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OFFICIAL REPORT

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Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Thursday 11 June 2020

The House met in a Hybrid Sitting.

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Derby.

Arrangement of Business Announcement

11.05am

The Deputy Speaker (The Earl of Kinnoull) (Non-Aff): My Lords, the Hybrid Sitting of the House will now begin. A limited number of Members are here in the Chamber, respecting social distancing, and, if the capacity of the Chamber is exceeded, I will immediately adjourn the House. Other Members will participate remotely, but all Members will be treated equally, wherever they are. For Members participating remotely, microphones will unmute shortly before they are to speak—please accept any on-screen prompt to unmute. Microphones will be muted after each speech. I ask noble Lords to be patient if there are any short delays as we switch between physical and remote participants. I remind the House that our normal courtesies in debate still very much apply in this new hybrid way of working.

Oral Questions will now commence. Please ensure that questions and answers are short. I call the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, to ask the first Oral Question.

Children: Exposure to Harmful Content

11.06 am

Asked by Lord Clement-Jones

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the research by the British Board of Film Classification on the extent of exposure of children and teens to harmful or upsetting content while in lockdown, published on 4 May.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Baroness Barran) (Con) [V]: My Lords, children are going online more due to Covid-19 measures. As the British Board of Film Classification's report has highlighted, this can put them at greater risk of encountering harmful content. DCMS published new online safety guidance on 23 April which includes guidance for parents, including on preventing children's exposure to age-inappropriate content. There is advice on implementing content filters and on talking to your child about staying safe online. Children's online safety is a priority for this Government, and new online harms legislation will be ready in this Session.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD) [V]: My Lords, the research carried out for the BBFC has revealed that, in lockdown, 47% of all children and teens—that is nearly half—have

seen content that they wish they had not. Given these appalling figures, and previous figures from the Government themselves about children's access to pornography, will the Minister now make clear the Government's commitment to urgently introduce long-delayed and much needed age verification for online pornography? This is a vital child protection measure which parents overwhelmingly support, and which Ministers themselves have described as a critical and urgent issue.

Baroness Barran [V]: The noble Lord will be aware that in our proposals we take the duty to deliver a much higher level of protection for children and adults extremely seriously. We are following an approach of requiring a duty of care on social media and other online content providers, and we think that this is more robust than any particular set of procedures, although it would obviously include age verification.

Lord Pickles (Con) [V]: My Lords, notwithstanding that there are some very unpleasant and disturbing images on the web, there is also a problem of addressing mature themes between childhood and adolescence. Can we look at the past success of the British Board of Film Classification? Does my noble friend agree that the 12 classification, between PG and 15, was transformative to British films and the video industry? The acceptance of the British Board of Film Classification's recommendations, and the adoption of classifications by video transmitting platforms, would enable the addressing of mature themes sensitively and responsibly, offering reassurance to parents of those early to mid-teens.

Baroness Barran [V]: I agree with my noble friend that the 12 rating was extremely helpful. The whole system of protection from the British Board of Film Classification was developed over a number of years, with great care. We are actively encouraging video on demand platforms to adopt it, and we were pleased to see that Netflix has done so.

Baroness Kidron (CB) [V]: I declare my interests on the register. The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the online risks facing children, in addition to age-inappropriate content. There is an emerging picture that includes grooming, child sexual abuse, financial scamming, threats of violence, misinformation and identity theft, at a time when children have no choice but to be online to access every part of their lives, including education and health services. Does the Minister agree that the platforms' persistent failure to uphold their own age restrictions, which results in 43% of 11 year-olds and millions of much younger children using services while under age, puts children at considerable risk? Does she accept that if the Government had already brought forward their long overdue online harms Bill, the UK would, right now, at this time of crisis, be a much safer place to be a child online?

Baroness Barran [V]: The noble Baroness is right to point out both the benefits for children of being online, through education, entertainment and communication with their friends, but also the risks. We remain committed to bringing forward the online harms legislation in

[BARONESS BARRAN]

this Session, and I hope she will be pleased to hear that the laying of the age-appropriate design code, in which she was closely involved, is imminent.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab) [V]: My Lords, the figures in the BBFC survey are shocking but not a surprise. Millions of pounds were spent so that effective age verification could be delivered, and it was ready to be introduced. Then, on 16 October, the Government abruptly abandoned Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act, which would have prevented children accessing unsuitable and harmful content. It is all very well talking about the online harms legislation, but it has been delayed and it is still ages away from implementation. Why were the Government so intent on waiting, when age verification was ready to start? Does the Minister agree that the facts clearly demonstrate that the Government have contributed directly to these shocking figures?

Baroness Barran [V]: I cannot agree with the noble Lord's last remarks. The Government have worked very hard on the guidance that has been published, the funding we have made available to organisations supporting vulnerable people, and the work we have been doing with the sector. As I have already said, we believe that the way to protect children from accessing harmful online content is through the legislation that we will bring forward later this Session, but a number of other elements are also being brought forward, including our media literacy strategy and the safety by design framework.

Baroness Benjamin (LD) [V]: My Lords, the BBFC research shows a clear demand for age ratings online and the value that these can bring to parents around child protection, especially as, unbelievably, there is still no age verification in place for harmful material. It is good to hear that the Government are encouraging more video on demand services to follow the example of Netflix and adopt the trusted BBFC ratings, but what discussions have they had with the technology companies since the start of the crisis to ensure that they are allocating resources to tackling harmful activity online?

Baroness Barran [V]: My department, my colleague the Minister for Digital and Culture, and the Home Office have been actively working with the social media companies. We are concerned that, because of the crisis, there have been resource limitations on the human moderation elements, but we are working closely with them, and welcome the creation of the Online Safety Tech Industry Association.

The Lord Bishop of Derby [V]: My Lords, I echo the concern about the Government's lack of progress in introducing the measures outlined in their online harms White Paper. The BBFC report found that children are increasingly using pornography as an educational tool, which appears to be normalising such access in childhood. That means that, particularly during the lockdown, there is an increased risk of children being exposed to harmful content. I am particularly concerned that the report also shows that irresponsible commercial

adult websites have benefited from the Government's delay on age verification and are offering access to behind-the-paywall content for free, without age verification. This content is likely to be more extreme and violent. Will the Minister condemn this irresponsible behaviour, agree urgently to look again at age verification for pornography online, and commit to bringing forward online harms legislation as a priority?

Baroness Barran [V]: Bringing forward the legislation remains a priority. We will respond to the consultation this autumn and, as I have said several times, the legislation will be brought forward in this Session. We are also implementing the Audiovisual Media Services Directive this autumn, which will provide higher levels of protection for children around accessing harmful content.

The Deputy Speaker (The Earl of Kinnoull) (Non-Aff): My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed.

Banks: Authorised Push Payment Fraud *Question*

11.16 am

Asked by Baroness Ludford

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to introduce legislation requiring banks to reimburse their customers who have been subject to Authorised Push Payment fraud.

Baroness Penn (Con): My Lords, it is vital that victims of authorised push payment scams are protected. The voluntary contingent reimbursement model code for APP scams, launched in May 2019, sets standards for the prevention of APP scams and for the reimbursement of victims. The Lending Standards Board will review the operation of the code this year. Meanwhile, the Payment Systems Regulator continues to work with the industry to ensure better outcomes for consumers in the fight against APP fraud.

Baroness Ludford (LD): I thank the Minister for her reply, but the fact is that the PSR believes that, last year, innocent victims lost nearly half a billion pounds to this scam, having been tricked into believing that they were transferring money to a correct account. Only a quarter of that money was reimbursed; some banks reimbursed fewer than one in 20 victims. The voluntary code is not working. Defrauded customers are being betrayed. I am not persuaded by the PSR's argument that EU payment services law bars a statutory obligation—it was not raised when I asked about this last year. Even if it does, this is one area where the Government's determination to diverge from EU law in future could have a silver lining.

