make a difference now, not just in the future?

How are we ensuring that the people working in those facilities have the support they need to say, “Tools down, we can’t work any more”? Of course, that is very difficult when we are talking about health facilities—we think back to covid and the conditions in which people were working in extreme heat there—but we need plans to support workers who are at risk of many of the same health challenges.

What I am really asking from the Minister is this. What are the resources and how will we ensure that devolution is part of that? How will we institute comprehensive planning, so that we do not continue to face the risks, the closures, the real discomfort and, tragically, the deaths that we have seen this year?

2.58 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak, Sir Christopher; it is a real pleasure to serve under your chairship. Let me say a big thank you to the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) for highlighting this issue. Whether people like it or not, it has to be addressed. It is a key issue for many people. The temperature rises across the United Kingdom cannot be ignored either, and they set a trend. The experts tell us that we have to be prepared for that.

When we think of heat planning, we must think in bigger terms than—I am not being facetious, by the way—having enough ice lollies in the freezer. It is about the pressure of running the freezer, and about the additional fans and cooling systems, which are running in a nation that is better equipped to store heat and not let it escape, which suits us 90% of the time. There are also some practical things we have to address. I want to talk about two things, health and agriculture. I believe we must also highlight a blind spot in our national resilience planning: the unique, devastating vulnerability of rural, coastal and agricultural communities to heat stress events. I want to ground this debate in my own beautiful constituency of Strangford, which stretches across the Ards peninsula and mirrors many coastal communities across the United Kingdom.

In the Ards and North Down area, roughly 20% of our population is aged 65 or older, so, from a health point of view, thousands of those elderly constituents live in older traditional stone or poorly ventilated rural properties, which act as little storage heaters during a heatwave. In my office in Ards, when it is warm in the summer, it is like a sauna bath, and when it is cold in the winter, it is like a freezer. That is the nature of the building; the walls are about a foot and a half thick, and they were built for a purpose—to hold the roof up—but they were never built for ventilation or for heat. We have those buildings across the Ards peninsula, where I live. An isolated pensioner living in a village in the Ards peninsula cannot just pop out to an air-conditioned shopping centre or a cold public building, so there is a personal health concern as well.

Furthermore, our agricultural sector, the very backbone of the Strangford economy, faces unprecedented strain. Vegetable and crop farmers are already grappling with intense summer droughts and skyrocketing water demands to keep yields alive. Our livestock are also highly susceptible to heat stress, threatening food security and farmers' livelihoods alike.

Our critical infrastructure is, I believe, also hanging by a thread. Just last month, I tabled a parliamentary question on the resilience of our electricity grid during extreme weather. When a heatwave strikes, transformers overheat and water treatment facilities face immense pressure. In a rural area such as Strangford, if a water pump or power line fails because of extreme heat, entire communities are left vulnerable and cut off from basic utilities. The impact is on not just one but multiple households.

Although environmental adaptation is heavily devolved, the strategic funding and macro-infrastructure backing must be an all-of-the-United-Kingdom effort. We cannot treat heatwaves as an occasional summer novelty. I love heat, but I am not sure that I like 40°C; I can probably just about take 30°C. We had our Twelfth of July parade yesterday, and it was a lovely sunny day and I really enjoyed it; it is nice to have that heat now and again, but maybe not at the constant level that we now have.

I ask the Minister what cross-departmental work has been done with the devolved Administrations to ensure that the UK Health Security Agency's heat-health alerts and emergency response playbooks are seamlessly integrated into rural healthcare networks. We have the system in place and we need to make sure that healthcare centres—whether that means GPs, clinics or hospitals—and health workers and carers are all integrated and working better together.

It is my belief that we need specific capital funding to be made available to modernise rural electricity grids, so that they do not buckle under the twin pressures of winter storms and summer heatwaves, and to support our agrifood sector in transitioning to heat-resilient farming practices. Of course, those improvements all take planning and funding, but if the Government truly believe in the environmental concerns that are seeing green taxes levied on those who can least afford them, that funding must come to these industries at the same time.

In conclusion—ever mindful of your timescale of about five minutes each, Sir Christopher—we must act now to ensure that national heatwave preparedness protects every citizen, whether they live in the heart of London or in my constituency on the shores of Strangford lough, and to ensure that our farmers and our agrifood industry are prepared to deal with any continued periods of heat. If that is what is to be expected in the future—the Government tell us that that is the way things are going—we have to be able to respond to that, and I gently say that we need to be more prepared.

I look forward to the Minister's response. I know that the Minister is always very keen to ensure that the regional Administrations and Westminster work together. My hope is that that will be exactly what we do.

3.4 pm

Alison Taylor (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) for raising such an interesting and timely topic

as extreme heat. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher.

We were warned more than 20 years ago that extreme temperatures would be the consequence of uncontrolled greenhouse gas emissions, and what did we do? Not enough. Not enough to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and not enough to adapt to climate change.

Across the UK, new high temperatures are being set. In my constituency, the highest temperature was recorded at a mere 26.7°C in 2018, but I would not be surprised if that were surpassed soon. What used to be a one in 100 or 200 event has, as we were warned, now become the new normal. While we ask ourselves how to get through this summer, I gently suggest that we need to heed the warnings of climate scientists and think about what the heat map of Europe and the UK will look like over the next 20 years.

Short-term fixes such as air-conditioning will set the average household back several thousand pounds, but also add to the demand for energy. As a regular visitor to London these days, I can see how much more extreme the heat is here compared with in my constituency of Paisley and Renfrewshire North. My constituency benefits from a more northern latitude, wide open spaces, lower population, lower density and a mix of urban and rural areas. My constituency will always be cooler than London, at least on the thermometer.

Having missed the opportunity over the past 20 years, we need to look forward, with short-term relief and long-term strategies to retrofit buildings, emphasising design and construction techniques that reduce the impact of extreme heat, and to look to the circular economy. We need to consider embodied carbon in buildings, the topic of last night's interesting Adjournment debate from the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Dr Chowns). As I mentioned last night, local authorities need to look at how buildings are demolished, so that cleared sites do not hypothetically hold embodied carbon and are not adversely affected by industry benchmarks, such as the Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method—BREEAM points are impacted by poor and thoughtless demolition practices. In conclusion, I stand ready to help the Government meet our 2030 and 2050 targets on climate change and greenhouse gases.

3.7 pm

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Christopher. I thank the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) for introducing this important debate.

The reports this week have been horrifying. That thousands may have died in this heat shows how ill-equipped we are as a country to deal with this kind of weather. I represent the rural and coastal constituency of Tiverton and Minehead, with a disproportionately elderly population, and the underlying health inequalities that often go with an area of its character. When the heat comes, my constituents are among the first to suffer and the least equipped to cope.

I wish to highlight plainly where preparedness has failed them. In part of my constituency, not only has this period not been managed, it has been completely mismanaged. Some children cooling off in the River Exe on hot summer's day, as any of us would want to,

[Rachel Gilmour]

fell ill because of an alleged discharge into the river. The children's father kayaked up the river later yesterday evening and reports encountering a pungent sewage odour in the vicinity of one of Tiverton's sewage treatment work sites. He witnessed what appeared to be active discharge, which the company's tracker failed to reflect, because it had not been updated. A monitoring system that does not monitor is worse than useless; it is a fig leaf.

There is a hosepipe ban, although the company had months of warning. A wet start to the year gave way to weeks of record heat that was forecast and foreseeable. Yet, when the pressure came, South West Water was not ready. The imposition of the ban is on mid-Devon and parts of east Devon but nowhere else in the region. My constituents want to know why they alone are paying the price of a company's failure to plan. Where was the investment? Where was the foresight? That is not bad luck, it is dereliction of duty.

It is hard to shake the distinct impression that to South West Water stakeholders come a distant second behind shareholder interests, which is unacceptable. The consequences go beyond garden hoses. At a slaughter site in Willand, water pressure was cut to a quarter of its normal levels, leading to an unfolding animal welfare crisis. It posed a potential public health risk, as a site that cannot access adequate water cannot maintain hygiene standards.

As the MP for the area, it took me five phone calls yesterday before someone from South West Water picked up the phone. I found the lack of urgency and concern to be outstanding. I am assured that some water pressure has now been restored, but this is on a cliff edge, and major welfare issues remain a concern. Despite what I heard from its new chief executive in a breakfast meeting just a few weeks ago, it seems as though South West Water has not learned any lessons.

Finally, heat preparedness is also as much about the everyday infrastructure that people rely on. Buses, in particular, are used disproportionately by elderly residents, the very group most at risk of heatstroke. Too many buses still lack adequate air-conditioning. That has to be part of the preparedness conversation. This heat will come again and again. We need a system and the infrastructure that meets it head on and corporate entities that put people first, not profit.

3.11 pm

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) on securing this important debate.

I recently attended a screening of the national emergency briefing in my constituency. One sentence stuck with me, which was,

"this is the least extreme climate we will experience in our lifetime."

As we swelter through another heatwave, many people are welcoming the hot and sunny weather, but it is unprecedented to have record-breaking temperatures three months in a row, and that is only set to continue. Experts estimated that there were more than 2,700 excess deaths during the May and June heatwaves attributed to heat-related causes. We are now seeing dangerous

climate change-fuelled heat claiming lives, disrupting schools and hospitals, and shutting down transport and infrastructure. We need to adapt urgently.

In recent weeks, I have heard from teachers and workers across my constituency who have struggled to keep buildings at a comfortable temperature. Teachers cited the guidance from the Department for Education, which suggested opening windows as a solution, as deeply unhelpful. The National Education Union rightly criticised the Department for underestimating the scale of the problem. Although I welcome the £710 million of funding to improve school and college buildings, which includes funding to install solar panels to bring down energy bills, it must be coupled with measures to provide good ventilation and cooling systems such as air-conditioning. Remember that not every school can simply open the windows, particularly not schools for children with special educational needs and difficulties, where it could be contrary to risk assessments.

I have also been contacted by train drivers, bus drivers and delivery drivers who have been working in extreme temperatures with no air-conditioning. I have even heard that some supermarkets deliberately chose new delivery vehicles without air-conditioning to reduce their costs. That is unacceptable, as workers' wellbeing should always be a priority over saving a few pounds. I have long supported the campaign for a law on a maximum working temperature, led by all the major trade unions, but it must be matched with the mitigating adaptations to ensure that productivity and the economy can continue in the face of climate challenges.

When I worked in the operating department before coming to Parliament, maintaining temperature and humidity at certain levels was crucial to reducing infection risks while balancing the need to maintain a patient's core temperature. Operating theatres are usually windowless rooms filled with electrical equipment, and even the best laminar flow and ventilation systems would struggle in hot weather. The lack of legislation on working temperatures and the pressures of waiting lists meant that we often had to carry on regardless and try to minimise the risk along the way.

We need to act now to adapt to extreme heat to outpace the health risks and impacts on daily life. That requires a combination of immediate operational changes and long-term architectural upgrades to maintain safe and comfortable learning, working and living environments. What are the Government doing to adapt to this new normal, Minister? Will comprehensive guidance and support be provided to help schools, workplaces and public buildings mitigate the impact of extreme heat? Will the Government follow the lead of Spain, Belgium, Latvia and others, and answer the calls from trade unions to implement a maximum working temperature in this country?

This country is built for a climate that no longer exists. Without immediate action, we will see more health implications and more disruption. We are at a tipping point. Adapting to extreme heat will strengthen our national and economic resilience and improve everybody's lives.

3.15 pm

Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I thank the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) not only for securing this timely debate but for

his detailed and comprehensive speech, which took me back a few decades to my school days, when my biology teacher talked about global warming. The chickens have come home to roost. What is happening not just in this country but across the world, with additional flooding and a warmer climate, demonstrates that Governments of all nations need to react. It is interesting that there are no Reform parliamentarians and few Conservative MPs in the Chamber. They often use the phrase “Drill, baby, drill”, not realising that additional carbon dioxide in the atmosphere can increase heat across the globe.

I recently visited my local hospital—unfortunately, a family member needed emergency treatment, so I was in an A&E department—and it was shocking. Hospitals and A&E departments are already in crisis. I looked at the live data to see which hospital in the area has the lowest waiting time, and pretty much all hospitals serving the city of Birmingham had an average wait time of four hours, but that data was not live, and in fact people were waiting far longer than what it said online. It was shocking to see vulnerable people, elderly people and people with significant injuries sat in a sweltering waiting area, although the NHS staff were doing their level best by providing water and trying to assist the patients. It is really shocking that, despite hospitals receiving an enormous amount of investment, they are simply not adequate for treating the most vulnerable and needy when they need critical support.

That experience brought home a simple truth: extreme heat is not a minor inconvenience, but a public health emergency. As hon. Members have said, during this heatwave alone, 2,700 people have died as a result of heat-related causes. That includes 368 deaths in the west midlands, which experienced its highest rate of deaths per head during the June heatwave.

The buildings that are intended to protect us are unprepared. Although we do not yet have data from this summer, more than half of NHS trusts reported at least one overheating incident during the summer of 2022, and the number of NHS overheating incidents requiring risk assessments rose by 53% between 2016 and 2024.

Hon. Members have spoken about schools and other public buildings. During the recent heatwave, about 1,000 schools closed or shortened their days, and there were reports of teachers passing out in classrooms that reached temperatures in excess of 40°C. The answer cannot simply be to send children home or tell patients and workers to drink more water. We need a properly funded national heat resilience programme. We must audit every school, hospital and care home, and install effective ventilation, external shielding, reflecting roofs and energy efficient cooling where necessary. We should create accessible community cooling centres and establish clear maximum safe indoor temperature standards.

Extreme heat is already costing lives, and the Government must prepare for summer emergencies with the same seriousness with which we prepare for winter. Warm words and weather warnings will not cool a classroom, protect a hospital patient or prevent the next avoidable death.

3.20 pm

Dr Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Christopher. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney Valley

(Adrian Ramsay) for securing this extremely important and highly topical debate. Having had three heatwaves in less than three months, we are all more than aware of the reality of extreme heat. We need to talk more about our preparedness, or rather our lack of preparedness, for extreme heat. We do not yet have the figures for the latest heatwave, but we have heard about the figures published this week on the thousands of excess deaths due to the heatwaves in May and June, which spell out in clear terms exactly what impact this has on human lives.

Like Members across the Chamber who have spoken today, I have heard from constituents about the direct impact that extreme heat is having on their lives. I have heard from parents who are deeply concerned, both about school closures and about schools not closing when their kids are struggling to learn in conditions of extreme heat, and from people who are desperately concerned about our health infrastructure, social care and homes. They are all struggling to cope with the effects, which is particularly important for the very young and our older community members, who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat.

I represent North Herefordshire, an absolutely beautiful constituency with farming at its heart. Farmers are at the forefront of the impacts of climate change—not just extreme heat but other weather extremes such as flooding. As my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney Valley pointed out, we are facing a situation in which climate change, or climate breakdown, is driving the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events. As he pointed out, we have known about this for decades, but sadly Governments have effectively been asleep at the wheel on reducing climate-warming emissions to the level we need them at, and particularly on adaptation and building our resilience.

Our farmers now face water shortages, and those working in public services, whether in health, education or public transport, are struggling to cope with conditions for which our infrastructure is simply not built.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): The hon. Member highlights infrastructure issues, which my constituents are experiencing in Epsom and Ewell. Commuters to London have faced repeated train cancellations and delays, affecting their livelihoods and businesses. Does the hon. Member agree that it is really important that we improve the resilience of transport infrastructure so that people can continue to go about their daily lives and go to work, and that businesses can continue to function?

Dr Chowns: I completely agree. To do that, we need to think long-term. We do not do well enough in this country at thinking long-term, or beyond the next election cycle. We need to think of the next generation. What sort of world do we want to bequeath to them? What sort of country do we want to bequeath to them, and how will we build the country that is suitable for the climate that will be here in a few decades' time? As has been pointed out, this is the coolest it will be in our lifetimes: the climate will only become more extreme, with more extreme heat and more extreme floods.

We need to change our ways as a country. Experts have been telling us this for a long time. The Committee on Climate Change has pointed out that we are not

[Dr Chowns]

doing anywhere near enough to meet the adaptation challenge facing us. I call on the Government to grasp the nettle. This is investment in building a better future—it is a win-win investment. Building houses that are suitable for the weather conditions that we will be facing is much cheaper than having to retrofit them afterwards. If we use materials and building methods that enable us to cool buildings naturally, we can create urban areas that are not such huge heat islands as they currently are. By building in such a way, including with lots of tree planting in urban areas, we can cool temperatures locally using natural methods. We have a real opportunity here, and we should grasp it with both hands. Tackling the adaptation and the resilience challenge is not about just sticking our finger in the dyke or using a sticking plaster approach, such as patchwork retrofitting air-con in every building that is struggling with the heat; it is an opportunity to imagine and to build a better country for the future.