Baroness Penn: The noble Baroness is right that the Lending Standards Board has looked at reimbursements and found that, under the voluntary code, they have not been as high as expected. It has issued individual reports to each firm, with actions that they should

take to improve matters. The industry continues to work on a longer-term solution and, where voluntary solutions are not possible, there is scope for further regulatory action.

Baroness Sherlock (Lab) [V]: My Lords, evidence from the Financial Ombudsman Service, of which I was a director, shows a wide variation in how banks are handling this. It sees firms making decisions based on assertion and not evidence; firms relying on generic warnings, even if they do not work; firms taking an unreasonable view of what an ordinary consumer ought to know, or do, before making a payment; and refunds making only half payments, instead of full. Why is the Minister confident that the code is working? How long will the Government wait before considering giving the PSR stronger enforcement powers?

Baroness Penn: The code is little over a year old. However, the Lending Standards Board will follow up on the review it has made of reimbursements with each of those firms. The follow-up exercise will take place later in 2020, to ensure that all actions recommended are fully embedded and that customers are properly reimbursed.

Baroness Wheatcroft (Non-Aff) [V]: My Lords, the code is clearly not perfect, but it is better than nothing, yet several significant banks have not signed up to it. Does the Minister believe that those banks should make it crystal clear to their customers that they have not signed up to the code?

Baroness Penn: Some banks have not signed up to the code, because they believe that their actions go further than it but take a slightly different approach. However, 90% of the total volume of transactions is covered by banks signed up to the code, and we welcome further banks signing up.

Baroness Altmann (Con) [V]: My Lords, regulations have failed to keep pace with evolving technology, so scammers are always two steps ahead. Does my noble friend agree that banks need a clearer legal and regulatory framework to help customers, such as being able to prevent payment if they suspect fraud, not being required to make payments within two hours, and not being required to have a court order before retrieving money from a fraudulent account?

Baroness Penn: One of the steps being taken to protect consumers further from the risk of fraud is the introduction of confirmation of payee. That is a new service intended to reduce the number of APP scam attempts succeeding. That was due to be rolled out by the end of March. However, due to Covid, the timeframe was extended to the end of June, with the clear understanding that if any customers had been affected by that delay in rollout—should any fraud have taken place during that time—the banks would compensate them.

Baroness Bowles of Berkhamsted (LD) [V]: Articles 4 and 45 of the relevant directive and paragraph 8.298 of the FCA documentation make it clear that it is the payment service provider that will specify the unique

identifier to the user in the first instance. Therefore, the point where this is all going wrong is when providers do not specify or check the identifier against the name and address. Is not the confirmation of payee being introduced for just the six largest banks doing only what was intended in the first place, and should it not be rolled out across all payment providers?

Baroness Penn: I am sure that once the confirmation-of-payee scheme has been rolled out across the six largest banks, the regulator will look at how that has worked and any further measures that need to be taken. One of the benefits of the code that is in place is that it ensures that, where victims have done everything that should be expected of them, they receive reimbursement and compensation from the bank.

Lord Young of Cookham (Con) [V]: My Lords, this crime is so prevalent because of the ease with which fraudsters can open bank accounts with false details. Does my noble friend agree that responsibility for paying compensation should rest not with the innocent customer's bank, as at the moment, but with the bank that allowed the fraudulent account to be opened and the money to be stolen?

Baroness Penn: My noble friend is right that it is essential that banks take proper steps to ensure that bank accounts are not opened fraudulently. The Financial Conduct Authority requires banks to maintain effective systems and controls to prevent the risk that they may be used to further financial crime. However, the code that specifies who pays compensation was drawn up with both industry and consumer groups and is getting reimbursements and compensation to those innocent victims. We should support a model that is supported by industry and consumer groups.

Lord Vaux of Harrowden (CB) [V]: I thank the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, for asking the previous question, which I was going to ask. Does the Minister agree that, if we made the fraudster's bank liable—it receives and handles the stolen money—it would greatly incentivise banks to vet customers and monitor suspicious activities much more rigorously, and that it would be more effective than the current situation of the victim's bank deciding whether the victim has been acting reasonably?

Baroness Penn: As I said to my noble friend Lord Young, there are requirements on banks to ensure that, when bank accounts are set up, the firms identify and verify the customer's identity. Under the voluntary code which was drawn up with industry, it is currently with the victim's bank to pay reimbursements if the victim is at no fault in the fraud. Those arrangements expire at the end of this year, and the points that my noble friend and the noble Lord made may be raised with industry when looking at a long-term solution to the issue of reimbursing consumers.

Lord Livermore (Lab) [V]: My Lords, Covid-19 is providing fraudsters with new opportunities to prey on the vulnerable, and there are clearly substantial problems with how APP fraud is handled. I return to

[LORD LIVERMORE]

the point raised by my noble friend Lady Sherlock. Does the Minister believe that the Payment Systems Regulator has sufficient powers to force banks to reimburse customers if they refuse to do so?

Baroness Penn: I believe that the regulator has sufficient powers. However, the voluntary code is just over a year old. There will be a review of the operation of that code by the end of the year and, should that review reveal that further powers are necessary, of course the Government would consider the case for that.

Lord Sharkey (LD) [V]: My Lords, in February, the PSR allowed banks a three-month delay in implementing the sensible and effective confirmation-of-payee rule. One of the conditions attached to this delay was that customers were not to be disadvantaged. It is very hard to see how that would be possible, since we know the new rule to be effective in reducing scams. How will we know whether the banks have observed this condition and, if they have not, what sanctions will be applied?

Baroness Penn: The implementation of this is monitored by the regulator, and it will be responsible for ensuring that banks comply with that condition. Should anyone have needed to delay confirmation of payment and suffered fraud as a consequence, they will be fully compensated for it.

The Deputy Speaker (The Earl of Kinnoull) (Non-Afl): My Lords, the time allotted for this Question has now elapsed. We therefore move on to the third Oral Question.

Contact Tracing: Personal Privacy Question

11.27 am

Asked by Lord Hain

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to protect personal privacy in the trial on the Isle of Wight of the NHSX COVID-19 contact tracing application.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Bethell) (Con) [V]: My Lords, we have prioritised privacy and security in all stages of the app's development, working in partnership with experts across government and industry, including the Information Commissioner's Office and the National Cyber Security Centre. Demonstrating our commitment to transparency, we have published a data protection impact assessment and a privacy notice.

Lord Hain (Lab) [V]: My Lords, there have been numerous failings over the Isle of Wight contact tracing app meeting its promised deadlines, alongside other serious errors in the Government's track and trace system. Also, the NHS failed to carry out its legal data protection obligations prior to the launch and entered into data-sharing relationships on unnecessarily favourable

terms to large companies. Will the Government now give full disclosure on every aspect of how their track and trace currently works, and commit to fully disclose details of any changes to that scheme, including the app, before they are rolled out?

Lord Bethell [V]: My Lords, we have agreed up front to an enormous amount of transparency. We have open source for the code, we have published the data protection impact assessment and the privacy notice, we have committed to publish the privacy and security models, and we have published numerous blogs setting out the approach we are taking. The approach towards the app completely embraces transparency and we will continue down that path.

Baroness Uddin (Non-Afl) [V]: My Lords, in addition to the questions laid before the House by the noble Lord, Lord Hain, can the Minister address the fact that the Covid-19 impact on minority communities has seen pertinent questions about structural discrimination, and inequality is now rightly acknowledged? Does he accept that the deep-seated misgivings about privacy and protection of personal data management within many communities is real? How will the Government work with community leaders, including women's and faith organisations, to create confidence in the NHSX contact tracing system in areas such as Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney and Brent, which have a disproportionate number of deaths, and where access to smartphones and technologies may be limited and this application viewed with scepticism?