There are things the Government can do right now. My hon. Friend the Member for Gorton and Denton (Hannah Spencer) introduced a private Member's Bill yesterday to establish a maximum workplace temperature. We have a minimum workplace temperature, but we clearly need a maximum one. Minister, is this something that the Government will support? I hope they will. As we have seen, there is international precedent and huge levels of support across the country.

We also need to recognise that we must build the long-term resilience that we require. As a country, we do not yet have an adaptation plan that is fit for purpose, or the co-ordination that is needed. I raised that issue with the Minister a few days ago in a debate on national security and resilience and was told that Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for resilience in farming, and that the Department of Health and Social Care is responsible for resilience in health.

I raised this in Health questions this morning, but the issues we face are not solved just by retrofitting our hospitals. We have to enable everybody in the country to stay healthy in the extremes of heat that we are increasingly seeing so that they do not have to go into hospital in the first place. This is a cross-Government requirement and priority, so will the Government put in place adaptation plans that the Climate Change Committee will itself declare are fit for purpose?

Finally, we must put the brakes on the problem at the same time. It is not an either/or between mitigation and adaptation; we still have more to do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the emissions that are causing climate breakdown, so that we save ourselves from the worst possible effects of runaway climate change. I call on the Government to go further and faster on real climate action, not least by holding the line on Jackdaw and Rosebank. We cannot on the one hand struggle with facing the consequences of climate change, such as extreme heat, and on the other hand continue to take more fossil fuels out of the ground and burn them. We need consistent Government policy across the piece. I hope the Government will provide that.

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): Pippa Heylings, you have three minutes.

3.27 pm

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) on securing this timely debate. As Britain experiences yet another summer of extreme heat, we cannot ignore the fact that the UK was built for a climate that no longer exists, as we have heard from all hon. Members here today.

Climate change is not a distant threat; it is here today. Minister, it is an issue of national security. It affects our constituents, damages our economy and, increasingly, costs lives. On our current trajectory, average summer temperatures in my constituency of South Cambridgeshire could rise by more than 4°C. Days above 30°C are expected to increase six-fold, while summer rainfall could fall by more than a fifth.

Those are just statistics, but like others I have heard stories of children struggling to learn in overheated classrooms, older people becoming dangerously ill in care homes, critical incidents in our hospitals, farmers facing drought and water shortages, and communities and wildlife under threat from wildfires, yet despite these growing risks the Climate Change Committee has concluded that the Government's approach to climate adaptation is clearly not working and we are woefully unprepared. Can the Minister confirm that the Treasury has now accepted the forecast of 2°C warming by 2050, and, if we now have an agreed forecast, whether each Department is doing what it should be doing and setting adaptation goals, given we can now model what that means for every sector?

Preparing for increasing climate impacts must be seen as an issue of national security and resilience. The Liberal Democrats are calling for adequate cooling to be installed in all NHS hospitals, care homes and schools in high-risk areas in the next five years, and for work with local authorities and mayors to create a network of air-conditioned cool hubs for vulnerable people. We also agree that we should have maximum workplace temperatures, as many of our European neighbours already have; increase green space and plant more trees to cool our towns and cities; and support households to insulate their homes and install heat pumps that can provide both efficient heating in winter and cooling in summer.

Without greater resilience, the foundations needed for our UK security will struggle to function, but we have all the answers in our hands. That is the message of the multiple people's emergency briefings that the South Cambridgeshire climate and nature group arranged across my constituency and which I have attended, and which have happened across the country. Does the Minister support the call for a Government-backed, televised national emergency briefing? People deserve the facts, and they need and want to be better prepared.

3.30 pm

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher, and I thank the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) for securing a debate on this very important topic. His wide-ranging speech highlighted the worsening climate outlook that we face; the impacts

on physical health, mental health and sleep of the extreme heatwaves we have recently been suffering; and important issues about water storage.

The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) rightly highlighted the impact that extreme heatwaves have on people with lower incomes, who may not be able to go and buy air-conditioning units and so on. As well as highlighting the mitigation of putting ice lollies in the freezer, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked about the impact on the elderly population in older, rural properties.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Alison Taylor) added to her comments in last night's Adjournment debate about the importance of embodied carbon in buildings. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) joined a number of hon. Members in highlighting the failures of water companies—South West Water's failings in her case—and the need to improve the reliability of water supply. The hon. Member for Stourbridge (Cat Eccles) highlighted the fact that Department for Education guidance has focused on open windows. I will come on to whether opening windows helps, after some experimentation that I have done in my own house as to how to deal with this.

The hon. Member for Birmingham Perry Barr (Ayoub Khan) rightly highlighted the fact we have had long-term knowledge of climate change and we have collectively, as a human species, failed to take decisive action thus far. The hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Dr Chowns) talked about the impact of learning. Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Pippa Heylings) talked with her customary passion and expertise on this topic. She said that the impact of climate change is here today and that it should be considered a national security issue.

We Liberal Democrats share the concerns of hon. Members in this Chamber. We are acutely aware of the serious public health threat posed by heatwaves, particularly to those with underlying health conditions, residents of care homes and people living in temporary accommodation. Back in summer 2023, an estimated 2,295 deaths were associated with five periods of heat. This year so far, more than 2,700 people may have died from heat-related causes in England and Wales, as suggested by expert estimates. We have also seen wildfires. Very tragically, a wildfire led to the deaths of British citizens in Almeria in Spain, but I have also had fires locally in the Astons and West Challow in my constituency, although thankfully they have not led to fatalities.

My constituency has also faced the challenge of hot school buildings. At recent school visits, I have felt this for myself—for example, at the Stanford in the Vale Church of England primary school but also at Aureus secondary school, despite that building not even being a decade old. That shows how we continue to not get these things right. I have attended a community national emergency briefing in Wallingford, and there has also been one in Didcot. That shows there is rising popular concern about these topics and that we need to take more action.

Let us think about this issue through three categories. First, what can we do to prevent the root cause? Secondly, what can we do to mitigate it? Thirdly, what coping measures do we have in place? On prevention, I feel very strongly, as do several other hon. Members, that we

cannot keep shunting carbon emission reductions down the road. We have made progress in a number of areas in the United Kingdom but there is a lot more to be done.

Globally, the same issue applies: when we are confronted with a choice between making further and faster progress on reducing carbon emissions and other factors, it is often the other factors that win out. Progress has been pretty stagnant on introducing electric vehicles and adapting our infrastructure, and the UK's hopeless record on rail electrification, including under this Government, and on industrial production needs lots of attention. That is before we even think about rainforest loss and the destruction of nature both here and elsewhere.

That is why we, as politicians who care about these topics, must tackle net zero scepticism head on. We are directly seeing the impacts of climate change now, and we will spend far more money if we focus solely on mitigation—which, alas, we need to do because of our lack of progress—rather than on tackling the root causes of carbon emissions.

The second theme is mitigation. Building design is important. The hon. Member for North Herefordshire made embodied carbon in buildings the focus of her Adjournment debate last night, and we can also learn how to design our buildings better so that they are resilient for the future. We know from some of the buildings here on the parliamentary estate what a long way we have to go: elements of the Palace can be very cool, but Portcullis House is hardly a triumph of modern building design, given that the atrium—and frankly every room in that place—is a greenhouse. I am personally delighted not to have won a room in Portcullis House in the ballot. I am happy to be in Derby Gate where the air-con actually works—for half of it anyway, but that is another story.

It is not right that so many people are left to endure dangerously high temperatures in poorly insulated homes and buildings. That is why the Liberal Democrats are calling for a 10-year emergency home upgrade programme, beginning with free insulation and heat pumps for low-income households, while ensuring that all new homes are built to zero-carbon standards. That builds on our recent success of getting the Government to commit to putting rooftop solar on all new builds, which was encouraged by the sunshine Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson). When we are dealing with heat pump scepticism, it is important to remember that heat pumps have the capability to provide air-con in summer.

Successive Governments have comprehensively failed to take climate adaptation measures seriously, guaranteeing misery for people and communities affected by heat stress, as well as flooding and wildfires. That is why we would prioritise protecting communities by implementing a comprehensive UK adaptation strategy, embedding climate resilience into decision making across all Government Departments and agencies—rather than the current siloed approach—to prevent problems before they happen.

We would deliver adequate funding to local communities to empower them to combat flooding, drought and heatwaves, including through nature-based flood management, sustainable drainage, water supply enhancement, building retrofits and urban greening, backed by stronger planning and regulatory frameworks.

[Olly Glover]

People continue to ignore the evidence that even simple solutions, such as more trees and more shade in urban areas, can make an enormous difference to our ability to withstand heatwaves.

The Liberal Democrats would develop resilience standards for the energy, water, transport and telecommunications sectors, and support homeowners to install proactive adaptation measures against flooding and overheating. We also believe that no one should be expected to work in unacceptably high temperatures, and we support the Climate Change Committee's recommendation to introduce a statutory maximum workplace temperature.

The third theme is coping measures, and cool hubs are our policy solution. They would be rather like warm hubs with areas of heating, which are popular in Ukraine in winter when Russia attacks infrastructure, but they are the summer equivalent. Community spaces with air-conditioning, such as gyms, leisure centres and libraries, could provide much-needed respite from soaring temperatures in summer months, following similar "cool bank" schemes in other countries.

We need to do more to make our transport networks resilient. We need to consider whether our current rail stress temperatures need to be increased, given a much wider range of temperatures and much hotter summers. The more modern railway electrification that we have in this country is much more resilient than older equipment installed in past decades. Melting tarmac can be an issue for roads and aviation.

Public health advice and information will be more and more important. We need to ensure that people understand good practice for keeping houses cool. I have realised from contributions to the Didcot community Facebook group that I have been doing this all wrong and that, actually, having the windows open often does not help. Somebody said, "You're such idiots for opening your windows. Keep them closed when it's hot." I have tried that and, I have to say, it is a lot better. Perhaps that exposes my embarrassing lack of understanding of science, but it shows that we can do a lot more to help people to reach the best conclusions for their own houses.

Finally, we need a public information campaign on what we can all do to prevent fires and reduce the risk, particularly in the countryside where we should not be smoking, vaping or having barbecues in areas that have been subject to drought and are at much higher risk.

This is clearly a very challenging topic, and one that needs action across Government Departments. For that reason, I look forward to the Minister's comments.

3.39 pm

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate another valley MP, the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay), on securing this debate. He excellently outlined how many people have been affected by extreme heat over the last few weeks both in a personal capacity and in their work in schools, hospitals or farms. All of us will have had the experience of helping vulnerable groups in our constituencies in the last few months. Just last Saturday, I met an elderly

couple with no fans or water who were not in the system. We have all helped vulnerable residents, and I commend everybody in this Chamber for the job that they do.

During the hon. Gentleman's opening speech, I noted that a Doorkeeper was bringing in another fan. The irony of the Doorkeepers wearing very heavy woollen suits was not lost on me. I hope that we think about them as much as everybody else when we talk about the extreme heat.

Pippa Heylings: Just before the debate, we hosted a solar-powered ice cream van from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) in Speaker's Court. Given the heat, it was very nourishing, and it was lovely that the Doorkeepers and those who work with Mr Speaker were able to come out and have some. It was fantastic to see Electrify Britain's campaign to get bills down while we reduce emissions, and Styles Ice Cream's fully solar-powered ice cream production and ice cream vans gave everybody a bit of comfort.

Paul Holmes: I will leave that for the Minister to respond to, but I entirely agree that it is good that the Doorkeepers and House staff who support us so admirably were allowed to have a brief break. I did not manage to get a solar power-produced ice cream, but perhaps I will pop down afterwards.

The hon. Members for Birmingham Perry Barr (Ayoub Khan) and for North Herefordshire (Dr Chowns) said that there had not been enough focus on mitigation over the last few years. They are absolutely correct, but I remind Members that we have seen a 40% reduction in total carbon emissions since 2010 and that the United Kingdom represents only 0.8% of total global emissions. If they had had longer to speak, I know they would have said that we have to tackle this internationally as well as domestically.

Last summer was the warmest on record in Britain. The UK Health Security Agency estimates that 1,504 people died as a result of the heat. Behind that figure are families who have lost loved ones. What is particularly striking is that the overwhelming majority were elderly: more than 1,300 of those deaths were among people aged over 75. Fortunately, that number was lower than the more than 3,000 deaths that had been predicted, thanks in part to the successful implementation of the adverse weather and health plan introduced by the previous Government. That demonstrates an important point: preparation saves lives.

As our climate changes, extreme heat can no longer be regarded as an exceptional event. It is becoming a recurring feature of British summers, and Government policy must adapt accordingly. Reducing emissions remains important, but adaptation must sit alongside mitigation. We have a duty to ensure that our homes, infrastructure, public services and energy system are capable of coping with the conditions we increasingly face. That begins with protecting the most vulnerable.

The Cabinet Office is the lead Government Department for severe weather and has responsibility for identifying those who require particular protection during periods of extreme heat. Last year's resilience action plan committed the Government to publishing new lead Department expectations and updated guidance to help Departments

to identify those who may become vulnerable during emergencies such as heatwaves. Yet a year after those commitments were made, neither of those things appears to have been delivered. Will the Minister explain when those long-promised expectations and updated guidance will finally be delivered? Preparing for emergencies cannot simply be a slogan; it requires effective planning and proper co-ordination across Government.

Preparation must also extend to the homes we are building today. Many of those homes will still be occupied at the end of this century, so they should be designed not simply for the climate of the past, but for the hotter summers that experts increasingly expect. In apartments in densely built urban areas or during prolonged periods of extreme heat, opening windows is often ineffective—as the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover), outlined from his personal experience—or impractical because of security concerns, pollution or noise.

Current building regulations may not explicitly prohibit air-conditioning, but they require developers to exhaust every possible passive cooling measure before mechanical cooling can even be considered. In practice, that has created a system where air-conditioning has become the exception rather than a realistic option. Indeed, there have been cases where families have installed air-conditioning and have been instructed by councils to remove it.

At precisely the moment Britain needs to become more resilient to hotter summers, Government policy is too often acting as a barrier to the adoption of technology that could help people remain safe and comfortable. Research suggests that wider use of air-conditioning could reduce heat-associated deaths among those at greatest risk by as much as three quarters. This is not simply a matter of comfort; it is about public health and protecting vulnerable people. It is also about ensuring that children can learn effectively during hot weather, that workers remain productive and that families are able to sleep safely through increasingly warm nights.

Britain is increasingly becoming an international outlier. Around 90% of homes in both Japan and the United States have air-conditioning, compared with only 3% to 5% of homes in the United Kingdom. We in the Conservative party have already committed to removing the regulations that effectively discourage air-conditioning in new homes. I asked the Minister whether the Government will now consider doing the same.

There is another contradiction in current policy. At the very time that we are discouraging greater use of air-conditioning, consumers are paying billions of pounds in energy bills to compensate renewable generators for switching off when there is excess electricity generation during sunny summer days. Air-conditioning demand rises precisely when solar generation is at its strongest. Rather than paying generators not to generate, surely it makes more sense to allow households to use that electricity to cool their homes.

As electricity generation becomes increasingly dependent on intermittent weather conditions, maintaining grid stability becomes ever more challenging. This summer, the National Energy System Operator took the unprecedented step of issuing electricity margin notices following periods when supply became dangerously tight. That should concern every Member of this House.

Cat Eccles: Does the hon. Member recognise that it is not unusual for NESO to issue emergency measures? There are normally peaks and troughs during the day, such as when people come home from work, put the kettle on and turn on the air-conditioning. NESO has stated that that is quite normal.

Paul Holmes: It may be quite normal, but it should still concern people that our electricity supply is vulnerable and that we are becoming increasingly dependent on weather conditions.

Preparing Britain for a changing climate means much more than setting emissions targets. It means protecting vulnerable people, ensuring that Government Departments are properly prepared, building homes that are fit for hotter summers, embracing practical technologies that improve resilience and maintaining an electricity system that is capable of supporting them. Adaptation is not an alternative to tackling climate change; it is an essential part of responding to it, because whatever path the climate takes over the coming decades—and we all know what path that will be—our responsibility today is to ensure that Britain is ready.

3.48 pm

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Dame Angela Eagle): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher, in this debate on a matter that has affected a great many of our constituents and all Members who are struggling through the London heat. I am grateful to Members for their valuable contributions. I thank the hon. Member for Waveney Valley (Adrian Ramsay) for securing the debate. I hope to give all Members some confidence that we are making progress in what is an extremely complicated and interconnected problem. It is not only interconnected in this country; it requires action locally, nationally and internationally, and it cannot be solved easily or quickly.

Despite some of the issues and considerable challenges—they are considerable—that hon. Members have pointed out in their contributions, I want to cheer people up slightly with the statement that the Nature Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry East (Mary Creagh), made on the Floor of the House yesterday. She pointed out that before the Paris agreement, the world was on track for 4% of warming, but we have now got it down to 2.5. That is still way too high, but I use that example because I want to inject a little bit of confidence that if we can get our processes right—internationally as well as nationally—we can do something about this. Such issues are so complex and interrelated that it is easy for people to think that the problem is too great and we cannot possibly deal with it, and then be despairing about it, so I wanted to inject that little bit of optimism. We have made progress, and we have to make sure that we carry on making progress.

The Government recognise that extreme heat fuelled by climate change is no longer a rare seasonal event to be managed with temporary emergency measures; it is a chronic, recurring, structural risk to our economy, public health and national security. Every hon. Member who has contributed today has recognised that point. Our response to extreme heat is built on a combination of tried and tested plans and capabilities that have been refined over time, and also longer-term programmes to meet the specific challenges of climate change.

[*Dame Angela Eagle*]

Evidence suggests that without action, the physical impacts of climate change could cost England's economy between 1.1% and 3.3% of GDP by 2050, and at least 7.4% by the end of the century. We are taking action now in recognition that it is economically beneficial to invest early to reduce emissions. As Nicholas Stern said many years ago, the more money spent on investing to prevent, the cheaper it is to deal with the consequences.

The Government have put clean energy and climate action at the heart of their agenda, which includes showing global leadership by setting a world-leading target to reduce emissions by at least 81% by 2035. Cutting emissions remains our first line of defence, but it is harder when the political consensus that existed about climate action has broken down globally and in this country. There are still people who claim that climate change does not exist and that we are spending a load of money for no particular reason, when we know that scientists are universally agreed that the increase in heat and changes in climate that we are talking about have been caused by human effects on our planet's climate. The sooner that everybody recognises that globally, the easier it will be for the great ingenuity of the human race—when it is in a good mood—to deal with the consequences of what was done in the past with industrialisation.

We are taking action as well as mitigation to prepare the UK for the impacts of climate change. Under the Climate Change Act 2008, we maintain a robust climate change risk assessment, and through the national adaptation programme, DEFRA co-ordinates a rigorous cross-Government response to ensure that our sectors remain resilient.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): Might the Minister comment briefly on the Government's approach to water? In the recent heatwaves, South East Water reported that water usage went up by 15% because people were taking extra showers and so on. She will know that South East Water has had huge problems with resilience in the network; that pushed it right to the brink. What are the Government doing to get a grip on this so that we build in resilience to areas such as Kent, which will be in a water deficit by the end of 2027?

Dame Angela Eagle: My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Haltemprice (Emma Hardy), the Minister for Water in DEFRA, is probably in a better position to give the hon. Member details on that. The water White Paper will seek to create a more coherent system than the one that we inherited, which we know is inadequate.

The Government are strengthening long-term climate adaptation by setting stronger objectives based on common planning assumptions, informed by the guidance that we requested from the Climate Change Committee. Yesterday, in the statement given on the Floor of the House by my hon. Friend the Nature Minister on the state of climate and nature, she announced on climate adaptation that 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.”—[*Official Report*, 13 July 2026; Vol. 789, c. 649.]

The Government will take forward that minimum temperature increase as an assumption in our adaptation planning; I think that is what the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Pippa Heylings) was asking me about.

Pippa Heylings: I presume that we are talking about degrees of warming. I want to confirm that we are looking at going beyond—keeping warming below 1.5°C, and that 2°C is not a minimum but a forecast that we would not like to see but is probably happening. If we do not do more, it will rise by 4°C by the end of the century.

Dame Angela Eagle: I absolutely accept that, and so do the Government. It is not ideal that 2% is the minimum that public authorities must plan their adaptation assumptions on. We want to avoid getting to 2%, but the fact is that the way things are going, that is a realistic assumption for our planners to incorporate into their work.

Dr Chowns: It is so important to clarify that we are talking about 2°C of warming, not 2%. The average pre-industrial temperature was 14°C; it is way more than 2%.

Dame Angela Eagle: I was hoping to deal with a lot of these issues, but I want to leave the hon. Member for Waveney Valley enough time to say a few things. I have many more things to say, so perhaps we can resume this debate in the future.

3.57 pm

Adrian Ramsay: I thank all hon. Members who have come along to take part in today's debate. It shows how much interest there is across the House in this issue, which affects our constituents' day-to-day lives now, and that is before the changes that could come in the future.

I thank the Minister for that information. She suggested that she has more to give, and I would welcome a written response to see what more there is, especially if she has gone to the trouble of preparing it. In particular, I would like to hear more about the cross-departmental work that is planned. That is why I called for the Cabinet Office to be the answering Department in this debate. As much as I respect and work with DEFRA Ministers, this is a cross-Government issue, and it is extremely important that it is led by the Cabinet Office.

I was also looking forward to the Minister talking about what immediate actions can be taken this summer, given that many measures that will take longer to deliver—in particular, increasing support for tackling wildfires and for A&E departments. If she has more to add on that, I would welcome it.

I want to underline what two or three other Members said. I too hosted a screening of “National Emergency Briefing” in my constituency recently. It would be immensely powerful if the Government got behind a public information screening of that film. Alongside that, information could be provided about measures that people can take to adapt as best they can to the changes. We need systemic measures—it is not about what individuals can do—but giving people that information would help to raise the profile of this issue and give them the sense that we are working together.

I reinforce the point that my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Dr Chowns) made: if we are to get a grip of this problem, we must first stop making it far worse, which the granting of new licences for oil drilling in Rosebank and Jackdaw would do. Rosebank would produce emissions equivalent to 28 low-income countries; we cannot possibly justify that if we are to get to grips with the scale of the problem.

It was reassuring to hear that Members from across the House are concerned about the degree of warming that is already happening. We need to tackle that to protect people—especially the most vulnerable, who are affected the most. I look forward to hearing more from the Minister about the range of actions that the Government have planned.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Employees Travelling Outside the UK: Expenses Rate

4 pm

Peter Lamb (Crawley) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered expenses rates for employees travelling outside the UK.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I am calling on the Government to ensure that serious consideration is given to reassessing the scale rates for expenses and subsistence paid to employees who by nature of their work are required to travel outside the UK. My constituency of Crawley is home to Gatwick airport and many workers, including pilots and cabin crew, who are required to spend considerable time abroad with the flights they crew. That can last from several hours to several days for those working long-haul flights.

Time spent away from home in foreign cities, without access to kitchens or other domestic utilities, can be overwhelmingly expensive, particularly for junior members of the cabin crew, whose salaries, according to the National Careers Service, begin at around £19,000. It is right, therefore, that employers pay tax-deductible subsistence payments to their employees, to cover the costs associated with travel necessary to do their jobs.

Under the previous Government, to save companies having to check every single receipt that an employee accrues while abroad, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs introduced a benchmark expenses rates for employees travelling outside the UK. Those were first published on the Government's website in 2013, with unique rates produced for almost every one of the world's major cities, setting out the average cost of drinks, breakfast, lunch and dinner, a night in a hotel room and even the journey from hotel to office. Each city had also been given broader non-specific subsistence reimbursement rates. Demarcated across specific time boundaries, that is a rate for when employees spent more than five hours in a given city, with another for when they spent more than 10 or 24 hours there.

The detailed task of producing those rates over a decade ago is evidenced by the fact that HMRC went to the effort of making unique assessments city by city, and that the increase in reimbursement between five, 10 and 24 hours is not only non-linear but unique to each city. Despite the time and effort put into producing those bespoke rates, they have been upgraded significantly only once in the past 13 years—in October 2014, a year after they were first produced—and that only included a fraction of the cities listed.

Despite assurances that the Government keep under review all taxes, including overseas subsistence rates, if we check their website, we see that rates payable to an employee who has travelled to Zagreb for work are listed in Croatian kuna, even though Croatia joined the euro on 1 January 2023. The subsistence rates for at least 15 European capitals, including Athens, Madrid, Lisbon and Dublin, have never received an update. Due to more than a decade of inflation, those benchmark values have been eroded in real terms.

Ahead of this debate, using the total residual rates produced in 2013, and nation-specific consumer price index inflation figures from the World Bank Group, we

[Peter Lamb]

have calculated today's expected subsistence rates for European destinations. Amsterdam's total residual rate in 2013 was set at €71; a year later it was raised to €72, where it remains today. According to World Bank Group data, prices in the Netherlands in the 12 years since have risen by an average of 2.6% a year. That compounds to a 36% increase over that period. Had the 2013 rates for Amsterdam increased in line with inflation, workers who had spent more than 24 hours in the city would now receive more than €96. The fact that those rates have been ignored for so long means that cabin crew and pilots—including constituents of mine and those in adjacent areas—are losing out on subsistence payments of more than €25.

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): I represent Horsham, an adjacent constituency, and very much experience the same problems, so the issue is not rare. I have many cabin crew in my area who say the same thing. One of the people affected is trying to get leave to remain, but the visa application is made extremely complicated by going back and forth out of the country, so I very much support the hon. Member and emphasise to the Minister that it is not a small problem.

Peter Lamb: I take that fully on board. I am delighted that the hon. Member is here for this debate.

There are cities in Europe where the situation is even more pronounced than in Amsterdam. In Budapest, the total residual rate set in 2013 and unchanged since 2014 has been eaten away by a compound inflation rate of 67% in Hungary. The current payment of 16,000 forints is well over 10,000 forints, or 40%, lower than it should be. The worst example among European capitals, however, is in Ankara. In the years since the overseas subsistence rates were first set, Turkey has experienced huge inflation. Prices have risen at an average of 22.5% every year. Despite that, Ankara's residual rate remains at 240 lira, as set in 2014. If it had increased with inflation, it would be over 2,500 lira today, which represents an unrealised tenfold increase.

In these situations, as a direct result of the Treasury not having revisited those rates over the last 12 years, airlines and other organisations are able to justify under-compensating their staff by pointing to what is essentially Government guidance. When I wrote to the Treasury with those concerns last year, the then Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (James Murray), informed me that in situations where expenses rates do not cover the actual costs of needing to eat, drink and sleep while abroad for work, the employers can instead choose to "pay actual expenses incurred". Unfortunately, not every company chooses to do that for their employees, with many of them instead choosing—I do not think this will be a surprise to any of us—to pay the lower rate, the Government's fixed rate.

The issue has a real and detrimental impact on the working lives of cabin crew. A constituent of mine working for an airline operating out of Gatwick airport was blunt about this, telling me that the fact that the rates are so far behind reality means that they have been forced to "miss meals" while abroad for work.

Another constituent stated that

"current scale rate allowances do not reflect the real costs we face on these trips",

and reiterated that

"the allowance provided does not cover even the most basic meals."

It is evident, therefore, that overseas scale rates must be raised. That is why I was delighted when, in his written statement, my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury committed to reviewing and uprating them last month. This has been a long time coming. While simply increasing the 2013 rates in line with inflation would be welcome, I hope the Treasury takes the opportunity to undertake a full review of how subsistence rates can be systematically improved.

Having secured this debate, I was contacted by Virgin Atlantic, which, among other things, raised concerns that there are some destinations where the current rate might not reflect the full cost of subsistence for an individual visiting or living in the city. For instance, it provided the example of Lagos where safety restrictions require pilots and cabin crew to remain in their hotels and rely on higher cost room service or onsite dining. It is its view—one that I share—that any review should give consideration to those concerns and ensure that safe accommodation is made affordable under new rates.

I am well aware that questions related to tax pose difficult decisions for Governments, particularly in times of global economic uncertainty such as these. But I would hope that we would all accept that people should not go without meals while undertaking travel essential to their work, particularly where those individuals might already be on a very low wage. I will closely follow the outcome of the Treasury's review of overseas scale rates, and I hope that the various issues I have highlighted today are reflected in its outcome.

4.8 pm

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Dan Tomlinson):

It is a pleasure to speak in this debate with you in the Chair, Sir Christopher. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb) for raising this important issue today and for the work that he and neighbouring MPs, on a cross-party basis, have been doing to highlight the concerns that their constituents have raised with them.

I can see that hundreds of people in the Crawley constituency have signed the petition. It is similar in Horsham and people near Heathrow and other major airports have signed it, too. The issue clearly affects many staff who work in the airline industry and, as my hon. Friend points out, particularly affects those who are on lower wages. Yes, they might enjoy and love the travel and going to visit so many different places as part of their work, as well as the benefits that come from a job working in the sky and working for airlines, but there are costs associated with being away from home. It was right to have the overseas scale rates system in place back in 2014, but it is not right at that the system has not been updated since then.

The OSRs play an important role in reducing administrative burdens when employees incur subsistence costs while travelling overseas, and the key thing is that they provide a practical alternative to reimbursing and evidencing every single expense. As a result, if they were abolished at any point in the future, that could place a significant burden on airlines, which is certainly something we want to avoid.

As my hon. Friend set out, the rates have remained more or less frozen since 2014. I was doing the maths earlier today in preparation for the debate, and I came up with a similar figure to him. If they had been uprated in line with inflation in the UK, they would have increased by 40% since 2014. Of course, inflation rates vary across the globe, but that gives us a sense of the size of the gap that has opened up over the last 12 years.

The Government have been listening to representations made by airlines, individuals and Members of Parliament, including my hon. Friend. As we announced just a few short weeks ago, we will review both the OSRs and the benchmark scale rates, which are the domestic equivalents that set out the scale rates for lunches and dinners that employees may have when they are in the UK on business.

We will also look not just at uprating the rates but at whether there is scope to simplify the OSRs. We want to engage in detail with businesses on such a proposal, and officials in HMRC have already begun that work. Rather than having hundreds of individual rates for individual countries that need to be updated in a painstaking and administratively costly way, and that are also difficult for businesses to administer, we may find that having buckets or bands works better for employers and employees. That is something we will want to look at as part of this review, so I would really welcome representations from my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley and the hon. Member for Horsham (John Milne) on what changes their constituents would like to see.

Let me be clear: we have not taken any decisions on where we would like to go, and our mind is not made up. We are convinced that we want to review the rates to make the system better, but we want to consider the issues carefully and gather evidence from those who are affected before a decision is made. Just last week, I met the CBI, which represents some of the large airlines, and it welcomed the announcement of a review. I look forward to receiving further representations from the private sector.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, it is important for the Government to strike the right balance between supporting businesses and maintaining fairness in the tax system, while also protecting the Exchequer to ensure that, in the round, we raise the necessary revenue to fund and put right our public services after the last 14 years, when too many were cut back. We also need to ensure that any administrative arrangements such as these remain straightforward and proportionate.

Of course, there is political change in the air, but I hope that this review will conclude in time for the Budget. We do not want to be in a place where, in years to come, we are still waiting for these changes. I hope that we can make swift progress in the coming months, so that my hon. Friend's constituents, as well as employees of airlines across the country, can see some improvement.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Horsham for his intervention. I will take the strength of feeling in their representations back to the Department, for as long as I will be there.

Question put and agreed to.

4.14 pm

Sitting suspended.

Support for Pig Farmers

4.30 pm

Harriet Cross (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for pig farmers.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I thank Members for coming to the debate. To say that the UK's pig industry is worried is a gross understatement. The sector has always experienced ups and downs, but the current trough and range of difficulties faced by our pig farmers is sustained and significant, and there seem to be few routes to stabilising the sector.

The current downturn is considered to have begun back in the autumn of 2025, and has been driven by a combination of factors, including an oversupply of pigs, stagnant demand and falling prices in Europe, which have put downward pressure on UK pig prices. The situation has been exacerbated by constraints in the processing sector and by rising costs. Next came the substantial backlog of pigs at the start of 2026; at its peak, as many as 100,000 pigs were left on-farm.

Although the worst of the backlog cleared, the standard pig price fell markedly and has remained low: it has fallen from about 208p per kilo in August 2025 to 178p per kilo now—a 15% fall. In the context of profit margins across agriculture that are sometimes only 1%, it is understandable why the fall in price over such a sustained period is causing issues for the sector.

However, it must be acknowledged that the standard pig price is very much an average price metric. Many producers are receiving significantly less than that—sometimes in the region of just 130p to 140p per kilo, which is significantly below the farm's break-even point. Indeed, a farmer I recently met in my constituency is losing about £50 per pig, and across Scotland, the industry has lost £5.7 million since January. Unless farmers are paid a price that at least covers the cost of production, there can be no future in the sector. It is as simple as that.