Lord Bethell [V]: My Lords, the evidence before me suggests that the British public have an enormous amount of support for the app. Recent research by Johnson and Lubbock partners for ITV showed that 59% of British adults report that they would download the app. We remain committed to reassuring all British people that the app is safe. I take completely on board the noble Baroness's recommendations to engage with community and faith leaders who may have particular misgivings; it would be worth engaging with them on a particular basis.

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford (Con) [V]: My Lords, I understand that a second version of the tracing app is now undergoing testing and that, following the outcome of this trial, the plan is to issue the new version to Isle of Wight residents as an update. Is this the case? If so, what are the differences in the information gathered between the first and second versions? Will Isle of Wight residents have to consent to any update or does their original consent include all future updates?

Lord Bethell [V]: My Lords, we are currently assessing the value of a specific Isle of Wight update and whether it would be worthwhile before we move on to issuing the full app. When we have finished that assessment, I would be glad to answer the questions asked by my noble friend.

Lord Patel (CB) [V]: My Lords, we need the tracking app to succeed. For this to happen, as has already been mentioned, the Government need to make sure that they are honest and transparent with the public

to gain their trust. Can the Minister say when the Government will publish the performance data from the Isle of Wight trial? Further, can he confirm that the Government have been following their own code of conduct for data-driven technologies in healthcare and in the development of the app? For example, principle 4 refers to transparency and principle 10 refers to commercial models. Can he tell us what process will determine secondary uses of the data?

Lord Bethell [V]: My Lords, I can confirm that the Government have been following the code of conduct, as the noble Lord suggested. I am also hungry to publish the performance data. I can confirm that, so far, there have been 73,365 users of the Isle of Wight app, 53,490 of whom were on the Isle of Wight. The user experience has been largely benign, and we look forward to publishing fuller technical and user details shortly.

Lord Whitty (Lab) [V]: My Lords, on timing, was the analysis of the Isle of Wight results, particularly as regards privacy, available to Ministers before we started to roll out the system across England? If so, how did that influence the rollout? On the Isle of Wight, were participants told that management of their data would be contracted out to a private company, now in the national context known to be Serco? If so, what was their reaction?

Lord Bethell [V]: My Lords, the greatest insight from the Isle of Wight experiment was that human contact tracing needed to be the first stage of our rollout of the test and trace programme and that, in the sequence of things, the app should come later, when people have got used to the principle of contact tracing. The use of private companies by the Government is commonplace, and we have had no adverse comment on or reaction to that usage.

Lord Scriven (LD) [V]: Ten years is the norm for holding medical research data, so what epidemiological reasons require data from the app uploaded to the NHS central database to be held for 20 years?

Lord Bethell [V]: My Lords, the data that an individual puts on the app is entirely voluntary. No data is held for more than 28 days until somebody takes a test. Once that test has taken place, the individual has the opportunity to upload further data. That data is held for clinical trials and to help us understand the epidemic. There is the opportunity for us to delete all that data at the end of the epidemic, and that assessment will be made at the right time.

Lord Cormack (Con) [V]: My Lords, like many, I pay tribute to my noble friend for his indefatigable hard work over these past weeks, but does he accept that, following the events of three weeks ago, there has been an erosion of public trust and confidence? It has been seen on the beaches and in demonstrations. Further, does he accept that it is absolutely essential that these tests are conducted in such a way that there is total public confidence in their probity? Can he give me an assurance that everything possible will be done to ensure that no vital personal information is misused in any way?

Lord Bethell [V]: My Lords, the test and trace programme will publish data later today; the noble Baroness, Lady Harding, will do the No. 10 presentation. In that presentation, I hope that noble Lords will see an enormous amount of data suggesting that public trust in the test and trace programme is profound, that it has made an enormous amount of progress and that it will be an important part of our arrangements for Covid. I assure my noble friend that the Government's approach remains that they put privacy at the heart of all of their arrangements and will continue to do so.

Lord Kilclooney (CB): My Lords, will this tracing application be interconnected with the tracing applications in the other three nations of the United Kingdom? Secondly, since we have a common travel area with the Republic of Ireland, will its tracing application be interconnected with the four nations of the United Kingdom?

Lord Bethell [V]: The noble Lord makes an important point about Ireland. We have regular conversations with the Irish Government about the app that they are working on. It is our aspiration that the two will work together. That has not been confirmed, since neither has been launched yet, as I understand it, but it is very much at the top of our priorities.

The Deputy Speaker (The Earl of Kinnoull) (Non-Aff): My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed. Accordingly, we will move on.

Unemployment Question

11.37 am

Asked by Lord Randall of Uxbridge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the projected level of unemployment over the next 12 months.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office and the Treasury (Lord Agnew of Oulton) (Con) [V]: My Lords, we must accept that the coronavirus will have a very significant adverse impact on our economy. The Office for Budget Responsibility reference scenario assumes that the unemployment rate will rise to 10% in the second quarter of 2020. However, the Government have announced unprecedented support for public services, workers and business to help mitigate the impact of the current economic emergency. As the OBR said, "the cost of inaction would ultimately have been ... higher."

Lord Randall of Uxbridge (Con) [V]: I thank my noble friend for his Answer. Sadly, we will hear of many redundancies in the coming weeks and months. Can I ask Her Majesty's Government to be bold in initiating a range of green infrastructure projects that will provide much-needed jobs as well as improving the nation's quality of life?

Lord Agnew of Oulton [V]: My noble friend raises an important point. Certainly, a great deal of thinking is going on at the moment about how we can turbocharge investment in green energy. Indeed, our Budget for virus lockdown provided a plank for a lot of these initiatives.

Lord Reid of Cardowan (Lab) [V]: My Lords, yesterday, the OECD said that the UK had experienced the worst economic impact in the G7 from the Covid-19 pandemic, which is on top of the fact that we are already seeing a surge in job losses. What targeted help can the Minister offer the hardest-hit sectors of the economy, such as hospitality and tourism which, when the furlough scheme comes to an end, will take longer to reopen and recover?

Lord Agnew of Oulton [V]: As the noble Lord will know, we have announced an unprecedented level of support across the economy which includes these particularly hard-hit areas. As he will also know, we announced yesterday that shops will be able to reopen next week as part of our gradual and phased reopening of the economy. The Government are meeting regularly with members of the entertainment and leisure sectors to look at all possible solutions to help them get back into business as quickly as possible.

Lord German (LD) [V]: My Lords, during this period of great instability for businesses, many self-employed people have received no help at all. Freelance musicians, cleaners, taxi drivers, hairdressers and millions more have seen their incomes evaporate. As we move forward to a staggered start to normality, will the Government put in place a bespoke system of support for the self-employed so that their businesses and jobs do not disappear as well?

Lord Agnew of Oulton [V]: The Government's overarching priority is to reopen the economy as quickly as is safely possible. That is how the groups the noble Lord has referred to will be able to start earning their incomes again as quickly as they can. We have in place a suite of support mechanisms for all those who have been the hardest hit, including the groups listed by the noble Lord.

Lord Caine (Con) [V]: My Lords, some of the latest forecasts about the economy are extremely worrying, especially for younger people. Is it not the case that the best way to avoid levels of mass unemployment as we exit lockdown is through policies designed to promote enterprise and growth and to set businesses free? Does my noble friend agree that, in this respect, tax rises on business, tempting as that might be for some, would be absolutely fatal to recovery and employment right across the United Kingdom?