Lower welfare standards and the attractiveness to UK retailers of the flood of cheap pigmeat from the European continent is a key factor dictating the low UK price. Here lies a significant problem: the undercutting of UK pig farmers by retailers, food manufacturers and providers, be that in the food service sector or in local authority procurement, is making the viability of the UK pig sector even tougher. While I absolutely understand and appreciate the fine margins in hospitality, not least due to rising costs and seemingly ever-increasing taxation, and the tight budgets of our local authorities, more needs to be done to ensure that local British produce, be that pork, beef, lamb or other farm outputs, can be prioritised and offered to British consumers.

Fairness in the contracts for independent pig farmers is also a well-voiced concern. I recognise that the Fair Dealing Obligations (Pigs) Regulations 2025, which are designed to improve fairness and transparency across the UK pig supply chain, will come into effect for the sector next month. The regulations were introduced in recognition of the imbalance in bargaining power between individual pig producers and the relatively small number of large processors and purchasers. The changes will

[*Harriet Cross*]

include principles such as mandated written contracts, a clear pricing mechanism, mutually agreeable term lengths and fair notice periods.

Those regulations will not immediately resolve every challenge facing the sector. The industry still has concerns, and has requested that the Government undertake an assessment of whether the fair dealing regulations are truly robust enough to address the pricing and margin concerns of producers when dealing with processors. Is that something the Minister would consider?

Biosecurity concerns are never far away from the pig sector. Indeed, the outbreak of African swine fever in Spain and elsewhere on the European continent and the impact that that had on the export market, including to China, is partly responsible for the oversupply and depressed prices we are currently seeing. There is real and growing concern about the emergence of diseases such as African swine fever and about foot and mouth entering the UK and infecting our livestock—no one needs reminding of the devastation that the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak had. Every possible effort must be put into ensuring that these diseases do not arrive on our shores.

In winding up, I ask the Minister to comment on what proactive and robust steps the Government are taking to ensure that diseases like African swine fever do not spread to the UK, because more robust checks are needed. His answers to my recent written parliamentary questions and a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Dr Hudson) in the main Chamber last week show that these robust provisions are not in place. It feels like we have been lucky not to see cases of African swine fever, foot and mouth or any other significant livestock disease enter the UK. The UK's biosecurity system cannot rely on luck, because the consequences of any of these diseases entering the UK and our livestock is hard to overstate.

Before I conclude, I want to reflect briefly on the situation in Scotland. Although I appreciate that agriculture is devolved, a robust agricultural sector and supply chain and strong food production and biosecurity controls are relevant UK-wide. Indeed, the UK pig industry, of which Scotland plays a significant part, is worth £2 billion at the farm gate, £7 billion in retail sales and, considering food service and export values, £14 billion in total. As I said, Scotland does contribute to that. The Scottish pig industry is facing even more acute pressures than those in England. With just one single processor in Brechin and distances too large to transport the pigs for processing south of the border, Scottish pig farmers are seeing an even lower standard pig price than their English counterparts.

According to data that I have seen, the price being paid has barely got above 140p a kilo since April. At present, Scottish pig farmers have no formal contracts, so there is no guarantee that their finished pigs will even be taken. Having spoken to pig farmers in my Gordon and Buchan constituency—most recently just yesterday—there is genuine fear for the future of the sector. Just since January, Scotland has lost 15% of its pig herds and the average price per kilo has fallen by more than 20%. The pig sector in Scotland is down £5.7 million since January this year, with continued losses almost

guaranteed if prices remain suppressed. Almost half of those losses—more than £2.5 million—are in my constituency.

In closing, I want to ask the Minister just a single question, in the hope that it will be the most beneficial way to help the sector to address the challenges it is facing. My understanding is that Ministers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs last met the National Pig Association or the pig industry in November 2024. Will the Minister commit to meeting the NPA and, when he does, making sure that there is a substantial package brought forward that can help support the sector? The best way to support the sector, which is complex and facing a wide range of issues, is to meet those who know most about it. That is the best way that we can support our pig farmers going forward.

4.37 pm

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher.

My constituency spans Doncaster and North Lincolnshire—two very proud agricultural areas with a long and important connection to British pig farming. We are part of a region at the heart of British pork production. Yorkshire and the Humber accounts for around 40% of England's pig population. Pigmeat contributed £499 million to the region's agricultural output in 2024. The Isle of Axholme also has deep roots in the farming and food traditions of Lincolnshire. Few products symbolise that heritage more clearly than the Lincolnshire sausage, yet consumers cannot always be sure that a product carrying a Union flag, British branding or a traditional British name actually contains pork from pigs born, reared and slaughtered in the United Kingdom. We must address that problem.

Unprocessed pork must already carry origin information, but once that meat becomes bacon, ham, sausage or gammon, the picture becomes far less clear. Pork can be imported and then cured, sliced or packaged in Britain, while the finished product is presented to shoppers as British. The place where food is packaged is not the same as the origin of the food itself. For pork, the origin is where the pig was born, reared and slaughtered. That is the information that consumers want to know and should be able to see clearly.

Aphra Brandreth (Chester South and Eddisbury) (Con): The hon. Member is making a really important point about the need for consumers to be clear about where their food is produced and reared. I draw his attention to my private Member's Bill on that very topic. I hope that he and others across the House will support it.

Lee Pitcher: The hon. Lady has my full support—and, I am pretty sure, that of my farmers.

My farmers have told me how much this issue matters to them. When consumers can easily identify British pork, they actively choose to buy it. That supports British farms, British jobs and our rural communities, while rewarding producers who meet the high standards of animal welfare, environmental stewardship and food safety that we rightly expect. There is nothing wrong with imported food being sold in Britain, provided it is labelled honestly. What is wrong is allowing the true origin of the meat to be hidden behind British branding.

The principle should be simple: the Union flag on a pork product should mean British pork, not simply British packaging.

I therefore ask the Minister to genuinely consider—I was going to say genu-swine-ly, but I will not do that—extending mandatory country-of-origin labelling to processed pork products, requiring that information to appear clearly on the front of the packet, and ensuring that unqualified claims that a product is British are reserved for pork from pigs born, reared and slaughtered in the United Kingdom.

Pig farmers do not need another expression of sympathy; they need practical action that helps consumers to identify British produce and choose it with confidence. When shoppers pick up a packet carrying the Union flag or drawing on the proud reputation of UK farming, they should not have to search through the small print to discover where the pork came from. British branding should mean British farming.

4.41 pm

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) on securing this important and timely debate.

Pig farming is an important part of our rural economy in West Dorset. Alongside several family-run pig farms, we are home to a large integrated producer and businesses that support local employment, veterinary services, feed supplies, agricultural engineering, haulage and food processing. We are also fortunate to have Dorset's last remaining independent abattoir, which processes around 100 pigs a week and provides a vital local route to market for small family farms.

Since August 2025, the standard pig price has fallen from around 208p per kilogram to approximately 178p. However, many independent producers have said that they are receiving far less—in some cases, only 130p to 140p per kilogram. Some farmers are losing as much as £50 on every pig they sell. That is unsustainable. Once again, it is independent farmers who have borne the greatest burden. Around half of the UK's pig herd is owned by independent producers. If they disappear, rebuilding the capacity will take many years. We should remember that the United Kingdom is only about 58% self-sufficient in pork. We should never accept a situation where British farmers, who produce to some of the highest welfare standards anywhere in the world, are undercut by cheaper imports produced to standards that would not be permitted here.

No future trade agreement should weaken UK food safety, undermine British farmers or lower our animal welfare standards. West Dorset farmers are proud of the standards they have achieved. Every farmer I have spoken to wants to see further improvements in animal welfare. I want to see, as they do, an end to farrow crates and to inhumane or distressing methods of slaughter, such as carbon dioxide stunning for pigs, through the implementation of DEFRA's 2025 recommendations by the end of this Parliament.

We should work together to prevent unnecessarily painful practices in farming, but it must be properly funded. Farmers operating on small, or in many cases, non-existent, profit margins cannot absorb further mandated changes unless they are properly funded and

accompanied by practical support. One pig farmer in my constituency told me that they fully support moving towards better systems, but estimate that a realistic transition could take up to 15 years. For many family farms already carrying debt from previous reforms, unfunded regulation is not an option. If we move too quickly without proper support, we risk reducing British production and replacing it with imported pork products produced to lower welfare and food safety standards.

Small and medium-sized abattoirs continue to disappear at an alarming rate, with fewer than 200 now remaining across the United Kingdom. Rising inspection costs, energy prices, waste disposal costs and increasing regulatory burdens have all contributed to their decline. For independent pig farmers in West Dorset, our local abattoir is essential infrastructure. Without it, transport distances increase, haulage costs rise and farmers lose access to local markets. Supporting local processing capacity is therefore every bit as important as supporting primary production.

Farmers manage more than 70% of our land. They underpin our food security and sustain the economies of rural communities such as West Dorset. All they are asking for is fair markets, fair treatment, practical regulation, acknowledgment of all their hard work and the confidence to invest in their future.

4.44 pm

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Around one in five pigs in the country are reared in my part of the world: Norfolk and Suffolk. That means that when we talk about the future of the pig sector, we are not talking about an abstract issue; we are talking about thousands of local jobs, family farms, and a sector worth billions to our local economy. The industry faces plenty of challenges. Rising costs, global competition and pressure on farm incomes have been covered, so I want to focus on the one issue that could undo everything else if we get it wrong: biosecurity.

African swine fever remains the single biggest threat facing our pig industry. It has spread across Europe and Asia, but thankfully has never been detected here in the UK. We have a window of opportunity to keep it that way, but only if we take border biosecurity seriously. If ASF got into this country, the consequences would be devastating for farmers and could cost the industry an estimated £100 million. Once it is here, we cannot simply rewind the clock, so prevention has to come first. What consideration has the Department given to providing the public with more information about the risks of bringing meat products into the UK, strengthening checks on personal imports and introducing measures such as amnesty bins before customs clearance?

The previous Government created what many in the industry see as a weakness in our border arrangements by moving customs checks to Sevington, over 20 miles inland from Dover. That leaves a significant stretch between the port and the inspection site. Will the Minister look again at whether that arrangement provides the level of biosecurity our farming sector deserves? I would suggest that it does not.

[Ben Goldsborough]

Good biosecurity is not just about stopping disease at the border; it is also about making sure that farms are as resilient as possible if the worst should happen. The animal health and welfare pathway is a good example. It provides funded veterinary visits, including dedicated biosecurity advice, yet I understand that uptake remains at only about 7%. What more is being done to ensure that farmers know about the scheme and feel confident in accessing it?

Finally, I want to touch on vaccines. When witnesses from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate gave evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I asked about the resilience of veterinary vaccine supply chains. Their evidence highlighted the risk posed by manufacturing disruption, changing demand and wider global shocks. What is the Department doing in support of international efforts to develop an effective ASF vaccine and to ensure that, when one is available, we have resilient supply chains capable of getting it to farmers when they need it?

Our pig farmers produce world-class food to some of the highest welfare standards anywhere. They deserve a Government who match their effort by taking biosecurity just as seriously. If we get this right, we will protect livelihoods, strengthen food security and avoid an entirely preventable crisis. I hope the Minister will continue to make that his priority.

4.48 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) on securing the debate. We do not hear about pig farming as much as we hear about other farming sectors, but it is essential to our food system and rural economy. While this debate concerns the UK sector, I want to focus on the pressures facing producers in Scotland.

As we have heard, the Scottish pig sector is under enormous strain from low market prices, rising costs, processing constraints and competition from imports. Many farmers are now selling pigs well below the cost of production. NFU Scotland estimates that Scottish members of the United Pig Co-operative lost around £2.7 million in the first four months of this year alone. Some producers were losing up to £37 per pig, while a typical 500-sow unit could face annual losses approaching half a million pounds. Those figures are unsustainable for family farming businesses.

The consequences extend beyond individual farms. Scotland's pig sector contributes around £300 million to the economy and supports around 2,200 jobs, as well as haulage firms, feed merchants, vets, processors and other rural businesses. Once that critical mass is lost, it will be exceptionally difficult to rebuild. In my constituency, farmers such as Adam Marshall in Berwickshire have spent decades investing in high-quality Scottish pork and adding value through local enterprises, including Reiver Country Farm Foods and Oink. That entrepreneurial spirit should be encouraged, but even innovative, well-run family businesses cannot absorb sustained losses indefinitely. If businesses such as Adam's are struggling despite doing everything right, that should alarm us all.

I welcome the Scottish Government's recognition of the crisis through their £2 million emergency package for independent producers, but the industry is clear that it does not go far enough; the losses being sustained are far greater than the support on offer. Further assistance will be needed to protect Scotland's pig sector, rural jobs and domestic food production.

The UK Government must act too. Ministers should urgently convene an industry roundtable and resume regular engagement with the National Pig Association. It is concerning that no bilateral meeting has taken place since November 2024. The Government should review whether the fair dealing obligations are providing the protection that producers were promised, and farmers must not be left carrying an unfair share of commercial risk. We should also strengthen country-of-origin labelling, particularly in food service, so that consumers can support Scottish and British pork produced to high welfare and environmental standards.

Finally, biosecurity must remain a priority. African swine fever poses a serious threat, and robust border controls and disease preparedness are essential for protecting food security and the rural economy. Our pig farmers are resilient and innovative. They are asking not for special treatment, but for fair markets, sensible regulation, meaningful engagement and support proportionate to the crisis. I hope the Minister will listen and act.

4.51 pm

Terry Jermy (South West Norfolk) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher. I thank the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) for securing this important debate.

I am very proud of the more than 500 farms in my constituency. Since I was elected, I have been delighted to meet with more than 100 of them. Many of them are predominantly arable, as one might expect in Norfolk, but we also have plenty of farms that include pigs as either a significant or a smaller part of their operations. Farmer Ed Lankfer, based at Wereham in my constituency, was kind enough to host an NFU roundtable that covered a whole range of issues facing the farming industry. It has been said that there are more pigs than people in Norfolk, so when there are issues in the industry—as there currently are—communities like mine very much feel the impact.

The UK pig sector is going through a difficult period due to an oversupply of pigs, stagnant demand and falling EU prices that have put a downward pressure on UK prices. At the same time, there are rising costs, exacerbated by the conflict with Iran, as well as the constant risk of disease such as African swine fever. We may not have seen the worst of it yet. As I highlighted at DEFRA oral questions last week, the National Pig Association anticipates that by November we could see 10,000 to 15,000 pigs per week without an outlet to be sold, placing a significant financial burden on farmers and risking animal welfare issues.

Sadly, as in so many aspects of farming, there is a huge unfairness in the pig industry. That unfairness in the supply chain is hitting independent pig farmers, including those in my constituency. Independent producers are responsible for roughly 50% of the pig herd in the UK, and very often they lose out first and are the most financially squeezed in the industry.

So often when I meet farmers, we talk about issues that directly connect with my Labour values, particularly around fairness and justice. I urge the Minister to consider those values when discussing what can be done to support the pig industry. There is a huge power imbalance in the supply chain, and a lack of credible contractual relations between far too many pig sellers and buyers. Specifically, will the Minister review whether the fair dealing obligations are being upheld and whether they are robust enough?

Tackling the power imbalance, not just in the pig industry but in farming more generally, needs to be at the forefront of this Labour Government's fightback to support British farming. The commitment to co-operatives included in the farming road map could support a change in that direction, and I very much welcome that approach, but we need to move quickly to achieve the change we seek. Smaller family farms are increasingly being squeezed out of operation, and we must act before it is too late.

We should do this not just because we recognise the importance of food security, but because of our commitment to achieve economic growth in every postcode, including in rural communities like mine. There is huge growth potential in rural areas, and so often it is the family farm that underpins that growth. If the farm is doing well, it will invest in new machinery, undertake repairs and maintenance to buildings, and reinvest in the local environment. The lack of profitability and weakened resilience in the industry is hampering that growth and, by default, diminishing the prosperity of rural communities.

Later today, the Labour rural research group, which I am proud to be a member of, will publish its latest report, "The Future of the Rural Economy". I will not give too much away, but it confirms that there is huge public support for farming, and for the Government to do more to support the industry, and it recognises that food security is national security. Some 87% of respondents to our survey agreed that it is very important to sustain a strong UK farming industry, and 77% welcomed increased Government investment in the farming sector. As a Labour Government, we have an opportunity to do much more to support the pig industry, farming more generally, and our rural communities. I look forward to the Government grasping that opportunity.

4.55 pm

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher. I thank the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) for securing this important debate.

Since becoming the Member of Parliament for Melksham and Devizes, I have been extremely fortunate to visit a number of farms, including pig farms, and meet many outstanding local farmers, including Cameron Naughton at West End farm, an independent pig farm with an attached farm shop. Cameron recently wrote to me to share his thoughts and to ask me to represent him, as an independent farmer, in this debate. He told me that his business is losing about £5,000 a week. Operating a high-welfare, outdoor-bred, RSPCA-assured farm like Cameron's inevitably carries a much higher cost of production, but what he finds incomprehensible is that prices to the consumer keep

rising while the supermarket supply chains continue to make substantial profits that are not reflected in what farmers are paid.

Independent producers like Cameron are bearing the brunt of a market that has been declining since 2025, driven by a combination of factors: an oversupply of pigs, stagnating demand and falling prices to the farmer. With the UK pig breeding herd at a historic low, high-quality British products like Cameron's risk being replaced by lower-welfare imported meat, which brings with it a heightened risk of diseases such as swine fever and foot and mouth disease. The European Food Safety Authority has reported a 76% increase this year in African swine fever outbreaks among pigs in the EU.

I urge the Government, and particularly the incoming Prime Minister, not to forget our farmers and our rural communities. I ask them to sit down with the industry, particularly with independent farmers like Cameron, to determine what can be done to secure the survival of this vital sector and to help secure our country's vital food security.

4.58 pm

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is a great pleasure to participate in this debate, Sir Christopher, and to have the Minister in his place.

I agree with practically every word that has been said by colleagues across the House about the importance of the pig industry. It is the largest agricultural output of Yorkshire and the Humber and worth more than half a billion pounds a year, but as colleagues have set out, there has been a gradual concentration into what is now no more than about four major processors across the United Kingdom. That puts up the costs of transport. More importantly still, it means a loss of competition and the potential for that imbalance in market power to be used in a way that is counter to fairness—as the hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy) mentioned when talking about Labour values—and to the interests of the consumer. If there is one thing the Minister needs to do, aside from keeping our pig industry safe from biohazards, it is ensure that there is healthy competition in the market so that the consumer is well served.

Earlier this afternoon, I spoke to a local Holderness pig farmer who was at the Great Yorkshire Show. She told me that she has had notice on contracts for the processing of the pigs, and she no longer has anywhere to send her pigs from 13 August. The pigs are literally going to be backing up on the farm, with nowhere to go.

Harriet Cross: 13 August is obviously a very important date, because it is when the fair dealing regulations come in. There have been warnings from the sector that that sort of thing will happen and about why it is so important. I ask the Minister for a proper review of these obligations to assess how they are working for the sector, so that we do not have situations like the one that my right hon. Friend has just mentioned.

Graham Stuart: I have represented pig farmers in Holderness for 21 years—it has always been volatile, and the farmers accept the volatility, but never has there been quite such a concatenation of issues all at the same time, including the introduction of the regulations and the closure of abattoirs. Scotland was hit first, as my hon. Friend will know, with the closure of abattoirs

[Graham Stuart]

there. The abattoir at Spalding has now gone. This is a very serious issue, which I hope the Minister will be able to look at.

Processors are also buying out the independents. Again, looking at the raw political elements of this situation, the truth is that independents who are struggling to find anywhere to have their pigs processed become more vulnerable and can be bought out, in which case competition will be further reduced.

I ask the Minister to use his good offices to get his officials to engage with major processors to ensure that no independent farmer is left unable to have their pigs processed, because that would create not only an animal welfare crisis, but a financial crisis for farmers, making them easy meat—pardon the language, Sir Christopher—for others to buy them out.

This genuinely is a crisis; the danger is that one hears that word too often, but this situation absolutely is one, not only for pig farmers, who are very important to my constituency, but for consumers in the long term. I hope the Minister will take that very seriously on board and will look to intervene, to ensure that every farmer has somewhere to have their pigs processed.

5.2 pm

Aphra Brandreth (Chester South and Eddisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) on securing this debate. The financial pressures facing pig farmers—indeed, farmers in every sector of our rural economy—are serious. Independent producers have seen prices collapse and contracts withdrawn, and it is important that we take time to recognise those challenges.

I will focus on something that is fundamental to the future of the pig industry and indeed to the health of our nation: biosecurity. Last month I asked DEFRA whether it had met the National Pig Association since the last recorded meeting, more than nine months ago, the response confirmed that Ministers have not met the NPA directly for a bilateral meeting. Perhaps if they had, they would be more aware of the NPA's stark warning that the UK remains poorly protected when it comes to biosecurity.

An outbreak of disease here would devastate British agriculture and our supply chains, impacting the taxpayer to the tune of billions of pounds. We must learn from the past. The 2001 foot and mouth outbreak cost the public and private sectors the equivalent of almost £15 billion in today's money. An outbreak of African swine fever would immediately close export markets worth around £500 million each year. Yet despite those risks, the NPA warns that large volumes of illegally imported meat continue to enter the UK from countries where those diseases are present.

I hope that the Minister recognises the severity and urgency of this matter. I urge him to set out what steps the Department is taking to ensure that staff at borders and checkpoints are appropriately resourced and trained to manage the risk of imports, and how DEFRA Ministers are working with colleagues from across Government, including the Home Office and the Cabinet Office, to ensure a cohesive and joined-up approach.

As the Government negotiate a new sanitary and phytosanitary agreement with the European Union, we need reassurances from the Minister that the Government will not cave in any way on our world-leading biosecurity standards in an attempt to placate and pacify the EU. Reduced border checks under any future SPS agreement could undermine our market and increase the risk of animal diseases entering the UK.

Does the Minister recognise that risk? Would he consider providing multi-year funding for the Dover Port Health Authority and other agencies that protect our borders, to strengthen enforcement and deter criminal activity? British pig farmers have shown real leadership: they have reduced antibiotic use by almost 70%, invested in higher welfare standards and continually improved animal health. They are doing their part. DEFRA must now step up, match their commitment to our food security and wellbeing, and act accordingly.

5.5 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship again, Sir Christopher. I thank the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) for setting the scene incredibly well.

It is a pleasure to champion a sector that is not only vital to my constituency, but a cornerstone of the entire economy of Northern Ireland: our fantastic, resilient yet deeply struggling pig industry. When we talk about agriculture in Northern Ireland, we are talking about the lifeblood of our rural communities. There are some 27,000 family farms across the province and our intensive sectors, particularly pork and poultry, punch vastly above their weight. Northern Ireland holds the highest density of pigs and poultry anywhere in the United Kingdom, and for a nation of some 1.9 million, we produce more chickens and pigs than Scotland and Wales combined—that is not to boast, but it is a fact of life and a statistic I want to put on record. We feed millions of people across the United Kingdom and the globe with world-class, top-quality, traceable pork products. As I stand here today, however our independent pig farmers are facing an existential crisis.

Adam Dance (Yeovil) (LD): As the hon. Member knows, small abattoirs are at breaking point in almost every imaginable way. One big issue is contradicting and inconsistent inspections. Does he agree that the Government urgently need to set out a clearer plan to streamline the regulation system?

Jim Shannon: I certainly do. That is one of the things that the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan and others have asked for, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

Sadly, pig farming cannot simply be switched on and off like a tap. It requires immense long-term investment, precision and dedication, but it has been squeezed to the absolute limit. Our farmers have battled skyrocketing input costs: feed, energy and fertiliser prices have gone through the roof. I declare an interest as a member of the Ulster Farmers Union, which has been forced to hold emergency meetings with major processors such as Sofina Foods at its Cookstown site, because of severe contract reductions and reductions in weekly slaughter volumes. Our independent family farms are being left adrift in a sea of commercial uncertainty and Ulster Farmers Union has had to take those concerns directly to major retailers.

I ask the Minister in his speech to take up the issue of cost, and specifically what farmers are getting for their products and what Tesco—I name it—and other large supermarket chains are getting. The supply chain is simply broken, and we need intervention. The Northern Ireland Executive have to deal with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs back home, but macroeconomic stability, supply chain legislation and national food security are firmly the responsibility of this Government.

Our family farms need protection from immediate financial ruin and the Government must engage with the major supermarket giants to ensure that they are paying fair and reasonable prices. If we do not support our pig farmers right now, we will see generational family businesses shut their gates forever. Let us remember this one thing: if there are no farmers, there is no food.

5.8 pm

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) for securing this timely debate.

I grew up on a sheep and beef farm, and when I was about 11 years old, I bought 13 pigs from market to take home. They became more like pets; I used to play football with them—

Graham Stuart: You used to kick them around?

Dr Chambers: No, I used to play football matches with them. They were a lot of fun, and I learned that of all livestock, they are potentially the most intelligent and certainly some of the most affectionate animals. I had a particularly interesting visit to Sparsholt agricultural college in Winchester with the National Pig Association. I used to love going there when I was a vet to treat the animals; now I go there as an MP to look at its teaching and facilities. It has a fantastic indoor, high-welfare unit that delivers piglets without the use of farrowing crates, and I pay tribute to the staff there for their teaching and the welfare standards that they maintain.

To touch on something that many Members have spoken about today, one of the top issues threatening the pig industry is biosecurity at the border. I have been to Dover and met the vets and border inspectors there who look at the potentially illegal meat coming in and the tonnes of it that get seized. The crazy thing is that currently, if I were caught smuggling meat into the UK, I could not be arrested and my vehicle could not be seized, but the meat would be confiscated and my vehicle would have to be cleaned, because it would be a biosecurity risk. The only deterrent to trying to smuggle illegal meat into the UK would be that I might get my van cleaned for free at the taxpayer's expense. That is absolutely ridiculous. I totally understand that enforcing biosecurity at such a busy border is difficult and comes with huge challenges, there are not even suitable deterrents in place for people who get caught. I urge the Minister at the very least to look at implementing some.

One thing that the pig industry has done phenomenally well is to reduce antibiotic use by 72% since 2015—just over 10 years. That is hugely important, not only for animal welfare, but for public health. Antimicrobial resistance is like a slow pandemic; it never gets media attention, but it will kill 39 million people by 2050 if we do not take action. It is important that we do not

undercut our high animal welfare and farming standards with products from countries that have lower standards. Countries that use antibiotics as growth promoters are not only farming with lower welfare standards, but contributing to this huge public health crisis, so we must do our bit to tackle that issue.

The hon. Member for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme (Lee Pitcher) mentioned labelling. It is hugely important that we can identify where meat has been produced. Consumers are currently being hoodwinked; they believe that they are buying products from animals reared in the UK, but it turns out that they were only processed in the UK. They want to support British farmers and high animal welfare standards, so it is completely wrong that they are being hoodwinked into buying products that potentially undermine UK standards.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello) made a very important point about the lack of small abattoirs in the UK. Their closure is a huge animal welfare issue, as animals have to be transported further than necessary to be slaughtered, and a huge economic problem too.

I urge the Minister to see how the Government can work with the pig industry to move away from the CO₂ stunning of pigs. It is a big welfare concern, and the British Veterinary Association and others are keen for the industry to make a sustainable transition away from it. It causes a lot of concern to a lot of constituents, and it really upsets me as a vet.

Finally, I urge the Minister to meet the National Pig Association as soon as possible to look at supporting UK farmers, maintaining high animal welfare standards and improving our nation's food security.

5.13 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) for securing this important debate.

The British pig sector is in crisis, and our pig farmers need our help. My hon. Friends the Members for Gordon and Buchan and for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) rightly spoke the challenges north of the border. My right hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) rightly called on the Minister to ensure that no independent farmer is unable to have their pigs processed. That is absolutely the crux of the issue.

Let us be clear about what is at stake. The British pig sector contributes about £14 billion to our economy—£2 billion at the farm gate, £7 billion in retail sales, and exports to 88 counties worth almost £500 million. It is a major part of our farming industry, and we cannot afford to let the current financial challenges go any further.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is right to outline the exports from the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, we export almost 80% of our product, so it is even more critical for us.

Robbie Moore: Absolutely. There must be a UK-wide approach.

[Robbie Moore]

The warning signs have been there for months. Since last autumn, the sector has been hit by oversupply, stagnant demand, falling European prices, factory disruptions and rising costs all at once. At one point earlier this year, around 100,000 pigs were backed up on British farms. That backlog has largely cleared now, but not without cost. The standard pig price has fallen by around 30p a kilogram, from roughly 208p to 178p.

That is only part of the picture, because the vast majority of independent farmers will be receiving much less than that, as was noted by my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon and Buchan. No market can survive on those terms. Without urgent action, the sector faces being pushed towards collapse. It is our independent producers who are bearing the brunt of the pressures faced by the sector, with thousands now seeing their contracts terminated early by major processors. Somewhere between 12,000 and 14,000 pigs a week are affected by notices being served on producers.

The Government simply cannot stand on the sidelines and hope that the market corrects itself, because by autumn, the industry fears that up to 10,000 to 15,000 pigs a week could have no market at all. If nothing changes, we know what follows—more farm closures, more herds reduced and more businesses walking away from the industry altogether.

The fair dealing obligations for pig contracts were brought in to fix the problem exposed by the last crisis—unequal bargaining power, poor contracts and a lack of fairness between producers and processors. We can all agree that those were worthwhile aims but if, during the implementation period, producers are still seeing contracts terminated early in record numbers and our farmers are still losing money on every pig they sell, the Government have to ask whether the regulations are doing what Parliament originally intended. Will the Minister commit today to an urgent assessment of whether the regulations are fit for purpose?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chester South and Eddisbury (Aphra Brandreth) noted, there are also longer-term challenges. The threat from African swine fever and foot and mouth disease is real and ongoing. Protecting our borders from illegal meat imports and strengthening our disease defences must be a priority. What are the Government doing to work across Departments, including with the Home Office, to make sure that these live issues are addressed?

The industry also needs a sensible workforce strategy. Like much of agriculture, pig farming is struggling with labour shortages. It needs a strategy that builds a workforce based on domestic skills and apprenticeships.

We must also address the issue of transparency. Customers want to buy British and retail labelling has come a long way, but food services still rely heavily on imported pork, often with far less clarity about where that pork comes from. British producers deserve a level playing field and British consumers deserve to know what is on their plate.

That is why the Conservative party has proposed closing the loophole that lets imported food, once merely processed or packaged in the UK, carry branding that many shoppers reasonably mistake as British. What

progress has been made since the Government's response on the food labelling consultation? Do the Government intend to strengthen country of origin rules?

British pig farmers are not asking the Government to solve every single commercial challenge, but they are asking for regulations that genuinely protect producers rather than leave them exposed. Above all, they are asking the Government to recognise the strategic importance of British food production before more independent producers simply disappear for good.

We cannot lose more of this vital industry. For the sake of our farmers, our rural communities and our country's long-term food security, the Government must engage with key stakeholders. It is disappointing to hear that the last bilateral meeting between Ministers and the National Pig Association was back in September 2025. I call on the Minister to have an urgent meeting—I understand there may be one tomorrow. If that is the case, will the Minister guarantee that those meetings will continue at pace and at regular intervals with the British Pig Association, so that we can make sure that this vital industry is protected long into the future?

5.19 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Stephen Morgan): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I congratulate the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) on securing this incredibly important debate, and on the constructive manner in which she contributed this afternoon.

I am grateful to all Members who have contributed to the debate and for the thoughtful way in which they have raised a number of concerns currently facing the pig sector and their constituencies. As my hon. Friends the Members for South West Norfolk (Terry Jermy) and for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough) passionately alluded to, the pig sector is woven into the fabric of the UK's food system, underpinning food security, sustaining rural communities and driving agricultural productivity across the country. Beyond its economic importance, pork has long held a place at the nation's table, from cherished regional specialities and traditional Sunday roasts to the everyday meals enjoyed by millions of families. As both a source of nourishment and a part of our culinary heritage, British pig production remains integral to what we eat.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk said, however, this is a moment of considerable pressure for the sector. Pig producers are navigating a period of profound difficulty, confronting a range of economic and structural challenges across all nations of the UK. I thank my Scottish and Northern Irish colleagues for their contributions this afternoon.

Recent reports have highlighted concerns about processors seeking to reduce pig numbers and producers—particularly independent producers—receiving notice that their contracts will be terminated. Those developments reflect a difficult market environment. A combination of increased production in recent years, changing consumer patterns and wider pressures in European pork markets has resulted in excess supply across parts of the sector. We recognise that this market adjustment is creating uncertainty for producers, particularly those affected by changes to supply arrangements.

That is why the Government will continue to engage with the industry as it responds to the challenges it faces. I personally assure all Members that I have prioritised meeting with the sector and, indeed, am meeting with the National Pig Association tomorrow to discuss the pressures that the sector is facing. I also note the NPA's request for ongoing dialogue in its briefing for today's debate. I hope tomorrow is the start of that relationship.