Lord Agnew of Oulton [V]: Of course we want to see businesses feeling confident in their approach to coming out of this crisis. However, I cannot give a commitment on behalf of the Chancellor on what the future tax structure will look like. These matters will have to be looked at in the light of how the economy responds over the next few months.

Baroness Meacher (CB) [V]: My Lords, the OECD has predicted that the level of unemployment in this country will reach 11.7% in the third quarter. Will the Minister and his colleagues work with the DWP to adjust the universal credit system and introduce active labour market policies that support unemployed people back into work effectively, as Sweden has shown most particularly? Many of those jobs could be green jobs; such policies could take the place of the sanctions regime in the universal credit system, which does little else other than punish people who are unable to find work.

Lord Agnew of Oulton [V]: As the noble Baroness will know, our furlough scheme has been one of the most generous in Europe, and the whole point of it is to protect productive capacity. We certainly hope that, over the next few months, its gradual withdrawal will give businesses time to adjust and come to terms with what the opportunities are for them to get back into business. We will certainly keep the mechanisms of universal credit under review. However, it is a far more flexible system than existed in the past.

Lord Livermore (Lab) [V]: My Lords, as my noble friend Lord Reid pointed out, the OECD said yesterday that Britain's economy would suffer the worst damage from the Covid-19 pandemic of any G7 country. I do not think that the Minister gave my noble friend a specific answer to his question, so perhaps I may ask again what specifically targeted help he will be able to offer those in the hardest-hit sectors of the economy, which will take longer to reopen and recover.

Lord Agnew of Oulton [V]: As the noble Lord probably is aware, we have given significant support to areas such as entertainment in the form of grants and business rates relief. For those that missed out on rates relief, we brought in the additional £600 million facility for local authorities to support those businesses that were not in the business rates relief regime. We will continue to assess the situation and we have ensured that several of these types of businesses, such as garden centres, have reopened recently. Yesterday, we announced that zoos can reopen. As we come up with a formula for businesses to reopen safely, we will continue to do that.

Lord Taylor of Goss Moor (LD) [V]: My Lords, millions of people depend on work in businesses that could function well if we had the one-metre rule recommended by the World Health Organization and adopted by countries such as China, which have successfully repressed the coronavirus. We still have a two-metre rule, which makes many of those jobs impossible to do. How quickly will the Government come to a conclusion to change the distance to one metre, which medical advisers have made clear is a decision for Ministers, not simply a medical one?

Lord Agnew of Oulton [V]: The noble Lord makes a good point and I certainly expect the debate about the distance to carry on. I share his concern about seeing the distance reduced, because it would enable a lot more businesses to open. We will see what the outcome of that debate is over the next few days and weeks.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab) [V]: My Lords, on 28 May, the Prime Minister said that we needed to work together to get our shared goals, including the sustainable development goals, back on track. He has also spoken about the need to “build back better”. On Tuesday, more than 100 leaders of major businesses and organisations called on the Government to include the sustainable development goals at the heart of their recovery plan. Will they heed this advice?

Lord Agnew of Oulton [V]: The advice will be taken in the context of our overall economic recovery. Our first priorities have to be keeping this country safe and getting our businesses reopened, and it is only by having a healthy economy that we will be able to become heavily involved in the sustainable issues referred to by the noble Lord.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, can the Minister indicate what assessment the Government have made of the number of people who will lose their jobs as a direct result of the two-metre rule? If no such assessment has been made, how is it possible for the Government to credibly continue with this policy in the light of the World Health Organization’s advice that one metre is adequate?

Lord Agnew of Oulton [V]: My Lords, I think that the scientific evidence is relatively clear that the risk of transmission of the disease declines exponentially with the distance between people who are interacting with one another. The argument, of course, is about the level of risk that we are prepared to take—the shorter the distance, the greater the risk; it is relatively simple. However, I support my noble friend’s concerns and I hope that the debate will continue.

The Deputy Speaker (The Earl of Kinnoull) (Non-Aff): My Lords, the time allotted for this Question has now elapsed.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

11.48 am

The Deputy Speaker (The Earl of Kinnoull) (Non-Aff): My Lords, we now come to the appointment Motion in the name of the Senior Deputy Speaker. Last week, the Procedure Committee agreed that this type of business should be conducted as physical proceedings only, with no opportunity to participate virtually other than by the mover, in this case the Senior Deputy Speaker. There is no speakers’ list, but Members present in the Chamber are entitled to participate. The Procedure Committee’s guidance requests any Member intending to speak on such Motions to give notice in advance. If the capacity of the Chamber is exceeded, I will immediately adjourn the House.

Covid-19 Committee

Membership Motion

11.48 am

Moved by The Senior Deputy Speaker

That a Select Committee be appointed to consider the long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic and social wellbeing of the United

Kingdom; and that, as proposed by the Committee of Selection, the following members be appointed to the Committee:

Alderdice, L, Benjamin, B, Chisholm of Owlpen, B, Duncan of Springbank, L, Elder, L, Hain, L, Harris of Haringey, L, Jay of Paddington, B, Lane-Fox of Soho, B, (Chair), Morgan of Cotes, B, Pickles, L, Young of Hornsey, B,

That the Committee have power to co-opt any member to serve on the Committee;

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records;

That the Committee have power to appoint specialist advisers;

That the Committee have power to adjourn from place to place;

That the Committee have leave to report from time to time;

That the reports of the Committee be printed, regardless of any adjournment of the House;

That the evidence taken by the Committee be published, if the Committee so wishes.

The Senior Deputy Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluith) [V]: My Lords, I beg to move the Motion standing in my name on the Order Paper.

The Deputy Speaker (The Earl of Kinnoull) (Non-Aff): Two Members have given notice that they intend to speak. I will call the noble Lord, Lord Newby, and then the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, although he has not yet arrived in the Chamber.

Lord Newby (LD): My Lords, I welcome the formation of the committee and its composition. I certainly do not want to attempt to dictate to it what it should do, but I will make one very brief point. Two Members of your Lordships’ House have been appointed to senior positions by the Government to undertake work in respect of coronavirus: the noble Lord, Lord Deighton, and the noble Baroness, Lady Harding. There has been some discussion about whether it would be appropriate for them to come to the Chamber to explain what they are doing. I do not think that that would be appropriate, but it would be appropriate if they were to appear before this new Select Committee to explain the work they are doing. I hope very much that that will be one of the first items on the committee’s agenda.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone else in the Chamber wish to speak? No? I call on the Senior Deputy Speaker to reply.

The Senior Deputy Speaker [V]: My Lords, I welcome the support of the noble Lord, Lord Newby, for the committee. Its aim is to look at the longer-term implications for the economic, social and international dimensions of the country. Any expertise available is important. Indeed, this Motion allows for co-option of Members who have expertise to be on the committee.

[THE SENIOR DEPUTY SPEAKER]

I am sure that the committee's chair, the noble Baroness, Lady Lane-Fox, will take these issues up. I will meet her next week to discuss these particular matters.

The noble Lord mentioned two particular Members. They would be a perfect fit for witnesses for the committee on the long-term future of the country post the pandemic.

Motion agreed.

11.51 am

Sitting suspended.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

12.46 pm

The Deputy Speaker (The Earl of Kinnoull) (Non-Aff):

My Lords, we come now to the Motion in the name of the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman. A limited number of Members are here in the Chamber, respecting social distancing. If the capacity of the Chamber is exceeded, I will immediately adjourn the House. Other Members will participate remotely, but all Members will be treated equally wherever they are. For Members participating remotely, microphones will unmute shortly before they are to speak. Please accept any onscreen prompt to unmute. Microphones will be muted after each speech. I ask noble Lords to be patient if there are any short delays as we switch between physical and remote participants.

I should remind the House that our normal courtesies in debate still very much apply in this new hybrid way of working. This is a time-limited debate. The time is limited to three hours.