Turning to intervention powers, in the event of exceptional market disruption, the Government have powers under section 21 of the Agriculture Act 2020 to provide support to farmers in England. Agriculture is a devolved matter, and there are similar powers available to devolved Governments should they consider intervention in the sector appropriate. The powers under the Agriculture Act in England are intended to deal with unforeseen short-term shocks to agricultural markets, where there is a significant adverse effect on price achievable for one or more agricultural products. Section 21 powers were previously used during the exceptional disruption faced by the pig sector in 2021, when a combination of reduced processing capacity, the impact of the covid-19 pandemic, interruptions to CO₂ supply and a shortage of skilled butchers led to a substantial backlog of pigs on farm.

We recognise the challenges facing the sector today, but our assessment is that the circumstances are materially different from those seen in 2021. The current pressures reflect broader market conditions rather than a breakdown in processing capacity or market function. As such, the threshold for intervention in England under section 21 of the Agriculture Act is not currently met. As it is a devolved matter, it is for devolved Governments to take a judgment on intervention.

Graham Stuart: I congratulate the Minister on the meeting he will have tomorrow and his offer to engage. I gently press him on reaching out. He has made it clear that he does not think that the current situation matches that of 2021. I accept that, but could he reach out and use his good offices to ensure that no farmer is left with pigs backing up on their farm? Could he lean, in the most genial manner possible, on the processors to ensure that farmers get those pigs off the farm and processed? They would be very grateful if the Minister could do so.

Stephen Morgan: I am very alive to the issues. That is why engagement with the sector is very important. I have powers available to me, if necessary, but we are keen to monitor the situation. That is why today's debate has been so important.

We are aware that the sector experienced a temporary backlog on farms earlier this year. The industry took action to address the issue, including through increasing processing capacity, and the backlog has now been cleared. Although that was a welcome development, wider pressures remain and we will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Turning to points made by Members about Government actions to strengthen fairness and resilience in the pig sector, the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan rightly raised the Fair Dealing Obligations (Pigs) Regulations 2025. They are designed to end unfair contract practices and give British pig farmers greater transparency and certainty in their commercial relationships. I will reflect on her points. The regulations will be fully in force from

13 April this year, when all contracts for the purchase of pigs will need to be compliant. While we are aware of some processors serving notice on their producers or reducing contract volumes, our understanding is that these notices are being issued in line with contractual provisions. The fair dealing regulations are enforced by the agricultural supply chain adjudicator, which producers can contact if they are concerned that their contracts are not compliant with the regulations. I assure the hon. Member that the regulations will be subject to statutory review processes that will assess their effectiveness and whether any changes may be required in future.

Alongside the UK-wide fair dealing obligation regulations, support is also available to pig farmers in England through the animal health and welfare pathway. Pig farmers can receive £648 for a vet on-farm to look at general animal health and welfare issues and carry out testing. Farmers can receive up to £1,087 for further testing and advice if their farm has PRRS. In 2026, £50 million was made available through the farming equipment and technology fund to help farmers in England to improve animal health and welfare, productivity and slurry management.

On the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk, the ambition of our farming road map is not simply to help farmers weather immediate challenges, but to create the conditions for a farming sector that is productive, resilient and profitable for generations to come. That means backing innovation, improving animal health and welfare, strengthening fairness across the supply chains and ensuring that farmers are better equipped to respond to changing and challenging markets. A strong domestic pig sector has an important role to play in delivering food security, supporting rural growth and maintaining the high standards that British consumers rightly expect.

By investing in productivity and resilience today, we can help to ensure that British pig farming remains competitive and successful in the years ahead. My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk and the hon. Member for Gordon and Buchan raised the important issue of African swine fever. I assure her that to help to prevent the uncontrolled movement of meat products into the United Kingdom, DEFRA has introduced safeguard measures that prohibit personal imports of pork into GB from the EU. The commercial import of pork from areas under African swine fever controls is not permitted. We are also funding the Port of Dover to ensure that illegal movement of meat into England does not take place. Since 2022, we have provided over £14 million of operational funding to the Dover port association.

I thank Members again for their thoughtful contributions to the debate. The concerns they raised have reinforced the importance of continuing to work closely with producers, processors and the wider industry. Our commitment is clear: to support a farming sector that not only is able to withstand future shocks, but is confident, profitable and able to seize the opportunities that lie ahead.

5.27 pm

Harriet Cross: Given that there is a Division in the House, I will keep this very short. I thank everyone for participating in the debate. I hope the Minister's meetings will be constructive. I ask him to go in with an open

[Harriet Cross]

mind and listen to what the NPA is saying. It is not sounding a false alarm; it is genuinely very worried about the future of its sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Government support for pig farmers.

5.28 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 14 July 2026

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Deepening the UK's Trade Relationships

The Minister for Trade (Chris Bryant): Trade remains central to this Government's mission to drive sustainable economic growth and to ensure that UK firms can access the opportunities presented by a rapidly evolving global economy.

This Government's trade strategy places international partnerships at the heart of that ambition. We are focused on strengthening the UK's position as a base for businesses to connect with global markets, while supporting high-value jobs, boosting investment and reinforcing our economic resilience. A key aspect of this pattern of international trading relationships is our membership of the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership.

Today, I am announcing the launch of a public consultation to inform the next phase of the United Kingdom's trade relationships with four global partners—Indonesia, the Philippines, the United Arab Emirates and Uruguay—as we explore how the UK should respond to accession talks with certain CPTPP candidate countries.

Parties to the CPTPP, including the UK, established an accession working group with Uruguay in 2025, and on 26 June 2026, CPTPP parties announced the start of preparatory discussions on accession with Indonesia, the Philippines and the UAE:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2026-06-29/hcws154>

Uruguay's accession working group is now well under way, with meetings scheduled

The Government therefore want to hear views on the opportunities, priorities and considerations associated with deepening the UK's trading relationships with these economies. CPTPP accession represents the most likely route to deepening trading relationships with the majority of them, but the call for input does not assume a single route and also invites views on other appropriate trade policy mechanisms, including bilateral free trade agreements where applicable and relevant.

This consultation marks an early but important stage in the process of assessing future trade opportunities. The call for input published today provides businesses, civil society, consumers and individuals across the UK with the chance to share their insights and priorities, ensuring that any future negotiations are informed by a strong evidence base and reflect the needs of the UK economy.

The Government will carefully consider all responses alongside further economic and policy analysis. This will inform decisions on the UK's overall approach to engagement with these partners. The call for input closes on 14 September 2026 and can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/deepening-uk-trade-relationships-with-indonesia-the-philippines-the-united-arab-emirates-and-uruguay>

I will keep Parliament closely informed as this work progresses. Further updates will be provided in due course, including ahead of any decision to progress to an accession working group or other negotiations.

[HCWS235]

Horizon Family Members Redress Scheme: Registration

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Blair McDougall): On 19 March, I updated the House about this Government's preparations to launch a redress scheme for family members of postmasters most affected by the Horizon scandal.

As we approach the anniversary of the publication of volume 1 of the Post Office Horizon IT inquiry report, which recommended that financial redress should be provided to close family members of those most adversely impacted by the Horizon scandal, I want to reassure those awaiting updates that this scheme is progressing and that we remain committed to helping this group.

I am happy to announce that the Horizon family member redress scheme will open for registration on 16 July 2026. This will allow potential applicants to come forward and begin the process by submitting information that will support the assessment of their applications later this autumn. Applicants will be able to access the registration form, alongside further information about the scheme, here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/horizon-family-members-redress-scheme>

Guidance for prospective applicants is also available at that link, setting out the type of documents that will be required to demonstrate eligibility once we start to consider claims. This guidance will help applicants to prepare the relevant documents in advance, so they are not unduly held up demonstrating their eligibility.

Processing of cases is expected to begin in the autumn of this year, once the Department has completed the necessary procurement steps to appoint an external supplier to manage this work.

At that point, cases will be dealt with in the order they were received. Those who register now will be among the first to have their cases examined. Those who are unable to register now or wish to wait until a later date are free to do so and this will not impact their cases other than them being considered slightly later.

[HCWS232]

Insolvency Service Annual Plan

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Blair McDougall): The Insolvency Service is the Government agency that delivers public services to those affected by financial distress or failure by providing frameworks to deal with insolvency and the financial misconduct that sometimes accompanies or leads to it.

The Insolvency Service plays a key role underpinning confidence in our financial markets: maximising economic returns to creditors from insolvency situations, supporting those in financial distress, helping them to return to economic activity, and tackling financial wrongdoing through its investigation and enforcement work. Its enforcement role is increasing substantially to meet the Government's ambitions to tackle economic crime.

This year, the Insolvency Service has reinforced its commitment to supporting businesses and citizens. They are supporting the delivery of the Government's priorities in supporting regulatory reform, reducing administrative burdens on businesses, and driving forward economic growth, putting more money in people's pockets and helping to rebuild Britain. This will ensure that the UK is a key destination for investment, with a regulatory regime that is fit for purpose and achieves value for money for the taxpayer. I have asked it to focus on:

Pro-active review of the key regulatory requirements which are placed on the insolvency profession, both to reduce burdens and to enable and facilitate use of new and emerging technologies.

Developing policy proposals to specifically support small and medium-sized businesses and ensure proportionate enforcement action that better supports growth.

Continuous improvement of its service delivery and interface with businesses through investing in and modernising its systems and processes.

The Insolvency Service's agency plan for 2026 to 2027 will be published in full on gov.uk.

[HCWS231]

Sixth Assimilated Law Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Blair McDougall): Today the Secretary of State has laid a report before Parliament pursuant to the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 and published it on gov.uk. This report updates the House in line with the obligations under section 17 of the REUL Act, which requires a report to be published and laid before Parliament every six months until 23 June 2026 detailing all revocations and reforms of assimilated law. As this is the final (sixth) report being laid before the House, section 17 of the REUL Act removes the requirement to set out the Government's future plans to revoke and reform assimilated law.

The report today summarises the data on the assimilated law dashboard, providing the public with information about the amount of assimilated law there is and where it sits across Departments. The dashboard was updated for the final time on 14 July 2026 and reflects the position as of 23 June 2026, showing a total of 6,921 instruments of REUL/assimilated law concentrated over approximately 400 unique policy areas. Since the previous update to the dashboard, 133 assimilated law instruments have either been revoked or reformed. In addition, Departments have undertaken further analysis and amended their record of assimilated law. As a result, a net figure of 2,700 instruments have been revoked or reformed in total. Section 17 of the REUL Act does not require the dashboard to be updated beyond the final reporting period of 24 December 2025 to 23 June 2026. As such, tracking and reporting of assimilated law, including publication of the assimilated law dashboard, will now end. After a six-month post-publication period, the dashboard will be taken offline and replaced by a downloadable version of the last dataset on gov.uk.

These steps are deemed proportionate as there is no clear policy rationale for continuing to track assimilated law once the statutory requirement expires. Any reforms to assimilated law would be made to truly support Government priorities.

The report provides details of 46 statutory instruments which were made by the Government using powers under the REUL Act and other domestic legislation since the end of the last reporting period. These statutory instruments amend assimilated law to deliver the Government's priorities. This includes, for example, The Provision of Services (Amendment and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2026, which support this Government's pledge to cut the administrative burden of regulation to business by 25% by the end of this Parliament. This statutory instrument supports an open, transparent, and proportionate licensing regime to reduce costs for business.

On 23 June 2026, the majority of REUL Act powers expired. The Government can continue making changes to assimilated law to support the national interest through other domestic legislation. Looking ahead, the Government will progress reform, where desirable, of assimilated law to ensure regulation creates the conditions for sustainable growth whilst upholding consumer and environmental protections.

[HCWS233]

CABINET OFFICE

National Resilience: Annual Statement

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Darren Jones): On 8 July 2025, the Government published our resilience action plan, committing to update Parliament with an annual overview of the UK's resilience. Today I will fulfil that commitment alongside publishing an annual update on the implementation of both the resilience action plan and biological security strategy.

This resilience work is informed by the national security risk assessment, the Government's assessment of the most serious risks facing the UK. Today we published a version of this document, the national risk register, which includes a summary of all but the most sensitive, classified risks. Ninety-five risks are listed in total.

For example, conflict in the middle east and Russia's war in Ukraine have exposed the vulnerabilities in global energy supply chains and driven up energy prices, and the increasing sophistication and proliferation of artificial intelligence not only brings huge opportunities, but threats too if it is weaponised by criminals against us. This could include novel ways of developing or carrying out hostile cyber-attacks against businesses and our critical infrastructure.

As we saw with temperatures across the UK breaking records in May, only to be exceeded again in June, the risks we face from climate change cannot be underestimated, from our infrastructure, food and water systems or people's immediate health. Climate change is also exacerbating the spread of high-consequence infectious diseases, alongside the changing boundaries of the human-animal interface. The incidence of highly pathogenic avian influenza, Ebola, and Andes hantavirus are examples from the last few months alone.

As we set out in the resilience action plan implementation report, also published today, having resilient public services and infrastructure is how we safeguard our national security. Under this Government, defence spending will rise to almost £80 billion a year by 2029—the

biggest sustained boost to defence spending since the Cold War. We have also accelerated our home defence planning, including updating the Government war book and increasing the emphasis on aligning military and civilian efforts if international hostilities affect the UK. We will rigorously test these plans through the largest UK home defence exercise in several decades in 2027, to ensure that should the worst ever happen, we will always be ready.

Later this year, we will publish an energy resilience strategy to strengthen the resilience of our energy system in the UK and a transport resilience strategy, setting out how we will work across these sectors to deliver secure and resilient systems for the UK public.

While Government will do all it can, we can all play our part to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe. As the storms earlier this year showed, extreme weather events can cause significant and prolonged disruption to the essential services on which we all rely.

Today, I can announce that the Government will launch a national resilience public awareness campaign later this year, in order to inform the public of the small but important steps they can take to be prepared in case of emergencies and disruption—be that severe weather or a cyber-attack which can impact access to power, water, phone signal or local shops to get food.

The public sector resilience system is key and must continually evolve to the changing risk landscape. For over two decades, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 has supported a consistent, co-operative approach to emergency preparedness and response across the UK, but it must keep pace to meet future challenges. To ensure this legislative framework remains strong and as relevant as possible today, we are launching a call for views on the Act's implementation review of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to gather evidence from across the resilience community on where it may need updating to reflect the modern world we live in.

Turning to the UK Government's biological security strategy, the biological security landscape has continued to evolve and the threats we face are more likely, diverse and interconnected. A future pandemic or the risk that hostile actors use biological weapons could permanently scar the UK's social and economic resilience. Over the last year, we have made strong progress against our commitments on biological security, including:

- delivering Exercise Pegasus: the largest tier 1 pandemic scenario simulation in UK history;

- establishing a network of national biosecurity centres, backed by £1.83 billion of investment to ensure a rapid, holistic "One Health" response to future crises;

- securing critical infrastructure with Moderna's new mRNA vaccine manufacturing centre;

- publishing a new pandemic preparedness strategy, supported by an additional £1 billion in health protection measures, and a new UK strategic approach to bio surveillance, to ensure that we are better positioned to detect biological threats; and

- operationalising a biothreats radar to provide real-time data on biological incidents, while pioneering new approaches to monitoring the near-term convergence of AI and biology.

Today, I have published the biological security strategy implementation report, setting out further commitments to ensure that, by 2030, the UK is resilient against a spectrum of biological threats and a world leader in responsible innovation.

Copies of the following documents have been made available on www.gov.uk

today:

- The UK Government Resilience Action Plan: 2026 Implementation Report

- The UK Government Biological Security Strategy: 2026 Implementation Report

- The National Risk Register and supplementary guidance

- A Call for Views for Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Post Implementation Review

[HCWS244]

National Security and Investment Act 2021: Annual Report 2025-26

The Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister (Darren Jones): I am today laying before Parliament the annual report covering the operation of the National Security and Investment Act 2021 for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. This fulfils the requirements under section 61 of the NSI Act and a copy of the report will also be published on gov.uk.

The Government are committed to ensuring the NSI Act supports growth by facilitating investment into our most sensitive sectors in a way that protects our national security. It must also do so as effectively, efficiently, and transparently as possible. This will give investors the certainty they need to promote ongoing growth across the UK.

The report shows that the Government took a decision on whether to call in or clear all notified acquisitions within the review period's statutory 30 working days, and the vast majority were cleared to proceed within this period. Of the 1,220 notifications reviewed, 95.6% were notified that no further action would be taken, and 4.4% were called in. In this reporting period, nine final orders were issued and four called-in acquisitions were withdrawn before a decision was made.

This report shows that notifications, call-ins, final orders, withdrawals, and final notifications covered many different sectors and acquirers' countries of origin.

[HCWS238]

TREASURY

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism: July 2026 Delivery Update

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Dan Tomlinson): The Government are introducing a carbon border adjustment mechanism from 1 January 2027 which will ensure that highly traded, carbon-intensive goods which are imported into the UK face a comparable carbon price to what is paid by manufacturers producing the same goods in the UK.

Following Royal Assent of the Finance Act 2026, which provides the legislative framework for the UK CBAM, the Government consulted on CBAM secondary legislation in early 2026. After considering the responses to the consultation carefully, the first tranche of secondary legislation has been laid today, setting out the majority of the detailed design and administrative framework for CBAM.

Further secondary legislation, confirming details on how to monitor, report and verify emissions, will follow. Comprehensive guidance will also be published later in the year, which will further assist businesses in complying with CBAM.

The scope of CBAM remains unchanged, with the sectors included being iron and steel, aluminium, fertiliser, hydrogen and cement.

The Government recognise that stakeholders are keen to know more about the UK's approach to setting default values. The Treasury is carefully considering the methodology for setting these values.

The Government will set out specific values in the autumn; ahead of that, I can reassure interested parties that in line with schedule 17 of Finance Act 2026, the Treasury's guiding principle in setting default values will be to ensure liable persons do not gain an advantage from using default values over determining the actual embodied emissions of imported CBAM goods.

This means that default values will not be set as a simple global average, but will instead be based on a trade-weighted average. In order to best reflect the imports most likely to rely on default values rather than actual emissions, we will look to exclude data from jurisdictions with robust mandatory MRV systems such as the EU. Where appropriate, we will consider applying additional mark-ups to ensure the environmental integrity of CBAM.

The Government committed previously to consider the feasibility of moving to an alternative approach in future, and will set out more detail on future plans for default values in the autumn, alongside the full list of default values for 2027.

[HCWS245]

DEFENCE

Naval Base Infrastructure

The Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry (Luke Pollard): I am today announcing the largest investment in the United Kingdom's naval bases since the end of the cold war.

As set out in the strategic defence review, improving readiness and strengthening our ability to generate maritime forces at pace is central to the Government's approach to national security in an increasingly uncertain world. Our naval bases are critical national infrastructure, and their condition directly affects the availability, credibility and effectiveness of the Royal Navy.

As confirmed in the defence investment plan, I can announce today that the Government are delivering Project Royal Oak, which is the collective name we have given to the extensive strategic investment we have committed for improvements to His Majesty's Naval Base Clyde in Faslane, His Majesty's Naval Base Devonport, and His Majesty's Naval Base Portsmouth. Collectively, this represents approximately £26 billion^[1] of investment over the next 10 years to increase the readiness, availability and lethality of the Royal Navy.

Investments at HMNB Clyde are governed by the Clyde Transformation Programme. This will see a multi-decade, multibillion-pound transformation of the site covering everything from dock infrastructure to training and accommodation facilities.

It will also include Programme Euston which will see three new floating docks and shoreside infrastructure for submarine maintenance with a renewed focus on asset management that will sustain infrastructure over the long term. There will also be a separate, offsite engineering facility established to boost maintenance capacity. This comprises £15.1 billion over the next decade.

In the south-west, forecast investment of £7.1 billion over the next decade at HMNB Devonport will deliver major upgrades and new and replacement infrastructure across the naval base and dockyard. Devonport is the UK centre for submarine deep maintenance and supports the continuous at-sea deterrent, submarines, ships, sailors and the Royal Marine Commando Force. The programme includes upgrades to 15 Dock, modernisation of 10 Dock and work on 14 Dock to enable submarine defueling to recommence, and wider renewal and maintenance across the site. This reflects both previous under-investment in infrastructure and a changing operational requirement.

On the Solent, forecast investment of £3.9 billion at HMNB Portsmouth will ensure recovery from years of disinvestment alongside vital modernisation to meet the emergent demands of a hybrid Navy which is maximised for warfighting readiness. This includes Project Bentham to upgrade jetties, berthing and support systems; a capability accelerator to support the hybrid Navy and fast-track technological development; a skills development centre for apprentice and adult learning; and expansion of the Royal Navy warfighting centre.

Taken together, these projects will modernise docks, jetties and engineering facilities and support infrastructure across the naval estate, ensuring our bases are resilient, capable and fit to support current and future fleets.

In these uncertain times, this investment will ensure that the Royal Navy is better placed to meet the challenges it faces, strengthen deterrence, and protect the United Kingdom's security and interests at home and overseas. The House will be kept informed as these projects progress.

^[1]Some of this funding sits within the nuclear ringfence.

[HCWS236]

Armoured Cavalry Programme

The Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry (Luke Pollard): I am releasing this statement to the House today to provide Parliament with a further update on the armoured cavalry programme, commonly known as Ajax, following issues raised on Exercise Titan Storm in November 2025.

Since Exercise Titan Storm, there have been a number of reports and investigations undertaken to understand the causes of the issues presented. I can now provide an update on the status of each of these reports and the associated next steps:

Army Safety Investigation Team investigation—as I outlined in my previous statement to the House on 28 Apr 26, the ASIT investigation has concluded, and found that there was no single causal mechanism, but rather a combination of multiple factors. Work is already under way to progress the findings of this investigation.

Defence Accident Investigation Branch investigation—the DAIB undertook initial investigations at the scene in the immediate aftermath of the incident and passed responsibility for the further investigation to ASIT.

A ministerial review was conducted to examine the quality of advice given to Ministers, senior officials and military leadership—I provided an update on this in my statement to the House on 22 Jan 26, and on 28 Apr 26 advised that a further review had been commissioned. This further review will be chaired by Jonathan Simcock and will evaluate the four previous reviews, looking specifically at the events leading up to the declaration of initial operating capability.

Jonathan Simcock has significant experience of Government major projects, having led the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, as well as holding a portfolio of non-executive and advisory positions across Government. This review is due to complete by the autumn. I will provide a further update to the House on this review in due course.

Ajax independent expert panel review—I can confirm that this review has now concluded and the findings have been provided to Ministers. The panel comprised 51 independent subject matter experts from defence, science, medicine and industry. The panel agreed with the ASIT report that the platform is safe when operated and maintained within the correct parameters, but noted that further action is required to improve the user experience. The report made 41 recommendations, which are categorised into four groups: technical and maintenance; training considerations; environment, motion sickness and psychological factors; and vibration and noise. All priority recommendations have been agreed in principle and work is under way to align with extant ASIT activity. This will be completed in the summer, including a timetable for resulting actions. We are also considering whether any of the recommendations have broader applicability against other programmes and platforms, as a precautionary measure. I will report back to the House on progress against the recommendations in due course.

The strategic case for Ajax remains extant. The capability is critical to a fully networked, persistent and lethal capability that sits at the heart of the British Army's recce strike complex.

We have resumed acceptance of the Ajax vehicles, with 16 vehicles accepted. Trials have now restarted and Army training is planned to commence shortly.

The safety of our service personnel remains paramount throughout this process, and we continue to work closely with General Dynamics to deliver the vehicle that provides the world-leading capability they need. I will continue to keep the House closely updated on the progress of the programme.

[HCWS237]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Unpaid Carers: Cross-Government Action Plan

The Minister for Care (Stephen Kinnock): The Government are today publishing a cross-Government action plan for unpaid carers.

This action plan delivers on the Government's commitment to strengthen support for unpaid carers across England. It sets out a co-ordinated programme of cross-Government activity to improve the visibility of unpaid carers, improve access to support, and ensure caring responsibilities are better recognised across public services and the workplace.

The plan has been developed collaboratively across Government with input from delivery partners. It responds to the need for more joined-up information and advice, improved data sharing between services, and stronger recognition of unpaid carers in workforce planning and service design. It also reflects the diversity of carers' experiences, including the specific needs of young carers.

The action plan is structured around three core themes: recognise, refer, and reach.

Under the recognise theme, we will improve the identification and visibility of unpaid carers across health, education and employment settings. Key actions include developing "my carer" functionality within the

NHS app to support self-identification and care management; improving the identification of young carers in education settings; embedding carer identification within personalised care planning; supporting NHS staff with caring responsibilities; and commissioning further research to better understand barriers to identification and improve data collection and employer support.

Under the refer theme, we will make it easier for carers to access the right support at the right time. This includes developing a cross-Government information and guidance resource bringing together support on finance, employment, health and wellbeing; exploring the use of digital notification systems such as NHS Notify and Diagnosis Connect to support targeted communications; promoting best practice on involving carers in hospital discharge planning; increasing awareness of employment rights and benefits; and improving transitions for young carers moving from children's to adult services, including through initiatives such as the Local Government Association's "No Wrong Door" memorandum.

Under the reach theme, we will support unpaid carers to reach their full potential alongside their caring responsibilities. This includes promoting flexible working and supportive workplace practices; reviewing the effectiveness of carer's leave; supporting small and medium-sized enterprises to better support employees with caring responsibilities; strengthening and promoting carer passports; improving support for young carers in education; and ensuring carers' needs are reflected across wider health, social care and employment reforms.

The action plan is underpinned by governance and oversight arrangements to ensure clear accountability, regular reporting, and ongoing review. This will support transparency on delivery and allow the plan to evolve in line with wider Government priorities and implementation milestones.

I am grateful to colleagues and officials across Government who have contributed to the development of this action plan, particularly in the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Business and Trade, and the Department for Education. I am also grateful to delivery partners for their valuable contributions in shaping this plan. Delivery of this agenda depends on sustained cross-Government collaboration and continued close working with our delivery partners.

[HCWS234]

Quality Strategy for NHS-funded Care in England

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Preet Kaur Gill): I am pleased to inform the House of the publication of our new quality strategy for NHS-funded care in England, developed by the National Quality Board, which sets out a clear and ambitious approach to improving the quality of care across the NHS in England, and represents delivery of a key commitment from our 10-year health plan.

The strategy reaffirms that quality must, once again, be the organising principle of the NHS. It sets a clear national objective that high-quality care should be available to everyone, everywhere, regardless of who they are or where they live.

The strategy makes clear that quality is defined across three inseparable and equally important domains: patient safety, clinical effectiveness and patient experience. While patient safety rightly remains the foundation, the strategy marks a renewed and explicit focus on the other domains of quality, so that our efforts drive improvements in outcomes and ensure a consistently high standard of care and experience for all patients.

The need for this renewed focus is clear. Too many people still experience variation in outcomes, fragmented care, and unequal access to high-quality services. The strategy responds directly to these challenges, with a strong emphasis on reducing unwarranted variation and tackling health inequalities across all three domains of quality.

Rather than introducing a new set of policies, the strategy provides a coherent framework for delivery, bringing together existing commitments from the Government's 10-year health plan. It aligns national priorities and clarifies how improvement will be led, overseen and delivered across the system. It is a call to action for leaders, clinicians and staff across the NHS to treat quality as their primary purpose, to use data transparently, and to adopt value-based approaches that direct resources to the interventions delivering the greatest benefit for patients and communities.

The strategy sets out how the NHS will focus its efforts on the areas where improvements will have the greatest impact on outcomes, experience and value, including major conditions such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and severe mental illness. It also reinforces the importance of improving maternity and neonatal care, patient safety, and the consistent delivery of evidence-based care. The National Maternity and Neonatal Taskforce will be taking forward work to improve the safety, effectiveness, and experiences of maternity and neonatal care.

We are also placing a renewed emphasis on transparency, accountability and leadership. Quality must be owned at every level of the system: providers are accountable for the care they deliver, integrated care boards must commission on the basis of quality and population need, and national bodies must provide clear leadership and oversight.

Importantly, the strategy also places the patient voice at its centre, recognising that listening to and working with people and communities is essential to improving services and ensuring care is responsive, person-centred, safe and effective.

Delivery will be supported by a clear set of system enablers, including improved accountability, better use of data, and the wider adoption of innovation and technology. At its heart, quality is underpinned by leadership, culture, and a shared commitment to deliver high standards. The strategy is a clear call to action to collectively create the conditions needed for sustained improvement across all parts of the NHS.

I am pleased to confirm that delivery of the strategy is already under way, with the modern service framework for sepsis also being published today, and the MSF for cardiovascular disease having been published on 7 July. MSFs are intended to support the NHS in providing consistent, high-quality, high-value and equitable care across key clinical pathways. Where appropriate, they will span both health and social care services, including

the points where services join up. In addition to the two MSFs already delivered, development is well under way on further MSFs covering severe mental illness, palliative and end-of-life care, frailty and dementia, and children and young people—this is one of the ways we are ensuring that the principles set out in the new quality strategy are translated into practical improvements for patients across the NHS.

[HCWS239]

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Policing Response to Antisemitism

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones):

Recent attacks on our Jewish communities are completely unacceptable. An attack on our Jewish community is an attack on us all, and we must take the safety of our Jewish community very seriously. Jewish people must feel safe and Government will strain every sinew to ensure that is the case.

The rise in antisemitism is a scourge on our society. In the year to March 2025, there were 2,873 religious hate crimes against Jewish people—106 per 10,000 of population—the highest proportion for any group by some distance. In the Community Security Trust's recent antisemitic incidents report, for the first time ever, the CST recorded over 200 cases of anti-Jewish hate in every calendar month in 2025. Shockingly, the CST also found that the terror attacks in Heaton Park and Bondi Beach triggered immediate spikes in antisemitism, ranging from face-to-face taunting to antisemitic social media posts. The Government have heard loud and clear the experiences of Jewish people in our communities in recent weeks and months.

While tackling this hatred requires a whole of Government response and a whole of society response, the police have an important role to play. This Government have already invested an additional £25 million into policing patrols and protective security to support Jewish communities.

I can also confirm today that we are providing additional funding of £251.1 million for the police to tackle antisemitism in our communities over the next three years. Alongside the investment in protective security, this brings total funding for protecting Jewish communities to £309.5 million.

This will fund:

- a recognisable, permanent policing presence in key Jewish communities across the country;
- a national surge capacity to ensure all Jewish communities, wherever they live, can be protected;
- stronger national co-ordination and specialised capabilities to deliver a consistent approach, with specified funding to deliver antisemitism training for all police officers in England and Wales and a centralised online hate crime investigations hub; and
- additional protective security and other capabilities to be deployed by Counter Terrorism Policing, in recognition of the threat from state actors and proxies to Jewish communities.

The majority of British Jews in England and Wales live in London, which has the highest concentration of synagogues and Jewish schools in the country, and this community has faced significant threat in recent months. We are therefore providing £85.8 million to the Metropolitan

Police Service to fund around 300 officers to support increased policing in Jewish communities. They will increase specialised capabilities, strengthen intelligence, investigative and co-ordination functions, all of which will allow for better operational deployment in response to specific threats. This is in addition to the £18 million uplift the Government announced in April.

A further £65.9 million will go to forces outside of London with a significant Jewish population to provide a permanent presence in Jewish communities and ensure they are equipped to provide the communities with the support they need. Of this funding, £22.5 million will be provided to Greater Manchester Police to sustain the increase in policing presence in response to the tragic attack in Heaton Park last year. The £43.4 million will be distributed across seven other forces with significant Jewish communities: Hertfordshire, Essex, Northumbria, Sussex, Thames Valley, West Midlands and West Yorkshire.

In recognition of the need to ensure consistency of policing responses to antisemitism across England and Wales, £40.8 million will be provided to support national policing co-ordination and capabilities. Jewish people and communities should feel confident that antisemitic crimes will face the full force of the law wherever they live. We will fund antisemitism training for officers in England and Wales and ensure surge resources are available to all forces to protect Jewish communities, during events or times of increased threat. This is in addition to the £2 million uplift the Government announced in April.

Finally, Counter Terrorism Policing will receive a further £58.6 million over the three-year period to provide further security to vulnerable communities, places and people.

Our Jewish community is an integral part of this country. To be antisemitic is to be anti-British. We will continue to do everything in our power to protect Jewish people, communities and places, and to bring those who seek to cause them harm to justice. This additional funding aims to establish a sustained police presence in Jewish communities, provide a national response to the threat of antisemitism, and most importantly reassure Jewish communities across the country at a time of great fear and concern.

[HCWS246]

Independent Review of Disclosure and Fraud Offences: Part Two

The Minister for Security (Dame Angela Eagle): My noble Friend the Minister of State, Home Office (Lord Hanson of Flint), has today made the following written ministerial statement:

I am pleased to inform the House that the Home Office is today publishing Jonathan Fisher KC's second and final report from the independent review of disclosure and fraud offences, *Fraud in the Digital Age*. The report examines the effectiveness of the current fraud framework and the barriers that inhibit the detection, investigation and prosecution of fraud committed against individuals and businesses.

I would like to record my thanks to Jonathan Fisher KC for this significant and authoritative contribution, and for his sustained leadership of the review across both phases. This includes his earlier report, *Disclosure in the Digital Age*, to which the Government has responded.