Covid-19: Recovery Strategies

Motion to Take Note

12.47 pm

Moved by Baroness Hayman

That this House takes note of the case for post-COVID-19 recovery strategies that will contribute to a fairer, cleaner, and more sustainable economy.

Baroness Hayman (CB): My Lords, I declare my interest as co-chair of Peers for the Planet. I welcome the Minister to what I believe is her first full debate in the House and I thank everyone in the staff administration who has made it possible for us both to be present in the Chamber today.

"This crisis offers us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild our economy in order to withstand the next shock coming our way: climate breakdown. Unless we act now, the climate crisis will be tomorrow's central scenario and, unlike Covid-19, no one will be able to self-isolate from it."

Those are not my words but those of Mark Carney, the former Governor of the Bank of England, his successor, Andrew Bailey, and other European bankers who argued this week for a recovery that places our net-zero objectives at its heart.

The last three months have been transformative, not just for millions of individuals and families but for institutions—look around this Chamber today—and for the entire governance of our country. The crisis has made us examine what and who we really value, recognise better the people on whom we depend and, amid the pain of separation, sickness and bereavement, appreciate the kindness of strangers and acknowledge our shared fragility and vulnerability.

While individuals have often felt powerless, unable to live their normal lives, the Government themselves have in many ways been empowered by an overwhelming threat and the public response, so unprecedented restrictions have been imposed and unparalleled amounts of public money spent to save lives and support jobs and businesses. Not just the extent but the speed of decision-making, innovation and delivery has been transformed. Government, organisations and individuals have made changes in days that in normal times would have taken years to achieve.

The fight against Covid-19 is far from over, but the first phase and the economic measures that anchored it are coming to an end. We need now to replace those short-term measures with a long-term strategy to rebuild the shattered economy, to replicate the sense of determination, to act at speed, to do whatever it takes.

The pandemic has distracted attention from the climate change crisis, but the imperative of tackling that overwhelming threat has not diminished. Without urgent and radical action, the world faces a dystopian future: extreme weather events; forest fires and melting ice caps; the spread of disease vectors; mass climate migration; and threats to the very existence of countries and communities vulnerable to sea-level changes.

The need for urgent and sustained action has been acknowledged internationally, but reaching the targets set out in the Paris agreement will be extraordinarily challenging. This year, CO₂ emissions are expected to fall by 8% because of the global downturn that coronavirus has brought. To achieve our 2050 targets, we need to replicate that fall every year until then—and without bringing the world to a standstill.

After the last recession, there was a sharp rebound in emissions due to a wave of carbon-intensive stimulus packages. While it is tempting to rely on familiar levers, these would in reality bring lower returns and lock us into unsustainable models. Nor, particularly given the disproportionate effect in health and economic terms that Covid has had on the most disadvantaged—the poor, the sick and ethnic minorities—can another round of austerity be contemplated. The 2008 crisis taught us that recovery policies focused on investment were more effective at restarting the economy than austerity-based approaches.

Fortunately, when looking at investment choices and stimulus policies, we do not have to choose between tackling the climate crisis and rebuilding the economy. In fact, the evidence suggests that clean stimulus strategies are likely to result in net positive gains for the economy and for society. This is increasingly recognised through the strategies being pursued across the world, with ambitious and extensive green stimulus programmes. It is also why the business community is restructuring its investment plans accordingly. In the wake of Covid-19,

global businesses worth \$2.4 trillion have called for a green recovery plan, and over 200 leading UK businesses, investors and industry networks, ranging from Lloyds Bank to Greggs, from Tesco to Sky, have stated publicly:

“Efforts to rescue and repair the economy in response to the current crisis can and should be aligned with the UK’s legislated target of net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest ... we must use the recovery to accelerate the transition to net zero.”

So what are some of the practical, high-potential policy opportunities? Renewable energy in the UK has showcased what is possible, making renewables the cheapest form of new power in virtually every major economy. At midnight on Wednesday this week, Britain passed the milestone of having gone two full months without burning coal to generate power; 10 years ago, we depended on coal for 40% of our electricity. As electricity demand bounces back, our energy sector is set to create 400,000 new, clean jobs between now and 2050 to meet our net zero target. Our wind sector has already established pools of technology excellence in former coal communities, while further jobs will open up across the UK requiring a diverse mixture of skills, including, importantly, in rural and coastal areas. But to capitalise on this potential, we need to address barriers such as planning policies which create obstacles to onshore wind projects and the clean electricity they produce. Perhaps I might recommend my Private Member’s Bill on onshore wind to the Minister.

In transport, there are myriad possibilities, from electrifying railways and having overhead cabling on highways for HGVs to investing in clean public transport. Networks for walking and cycling have already been scaled in cities such as Manchester and London since the lockdown. Transition to electric cars needs to be fast-tracked. We need to drive both supply and cost reductions, offer financial incentives to replace polluting vehicles with electric ones, and accelerate plans for a national network of charging points.

During the current crisis, remote working has revolutionised how we participate in the economy. Many people have no desire to return to the tyranny of the five-day office commute and flights to non-essential meetings. We need to build on this. Investment in full-fibre broadband could be one of the most important enablers for behaviour change, reducing journeys, emissions and pollution while promoting social inclusion. Efficiency in housing and building offers another strategy area where what is good for the economy is good for net zero. Retrofit is a resource-intensive job creator, and one of the cheapest ways to reduce emissions, but has suffered from an uncertain policy framework. Fixing that can offer a quick first wave of demand for the construction sector, with knock-on benefits throughout the supply chain, as well as addressing fuel poverty. Public buildings, including schools and educational facilities, could lead the way.

Others will speak, I am sure, of the possibilities that the UK’s world-leading track record in R&D innovation can open up in areas such as hydrogen, batteries, carbon capture and storage, circular business models and much more. Our natural assets also hold immense potential, where investing in large-scale mixed tree planting, creating productive forests, and restoring

carbon-rich peatland and marine environments, can act as critical carbon sinks while supporting countryside and coastal communities.

Not all this is down to government alone; our financial system must also play an instrumental role. We already know that, in the last decade, listed companies with green activities have performed better than fossil-fuel stocks and that, during the pandemic, ESG portfolios have fared better than conventional ones. Investors need to align their investments to our obligations under the Paris agreement, report on climate risks and set strategies to mitigate those risks. The pensions industry could and should make a game-changing contribution by setting a trajectory to redirect the \$2.9 trillion in pension funds—our money—into sustainable investment.

Clean stimulus strategies have many attractions as a route to recovery. They bring substantial benefits, such as clean air quality, without the restrictions and sacrifices that the pandemic demanded and without a requirement to slash public spending. They generate high returns while many are mature, proven industries and technologies, not risky ventures. They are labour intensive, creating more jobs than traditional stimuli. Renewables projects have been shown to create twice as many jobs as the equivalent investment in fossil fuels.

Jobs matter enormously, particularly to the young, who face the worst prospects in the projected recession and its horrifying unemployment levels. The OECD report this week made very grim reading. The elderly have suffered most in health terms, but the young are most at risk economically. We need to re-gear our national approach to education, apprenticeships, reskilling and life-long learning, not only to ensure a sustainable future but to support workers whose sectors cannot be sustained, and in regions which need regeneration.

In recognising the profound damage done to our economy and the challenges there will be in rebuilding it, public support will be essential. Public support has been shown, in survey after survey across the globe, for Governments to act to avert climate catastrophe. But to maintain that support, the measures taken will need to be seen to be fair. We need fairness between generations, between regions and between industries. The IFS warned in its report today:

“Britain risks entrenching deep class, ethnic, gender, educational ... and geographical divides unless the government acts to tackle inequality.”

Public assistance for conventional industries must be transitional and accompanied by obligations to disclose climate-related financial risks and clear decarbonisation targets. Fairness will also need to govern our tax and benefits regimes. That includes how we tax income and wealth, looking at bold new funding mechanisms for social care and, yes, looking at the triple lock on pensions.

The Prime Minister and other Ministers—the noble Lord, Lord Agnew, did it this morning—have spoken enthusiastically of their commitment to greening our economy, but in practice there remains a frustratingly piecemeal and inconsistent approach to policy-making. The urgency of transformation calls for a coherent vision and steely determination to deliver. Will the Minister indicate today that the Government are committed to placing a climate lens on every policy

[BARONESS HAYMAN]

and Bill they introduce and that they will be explicit and transparent about the contribution each of their proposals will make to getting us to net zero?

I have focused so far on UK strategies, but if we did not know before we certainly know now that we are part of a global community. The world will not come out of recession, any more than it will address the climate crisis, by raising drawbridges and retreating into narrow nationalism.

The UK has an historic opportunity to lead concerted international action through our presidency of COP 26 and our hosting of the G7 next year. I have said before that I believe this country's contribution to the fight against climate change will be measured not only in the scale of our national emissions reduction but, crucially, in the quality of our global leadership. I hope we will hear from the Minister today that the UK is already working to secure international support and co-operation for a global road map to net zero and the philosophy of building back better.

Clean, fair and sustainable strategies offer strong alignment between tackling the climate emergency and generating prosperity for all parts of our country. They will support structural changes that deliver social, regional and intergenerational gains. They can reskill affected workers, improve physical infrastructure, enhance environmental assets and promote well-being for current and future generations.

I end with a question posed recently by Sir David Attenborough: do we invest money into the practices that take us deeper into this crisis or the solutions that get us out of it? The answer this Government give to that question will define the shape of our economy and society for decades to come.

1.03 pm

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Baroness. As I have only two minutes, I will not develop the many points on which I agree with what she had to say. In the absence of the Government providing us with an opportunity for a two-day debate on the economy, which is what is required, I will focus on the catastrophe—for that is what it is—we face in the fourth quarter of this year as a result of the circumstances we find ourselves in. A great tsunami will sweep away the jobs of many people who thought they were in secure employment. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that we could be looking at 3 million or more people with no jobs.

The extent to which those people will be able to find new jobs will depend on the nature of the recovery. Most people have abandoned the idea that it will be V-shaped; perhaps it will be L-shaped. How quickly the economy recovers will depend on how quickly we can end this lockdown and Ministers can get their act together and decide where our priorities should be.

Earlier today I asked the Minister to indicate what assessment had been made of the number of people who would lose their jobs as a result of two-metre distancing, as opposed to the one-metre distancing recommended by the World Health Organization. He did not answer the question. The Government will have to look at how quickly we can free up the economy

and save those jobs that are disappearing even now. Many of the people on furlough schemes are already out of work and will find themselves unemployed when the furlough ends. The solution for the Government is not to put up taxes or cut public expenditure but to go for growth. To quote Ronald Reagan, the deficit is “big enough to take care of itself” in the short term.

1.05 pm

Lord Tunnicliffe (Lab) [V]: My Lords, this is an important debate. As we all know, Covid-19 has had an unprecedented impact on the domestic and global economies. Some 3 million people have applied for universal credit and a significant proportion of the workforce is furloughed. We are still uncertain about when schools and universities will return to normal or when graduates will be able to find jobs. Yesterday the OECD warned that the UK is likely to be the hardest hit of all major economies. That should concern us all, but it should also motivate us to break from the past and rebuild in a fairer, cleaner and more sustainable way.

I think we all agree that GDP, despite its importance as an indicator, should no longer be the only way we measure economic success. Among other things, we need to embrace means of improving well-being and boosting social mobility. A fairer economy means tackling health inequalities, rebalancing the regions and getting to grips with the issues that prevent individuals from certain ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds meeting their full potential.

Doing this will require new policies rooted in a new consensus. We need to change, from how we engage with businesses and citizens to how we restructure central government. For example, should there be a Minister with a formal responsibility for economic fairness? Should that Minister sit in the Cabinet? How will the Government ensure that such a Minister can work effectively across all departments?

The scale of the challenge we face is significant. Very little good will come out of Covid-19, but acceptance of the need to reshape our economy could be one glimmer of hope.

1.07 pm

Baroness Kramer (LD) [V]: The horrific killing of George Floyd has forced us to confront race injustice, which must be tackled in the economy we build for the future—just as much as we tackle climate change, Brexit, Covid, generational injustice, regional inequalities and the fourth industrial revolution. I challenge every business to embed diversity and the Government to require every public company to put social and environmental stewardship on a par with shareholder returns. A shift to a green economy is urgent as we run out of time to limit climate change, and I support the proposals my noble friend Lord Oates will detail in this debate.

I turn to the gig economy, because I anticipate that many who have lost or will lose their jobs will turn to self-employment. As the IFS has said, they will be primarily the young, low-skilled and poorly paid—it could have added BAME—workers. The Government

must at once implement the Taylor review and remove the abuses within the gig economy. Flexibility for a company should not equate to an absence of rights for a worker. We will need new approaches, such as portable benefits, minimum hours and a tax system that recognises risk.

Secondly, we cannot again face an abyss or allow so many to. The Government need to sign up to the universal basic services agenda, including in housing, to put a proper floor in place for everyone. That would also encourage creativity, innovation and risk-taking, which are vital to our future.

Lastly, in dealing with Brexit we must not take a “charge of the Light Brigade” approach. A senseless order must be countermanded and an effective negotiating strategy put in place to conclude transition, even if it means an extension.

1.09 pm

The Lord Bishop of Oxford [V]: My Lords, I warmly welcome this debate. The country faces the triple challenge in the next decade of the threat of climate change, the deepest recession for generations and the health challenges of Covid, all of which will exacerbate existing inequalities. I support much of what other noble Lords have said and will focus my remarks on the vital theme of digital inclusion.

As we discovered through the pandemic, the key to much of life in lockdown has been digital access—in churches, charities, schools, universities and business. As the Government recognise, one of the keys to a cleaner and sustainable economy is a fair and ethical digital sector, but it is the key responsibility of government to ensure equal access for all. The government report exploring the UK’s digital divide is to be welcomed, as is the DCMS industrial partnership through DevicesDotNow, announced in April, to provide equipment and access to as many as possible of the 1.9 million UK households without internet access.

However, the digital divide in this country was already substantial before the exacerbating effects of Covid-19. Only 47% of low-income households have broadband internet at home. Britain is ranked only 34th in the world in the broadband speed league. Brad Smith likens rural broadband to electricity. A fair, clean and more sustainable economy depends on possibility, not just affordability, of access. When will the Government commit to making digital access a fundamental right as essential as access to home heat and safe drinking water? Does the Minister agree that a post-Covid economy that lacks fast and affordable internet access for all cannot be fairer, cleaner or more sustainable?

1.11 pm

Lord Mair (CB) [V]: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on introducing this important debate. I speak as a civil engineer and draw attention to my interests in the register. In the limited time available, I will make three points. These relate to carbon, resilience of our infrastructure and prioritisation of resources.

First, on carbon, the Government have legislated to cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. We have a long way to go to achieve this, and we must act quickly. We require smart engineering to minimise the

use of materials and energy, while still ensuring the resilience of our infrastructure. This can be achieved by many innovations, including the latest digital and sensing technologies. We must be innovative with green stimulus programmes. We should be planning modern transport infrastructure, reducing car use and pedestrianising cities. We should construct more renewable energy sources such as offshore wind. Carbon capture and storage should be exploited for low-carbon production of cement and hydrogen fuels. All such initiatives will involve welcome new employment opportunities, requiring extensive technical training and reskilling.