Together, the two reports reflect extensive engagement across the criminal justice system, law enforcement, regulatory bodies, academia and the private sector, and provide a comprehensive assessment of how fraud is now perpetrated and how the system should respond.

This second report lays bare the scale and seriousness of the challenge. Fraud now accounts for nearly half of all surveyed crime, making it the most prevalent offence faced by the public, including businesses. It is not a victimless or technical crime: it strikes directly at personal autonomy, causes profound emotional harm to victims, imposes significant costs on businesses and the wider economy, undermines public trust, and poses a growing threat to our national security and economic resilience.

The report identifies a set of structural and systemic factors that have allowed fraud to proliferate. It describes an age-old crime that has been supercharged by digital technology: offenders can operate at scale, at distance and across borders; and the likelihood of detection and prosecution remains low. Lengthy investigations, the growing complexity of digital material, limited specialist capability and fragmented responsibilities have combined to weaken deterrence and to create the perception among criminals that fraud is a low-risk, high-reward activity. The report is clear that the Government must match criminals' innovation with their own.

Against that backdrop, the report emphasises that enforcement alone will not be sufficient. It makes 47 recommendations which collectively argue for a decisive shift in posture: from a system that is predominantly reactive and post-harm, to one that is proactive, disruptive and preventative. The recommendations are grouped around strengthening upstream disruption; improving public-private partnership and data sharing; increasing corporate accountability; responding to emerging technologies; and ensuring that consequences for fraud and fraud-enabling conduct are swifter, more certain and more visible, in order to increase deterrence and reinforce public confidence.

As set out in the Government's fraud strategy 2026-29, we are already strengthening the tools available to disrupt fraud earlier and at scale, including through the exploration of civil penalties and international sanctions against high-harm overseas fraud actors. We are expanding international co-operation, sponsoring the Global Fraud summit 2026, to tackle fraud as a transnational threat.

Alongside this, through the Online Safety Act 2023, we are ensuring that tech companies are responsible for preventing fraudulent content and adverts from appearing on their platforms. We are deepening public-private partnerships by launching the online crime centre to disrupt online and volume cyber-fraud at scale, and to make the UK a harder place for criminals to commit fraud.

We are also working to improve the sharing and use of economic crime data, including through a recent call for evidence, and will consider the effectiveness of whistleblower incentivisation as part of the Government's broader approach to strengthening the detection, prevention and enforcement of economic crime. Trusted reporting channels can play a vital role in surfacing information on fraud, corruption, sanctions evasion and other illicit activity, enabling earlier intervention and more effective disruption.

The report's recommendations cut across the responsibilities of multiple departments, agencies and sectors. The Government will now consider them carefully and will respond in due course.

Tackling fraud requires sustained collaboration between Government, law enforcement, regulators, industry and civil society. This Government are determined to build momentum in the fight against fraud: to support victims, to pursue those who profit from deception, to strengthen deterrence, and to make the UK a safer place to live, work and do business.

The report is being presented to Parliament today as a Command Paper (CP 1600) and will be available on gov.uk.

[HCWS240]

Independent Review of Disclosure and Fraud Offences: Government Response to Part One

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): Today the Government publishes “Modernising the Criminal Disclosure Regime”, setting out our response to recommendations made by the independent review of disclosure and fraud offences and the independent review of the criminal courts on the operation of the criminal disclosure regime.

We are grateful to Jonathan Fisher KC for his thorough independent review of disclosure and fraud offences which has been published in two parts. This Government response refers to part one of his independent review: “Disclosure in the Digital Age”. The Government response to part two on fraud offences will be published in due course.

Disclosure is a statutory regime that applies to all criminal proceedings in England and Wales and is central to the right to a fair trial. It governs how material gathered in criminal investigations is recorded, reviewed, retained and shared, ensuring that relevant material capable of assisting the defence or undermining the prosecution is identified and disclosed.

Part one of this review reflects extensive engagement across the system and offers a practical package to raise standards, embracing appropriate technology, strengthening case management with an intensive disclosure regime for the most complex cases, and consolidating guidance and learning so that good practice is embedded consistently.

We also thank Sir Brian Leveson for his work on the independent review of the criminal courts, which included proposals related to disclosure, set out in chapter 5 of part 2 of his independent review. Our response considers Sir Brian Leveson’s proposals, alongside Jonathan Fisher KC’s proposals, which have enabled the Government to evaluate and implement disclosure reform collectively, drawing on the findings of both reviews. The Government’s full response to Sir Brian’s independent review of the criminal courts will be published separately in due course.

The Government response to these recommendations sets out how we will improve the disclosure regime while preserving its core legal safeguards. In summary, it supports the responsible and transparent use of advanced technology to manage large volumes of material more efficiently; strengthens learning, training and consistency across law enforcement and prosecutors; and considers improved court processes, including exploring a pilot of the proposed intensive disclosure regime to support earlier, more focused engagement between the prosecution and defence in the most serious and complex cases.

Taken together, these measures are designed to reduce unnecessary administrative burden on police and prosecutors, improve the speed and accuracy of disclosure, support victims, and uphold the right to a fair trial. This will deliver a disclosure regime that is transparent, modern and fit for the future.

This response has been developed jointly with the Ministry of Justice, owners of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 and its code of practice, and the Attorney General’s Office, which owns the Attorney General’s guidelines on disclosure. I am very grateful to the Solicitor General, the Courts Minister

and officials across all three Departments for their close collaboration in producing a coherent, system-wide response.

The response is being presented to Parliament today as a Command Paper (CP 1601) and will be available on gov.uk.

[HCWS241]

PRIME MINISTER

UK Covid-19 Inquiry: Module 5 Report

The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer): The chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry has today published the inquiry’s module 5 report, which examined the procurement and distribution of key healthcare equipment and supplies, including personal protective equipment, ventilators, and testing equipment.

The chair finds that the lack of preparation ahead of the covid-19 pandemic meant that the UK’s stockpile of PPE was in a perilous condition, with shortages and expired stock. The chair adds that there were no proper plans for the procurement and distribution of key healthcare equipment in an emergency. Health and social care workers were therefore left without adequate PPE to protect themselves, and those for whom they cared.

The chair acknowledges the logistical challenges of simultaneously obtaining the same supplies as other Governments across the world. Those involved in the emergency procurement of healthcare equipment had to act under pressure with extraordinary speed, and were confronted with unenviable choices.

The inquiry identifies 11 recommendations to ensure that the UK is better prepared ahead of a future healthcare emergency.

I would like to thank Baroness Hallett and her team for their thorough work on this report. The Government will carefully consider the findings and recommendations of the report and respond in due course.

I have laid a copy of the report before both Houses of Parliament.

[HCWS242]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Revised Telecommunications Security Code of Practice

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Kanishka Narayan): I am repeating the following written ministerial statement made today in the other place by my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital Economy, Baroness Lloyd of Effra.

The Government have today issued the revised telecommunications security code of practice, under sections 105E and 105F of the Communications Act 2003.

The draft revised code of practice was laid before Parliament on 3 June 2026, and the statutory period required under section 105F of the Communications Act 2003 has now ended without either House having resolved not to approve it.

The UK telecoms supply chain review 2019 identified the need to establish an enhanced legislative framework for telecoms security. In response, the Government established a stronger telecoms security framework, which consists of:

The Telecommunications (Security) Act 2021—primary legislation which established new duties on public telecoms providers to prevent security compromises within their networks and services.

The Electronic Communications (Security Measures) Regulations 2022—secondary legislation setting out specific cyber security requirements with which the public telecoms providers must comply.

The Telecommunications Security Code of Practice 2022—technical guidance on how providers can comply with the requirements set out in the regulations.

The UK's future prosperity rests on the public electronic communications networks and services—PECN and PECS—that provide our telecoms and internet connectivity. It is important therefore that the telecoms security framework keeps pace with the scale of the threat to UK telecoms networks and services, adapting to evolving threats to network security and new innovations in telecoms technology.

This revised code updates some areas of the technical guidance provided within the “Telecommunications Security Code of Practice 2022” to:

Provide further clarity on specific security measures: in response to feedback from providers, the revised code includes updates intended to give clearer direction to support compliance with legal duties in the legislation. This includes clearer guidance on the use of privileged access workstations, approaches to security testing, and the encryption and protection of data.

Reflect evolving technology: since 2022, increased use of certain technologies warrants updated technical guidance to support safe adoption. The revised code includes new security guidance on the secure use of public cloud, automation, and application programming interfaces.

Reflect emerging security threats: recent hostile state linked attacks underline growing risks. Guidance to public telecoms providers must evolve to help ensure providers respond appropriately. The revised code includes updates to reflect the need for providers to take appropriate and proportionate steps to protect their networks against such threats.

The issuing of the revised code represents an important step in ensuring the UK's telecoms security framework remains robust and effective in the face of rapidly evolving cyber threats and technological change. By providing clearer and more up-to-date technical guidance, the revised code helps telecoms providers to comply with their statutory duties, strengthen the security and resilience of the UK's public electronic communications networks and services, and protect citizens, businesses, and critical services that rely on them.

[HCWS229]

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Equal Pay and Pay Discrimination

The Minister for Equalities (Seema Malhotra): The Government have today published a consultation on equal pay and pay discrimination.

In our manifesto and plan to make work pay, we committed to strengthening equal pay provisions and eliminating pay discrimination. This is an important milestone in the Government's wider plan to break

down the barriers to opportunity and make work pay for women across the country, address racial inequalities, and champion the rights of disabled people.

The UK's prosperity and long-term economic growth depend on a national renewal that is grounded in the principles of equality and opportunity. This includes reinforcing our commitment to upholding the fundamental right to equal pay for equal work. This Government's ambition is to remove barriers to opportunity, provide greater certainty for employers, and reduce the burden on business and the justice system through less protracted litigation.

Concerns have been widely expressed by employers and employees that the existing law on pay equality has become excessively complex, costly, and protracted. With tens of thousands of claims stuck in the system and cases taking a decade or more to resolve, workers are trapped in endless litigation and employers face intractable uncertainty. No one benefits from this.

We know what the problems are: a system that fails to provide the data and tools needed to reliably and efficiently identify discriminatory pay practices; that places too much of the burden for enforcing the law on individuals; that incentivises arguments over minor details of a dispute, multiplying time, stress and expense; and that does not do enough to protect women or others who need it, such as ethnic minority and disabled employees and outsourced workers.

It is therefore crucial that we address the issues raised by workers, businesses, and the justice system, ensuring the pay discrimination framework works effectively for everyone.

This consultation seeks input from stakeholders regarding policy proposals designed to deliver the following commitments:

- make the right to equal pay effective for ethnic minority and disabled people;

- establish an equal pay regulation and enforcement unit with the involvement of trade unions;

- ensure that outsourcing of services can no longer be used by employers to avoid paying equal pay.

In addition to these commitments, the consultation seeks input on the proposed introduction of allied pay transparency measures where the evidence shows that these are proportionate and effective in supporting a preventive approach to pay equality.

In April 2025, the Office for Equality and Opportunity launched a call for evidence on equality law which invited feedback on areas of existing equality legislation and possible equality law reform. This included questions on the equal pay commitments outlined above, as well as possible related pay transparency measures. The responses received, as well as Government-commissioned research on the socio-legal and lived experience impacts of the equal pay scheme, demonstrate a need for serious reform of the current system before broadening protections to address inconsistencies in the law.

That is why we are consulting on a phased and future-facing approach to reform which commits to fixing the system first, before broadening protections to ethnic minority, disabled and outsourced workers. In doing so, we would seek to protect employers from unforeseen liabilities for historic practices. We want to get this right, working in partnership with businesses, civil society and trade unions to make sure that our reforms account

for all parties' needs and circumstances. We also invite views from stakeholders on whether they think there are alternative ways to achieve our objectives. The launch of this consultation will inform how we can change the law for the better.

Specifically, the consultation includes proposed measures designed to proactively prevent pay discrimination, ensure enforcement agencies are empowered to drive good practice, and simplify the resolution of disputes when they arise. It also includes proposed measures to address gaps and inconsistencies affecting ethnic minority and disabled employees and outsourced workers. These measures are intentionally proportionate, prioritising targeted action that minimises administrative burdens and simplifies compliance.

As a result, these measures will support the Government's ambition to remove barriers to opportunity, make work pay, provide greater certainty for employers, and reduce the burden on business and the justice system through less protracted litigation.

The consultation will be open for 15 weeks. In connection with the above, my Department has made the following documents available on gov.uk:

An independent analysis of the responses to the pay discrimination sections of the call for evidence on equality law, undertaken by an external contractor.

Independent research commissioned by OEO.

I will also deposit a copy of the consultation in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS243]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Office for Nuclear Regulation: Annual Report and Accounts 2025-26

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Andrew Western): The Office for Nuclear Regulation's "Annual Report and Accounts 2025/26" is being laid today. This document will also be published on the ONR website.

I can confirm, in accordance with paragraph 25(3) of schedule 7 to the Energy Act 2013, that there have been no exclusions to the published document on the grounds of national security.

[HCWS230]

Written Corrections

Tuesday 14 July 2026

Ministerial Corrections

TRANSPORT

East Midlands Railway Collision

The following extract is from the statement on the East Midlands Railway Collision on 22 June 2026.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Heidi Alexander): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the tragic collision between two passenger trains on Friday 19 June... I was particularly moved to hear of a ticket inspector on the Corby train who, despite being injured, radioed in to close the rail line while checking that everyone else was okay. As I have said before, I truly believe the best of us show up in the worst of times, and that was the case here. [Official Report, 22 June 2026; Vol. 788, c. 43.]

Written correction submitted by the Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Swindon South (Heidi Alexander):

The Secretary of State for Transport (Heidi Alexander): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the tragic collision between two passenger trains on Friday 19 June... I was particularly moved to hear of a **train manager** on the Corby train who, despite being injured, radioed in to close the rail line while checking that everyone else was okay. As I have said before, I truly believe the best of us show up in the worst of times, and that was the case here.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Business and Trade Questions

The following extracts are from Business and Trade Questions on 2 July 2026.

Richard Baker: The EU is a key trading partner for Scotland, accounting for almost 40% of Scotland's international exports. Can the Minister reassure my constituents in Glenrothes and Mid Fife that while we wait for a new date for the EU summit, this Government will press ahead with plans to align with more areas of the single market, so that we can continue to remove barriers for our businesses to trade with Europe?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, not least because in the most recent figures, our trade in goods with Europe has fallen by 2% in the last year, whereas our trade in services has grown by 7%. [Official Report, 2 July 2026; Vol. 788, c. 1008.]

Written correction submitted by the Minister for Trade, the hon. Member for Rhondda and Ogmore (Chris Bryant):

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, not least because in the most recent figures, our **exports** in goods with **the EU have** fallen by 2% in the last year, whereas our **exports** in services **have** grown by 7%...

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): When I visited NDT Equipment Ltd in my constituency, the director Dan Lenton showed me the ultrasonic test calibration blocks and reference pieces that it uses and supplies to manufacturers in a wide range of sectors in the UK and abroad. This steel is not manufactured in the UK; it is imported and is high grade. I know Ministers are being flexible and talking to hon. Members. Will the Minister please consider the grade of steel that the company uses, which I believe is EN3B, and exempt it from the tariffs?

Chris Bryant: We have already laid out our steel trade measures, which are there to ensure that the UK has a steel industry. This is vital for our economic future. I want to make clear that 73% of all steel imports into the UK are not in scope of the measure, but I will, of course, look at this specific issue...

[Official Report, 2 July 2026; Vol. 788, c. 1022.]

Written correction submitted by the Minister for Trade, the hon. Member for Rhondda and Ogmore (Chris Bryant):

Chris Bryant: We have already laid out our steel trade measures, which are there to ensure that the UK has a steel industry. This is vital for our economic future. I want to make clear that **74%** of all steel imports **by value** into the UK are not in scope of the measure, but I will, of course, look at this specific issue...

Other Correction

DR SHASTRI-HURST

Rearmament and Warfighting Readiness

The following extract is from the Backbench Business debate on Rearmament and Warfighting Readiness on 8 July 2026.

Dr Shastri-Hurst: I refer Members to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, in particular my participation in a parliamentary delegation to Ukraine in February with the UK friends of the armed forces.

[Official Report, 8 July 2026; Vol. 789, c. 365.]

Written correction submitted by the hon. Member for Solihull West and Shirley (Dr Shastri-Hurst):

Dr Shastri-Hurst: I refer Members to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, in particular my participation in a parliamentary delegation to Ukraine in February with the **UK Friends of Ukraine**.

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Tuesday 21 July 2026**

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