Secondly, all the new infrastructure that we build must be cost-effective and resilient. Covid-19 has forced rapid changes in practice on our society. It demonstrates the opportunity to do things differently. We must not revert to designing and constructing infrastructure in the same way as before. We must apply the latest technologies to find ways of doing more for less, but still ensuring resilience.

Thirdly, how should we prioritise our resources? Much of our infrastructure is old; a lot of it is Victorian. We should exploit the latest digital and sensing technologies to optimise the assets that we already have by measuring and understanding their performance. We should fix them before rushing to build new infrastructure. In summary, we should exploit the very latest technologies in the post-Covid-19 recovery plan. We need all our engineering ingenuity to reduce carbon, increase resilience and preserve resources.

1.14 pm

Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate (Con) [V]: My Lords, we now know that we have a huge task ahead to secure our economy following the Covid crisis and our post-EU situation. As one of those involved in the rollout of development corporations in the most needy regions of our country in the 1980s and 1990s, I would support their implementation again to help us recover. Choosing the areas of the country most affected by the current crisis and installing development corporations under enlightened and strong leadership, we can replicate the success of the earlier examples that rejuvenated the local economies of many places, including the north-east and Yorkshire. The corporations not only produced fresh enterprise, including many new-technology businesses, but improved the environment in their areas of operation. Maintaining an emphasis on sustainability and job creation with an eye to future opportunities, they could again be the basis for recovery and greater geographical equality in this country.

One of the most important powers ceded to the corporations was that of fast-track planning. Decisions were taken and investment obtained on a new basis that fully considered all aspects of community needs and environmental enhancement. In many cases, we were able to encourage enterprise to come to local populations, thus minimising the need for unnecessary travel. The boards comprised representatives of business, workers and the community. In the main, they made very good decisions, and the evidence of success is still to be seen today.

Looking ahead, the challenges seem enormous, with the shrinking of our GDP predicted to be 12% this year. Many sectors are affected, but the remedies lie

[LORD KIRKHOPE OF HARROGATE]

not in old approaches but in new technology, job creation and, of course, care for our environment. These things are not incompatible.

1.16 pm

Lord Blunkett (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I too believe that we should learn from the past without living in it. In 1998, we introduced the new deal for the young unemployed, which included in it a particular strand for environmental work, but crucially for training and for jobs of the future. We face an even bigger catastrophe now and therefore we should mobilise, learning from what happened previously, and ensure that we link that to further and higher education.

The importance of research and knowledge transfer cannot be overestimated, but this is a devastating moment for our university sector, as money that was previously coming in from overseas students, particularly postgraduates, which funded and cross-subsidised the research agenda, will not be available. I hope that the Minister will be able to encourage the research sustainability task force to come forward urgently and encourage the Government to take up its recommendations and fund them properly, so that we can take up the work of the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre at the University of Sheffield and partnership programmes across the north of England. This will help us to break the triangle of Imperial, Oxford and Cambridge as we rebalance our economy and our future.

Crucially, time is running out: we see from the discouragement of people using public transport because of the two-metre rule that traffic is already returning to previous levels. Pollution can even be tasted in the air that had become so clean over the past two months. Linking job creation for young people and research and knowledge transfer from our universities with immediate action to avoid a return to the pollution that we experienced earlier this year will be vital if we are going to have that sustainability for the future.

1.18 pm

Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD) [V]: My Lords, I want to talk about one effect of coming out of lockdown on economic prospects for women. The Government have not published an equality impact assessment for the Coronavirus Act 2020 and other key policies such as the job retention scheme. The Minister for Women and Equalities has said that this would have a chilling effect on the advice given by civil servants.

The post-Covid recovery and the development of many children will be damaged unless the childcare sector is paid fairly by the Government. The government subsidy of so-called “free” childcare places only covers about half the actual cost, and many nurseries had already given up the ghost before Covid. Research by Childcare UK and the Early Years Alliance found that the epidemic could be the last straw for a further 25% of providers and that 150,000 childcare places could be lost. If we want mothers and fathers to play their part in the recovery, we must pay the childcare sector properly and fairly. Will the Minister please commit to looking at this?

1.19 pm

Lord Birt (CB) [V]: My Lords, following the global trauma of World War II, a new and more progressive world order was established. At its heart were the UN, the World Bank, the IMF and NATO. At home, in a blaze of activity, we founded the NHS, brought into force the Education Act 1944 and created Beveridge’s welfare state. Our parents built a better world; now we must do that.

A tiny virus has reminded us of the vulnerability of all mankind, and that we are not an island cut off from the world. We must play our full part, but we can mitigate climate change only if the whole world acts together. Let us reinvigorate the depleted forces of global co-operation and collaboration. Let us seek to build on our common interest not to intensify division. Let us renew the attack on poverty and proclaim the advantages of the free flow of ideas and trade. Let us revive the global influence that we have long had.

The UK is at a low. My strongly anglophile French and German friends look askance at our travails. As we emerge from our horror, let us bottle the communal spirit of those who have clapped each week for the NHS. Let us reset our world. Let us drain the poison that has built up in our political system. Let us recover our ability for competent, careful and considered government. Let us address our many problems, as our parents once did, and build once more a fair, tolerant and prosperous Britain.

1.21 pm

The Lord Bishop of Derby [V]: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for securing this vital debate. The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the life of every child in this country. Many of their households face reduced income, irregular working hours, increasing debt, greater risk of online harm, growing concern over mental health and well-being, and increased prevalence of domestic violence. Already vulnerable children have been made all the more at risk.

My work with the Children’s Society has drawn my attention to the disproportionate and detrimental impact of inequality and lack of sustainability on children and their households. By 2021, it is predicted that more than 5 million children will be affected by poverty in the UK. In Derby, the proportion of nought to 15 year-olds living in income-deprived households is as much as 47%. The gap in life expectancy between the poorest and most affluent areas of the city is eight and a half years, and the gap in healthy life expectancy is 19 years.

The inequalities that affect children in poverty run deep and are systemic, so the solutions need to be long term, taking account of the sustainability of the future for the children’s sake. Responding to the needs of every child in post-Covid-19 recovery strategies means keeping children and young people safe, protecting children and families facing financial insecurity, and supporting the mental health and well-being of all children in ways that support the recovery of the planet which they will inherit, rather than further damage it.

I encourage the Minister to ensure that government finds ways to hear the voices of children as our post-Covid-19 recovery strategies are shaped. Recovery strategies will contribute to a fairer, cleaner and more

sustainable future only if they offer hope for every child and young person across the UK. Will the Minister commit therefore, as some previous Governments have done, to using family or young person tests to assess the impact of all Covid-19 recovery strategies as a mechanism for contributing to a fairer, cleaner and more sustainable economy?

1.23 pm

Lord Randall of Uxbridge (Con) [V]: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on securing this important debate and on her excellent speech. I want to confine my brief contribution to one aspect of the green strategy, or rather a blue one, to help with our post-Covid recovery. The blue in question is not party political but refers to the importance of wetlands. I am much indebted to the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, a charity of which I have been a member for more than four decades, for working on this concept, which I fully support. Creating new wetlands will not only create much-needed jobs but will improve carbon capture and water quality, provide flood management and—highly importantly—ensure greater public enjoyment and improved physical and mental health. Of course, it will also hugely enhance our much depleted nature. It would assist in reducing coastal erosion and help regenerate neighbourhoods and towns. These projects do not always have to be huge scale, and we can do great things in urban areas too.

The aim would be to restore or create 100,000 hectares of wetlands. We do not always have to talk solely about tree planting and peatland restoration, important though they are. I also suggest that, in the provision of new housing, we could be innovative by creating new wetland cities, like the garden cities of a few decades ago, only wetter.

Following this terrible pandemic, we have an incredible opportunity to reset our world. Let us be bold and imaginative. I hope that my young granddaughter will enjoy a better quality of life than current generations.

1.25 pm

Baroness Young of Old Scone (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I declare my environmental interests as listed in the register. A rapid and resilient recovery from Covid-19 cannot be just a reversion to more of the same old ways. I commend the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for setting out the many ways in which we need to change. We have a real opportunity to grow back better, and that means a green recovery.

The noble Lord, Lord Stern, has elsewhere urged that the Government immediately promote measures that are fast, labour intensive and embed an economic multiplier effect. There are many shovel-ready programmes from the sustainability agenda that can deliver against those criteria, without necessarily using shovels. They can also promote intergenerational fairness by tackling the twin challenges of looming climate change and catastrophic biodiversity loss, which our children will inherit.

Examples of projects which could quickly start across the length and breadth of the country include scaling up energy efficiency retrofits in housing and

other buildings, and building new homes that are energy efficient and zero carbon; investment in green infrastructure to enable people to walk or cycle to work, and to work remotely through accessible internet; and expanding tree planting exponentially—I declare my interest as chair of the Woodland Trust—both in urban and rural settings, to sequester carbon and benefit human health and biodiversity. There are many such examples.

Any public subsidy for recovery should pass a net zero test, and major infrastructure proposals should pass a net biodiversity gain test, to make sure that our recovery projects genuinely meet our longer-term objectives.

How about we introduce a national nature service, which could work on a new nature recovery network of projects and provide training, skills, jobs and healthy contact with nature for young people whose futures risk being blighted by the Covid crisis?

1.27 pm

Baroness Randerson (LD) [V]: Lockdown has been a cyclist's paradise, with much talk about active travel, but then the Prime Minister encouraged us to take to our cars again and told us that we must avoid public transport. At a stroke, the benefits of lower emissions, for our planet and for our personal health, are potentially lost. In fact, it is significantly worse than it was before the pandemic, because, normally, 14.5 million people drive to work across England and Wales each day, and 4.2 million people use public transport. A study by Westminster University predicts that there will now be 1 million additional rush hour vehicles using the roads. That is a 22% increase in London, for example, and it is unsustainable in every sense of the word.

Ironically, the virus has given us a glimpse of a less polluted, healthier world. The Government must seize the moment to introduce radical, comprehensive measures to reduce transport-related pollution, because transport is the biggest polluter. Such measures include changing the planning rules so that no new housing developments can be built until a safe, active travel network is in place; moving freight off the roads and on to rail; electrifying the railways; and reinvigorating the bus industry by funding greener buses and devolving real powers to local authorities to control them. We should reward those who work from home, and, wherever possible, we should take services to people in rural areas.

We need a sustainable transport revolution starting now and not at some distant target date.

1.30 pm

Baroness Boycott (CB) [V]: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on securing this debate. This is a key turning point: if we are to successfully transition to a sustainable and green world, we need to change how we value success and worth. The way we live now is almost entirely about the value of money. The success of a company depends on creating share value; the success of an individual is intricately bound up with the material goods he or she has. Even the health of our nation is now judged by targets of longevity rather than of quality of life.

[BARONESS BOYCOTT]

To change that, we have to understand that we need different kinds of rewards. This is a huge challenge. If a business depends, say, on growing palm oil in Malaysia or deforesting the Amazon for its key products, what will it say to its shareholders? How can we calculate reward in terms not of money but of public good? How can we start to value people's happiness and sense of satisfaction over the size of their bank accounts? How can we bring fairness back into our reasonably unfair society? I would like to know from the Government whether these are being debated.

The community spirit generated during Covid shows that there are more rewarding values among us. I much look forward to the day when the shareholder's value—their prize—is in not cutting down the rainforest. We must invest in a green economy and not return to business as usual, as happened after the 2008 crash. We must involve all, and that means starting with education. Just as we need a green recovery for the economy, we need a green recovery for education.

Our young people, from an early age, need and want to understand resilience and sustainability. As members of the Green Recovery for Education say, there is little point learning how to continue our traditional capitalist systems, as these are in many cases the very systems causing our planetary crisis. I therefore ask the Government a second question: what conversations are going on in the Department for Education to consider the proposals that young people themselves have set out through the Teach the Future initiative, to review our education system and teacher training so that we are equipped for the climate crisis and investing in net-zero facilities?

1.32 pm

Lord Robathan (Con) [V]: I agree with a great deal of what the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, said about moving further towards a more sustainable economic future. I have been a supporter of wind power for nearly 40 years, and I was vice-chairman of the parliamentary renewable and sustainable energy group for some 15 years in the Commons.

I want to concentrate on intergenerational fairness, which was mentioned by the noble Baroness. Like most noble Lords, I am in my later years; our future is behind us. Young people in this crisis have seen their education trashed, schools and universities closed, and exams missed. When lockdown is lifted, unemployment will shoot up; it will not be a good time to look for a job. We are facing a deep recession, possibly a global depression. The last one did not end well, and it left indelible scars on the world. Our prosperity and quality of life will be severely lessened and healthcare will suffer. If we older people are “all right, Jack”, and while our futures are largely behind us, we have mortgaged our country's future and our children's future.

The young are the least affected by this virus. Deaths among the young are very few—negligible in the under-20s and very, very low in the under-30s and under-40s, and only 12% of deaths occur among the under-65s. We, the older generation, have trashed the future of the young to protect ourselves. Will they forgive us?

We made a public health crisis into an economic and social catastrophe. We should lift the lockdown now completely, and those at high risk should shield themselves. My own view is that the virus swept through the population, starting as early as November. There may of course be a second wave, but let us at least give our young people a chance and some hope for the future.

1.34 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP) [V]: I declare my interest in universal basic income as set out in the register, and congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on securing this debate. Today, we are discussing what “strategies” after the Covid-19 shock could “contribute to a fairer, cleaner, and more sustainable economy.”

Greens on these islands have long been calling for a universal basic income to help us recover from the shock of austerity, privatisation and inequality that our economic model has delivered.

We have also been calling for the universal services to which the noble Baroness, Lady Kramer, referred. Universal basic income would dramatically reduce insecurity, a huge driver of unsustainable consumption. The case has been further strengthened in this pandemic, with so many falling unfairly into desperate poverty through the conditionality of our current benefits system and emergency measures.

With great timeliness, the long-awaited report of the study group for Scottish universal basic income—driven from the grass roots up by the Fife, North Ayrshire, Edinburgh and Glasgow councils—has been presented today. The report concludes that a pilot, which would run for three years, could provide a better understanding of how a universal basic income could impact poverty, child poverty, unemployment, health and financial well-being. However, the report says that delivering it would require the UK and Scottish Governments as well as councils to work together. The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has expressed her “active support” for universal basic income.

Today the House has just made history by casting our first trial virtual ballot, bringing us into the 21st century while 19th-century queues form in the other place. I hope that we can also make history by seeing the noble Baroness the Minister promise for the Government to not get in the way of—and indeed, to actively facilitate—the exciting social innovation of universal basic income, and to take a world-leading role.

1.36 pm

Baroness Eaton (Con) [V]: I declare my interest as a vice-president and former chair of the LGA. I thank local government for its tireless work in responding to the Covid-19 crisis in its communities and keeping public services running.

Councils are at the forefront of mitigating climate risks locally and supporting their communities to adapt to future changes. In order for councils to continue to play their full role in delivering a sustainable economic recovery, they need greater powers and flexibilities devolved at pace. As a member of the devolution APPG, which is looking into many of the important

issues we are discussing, I encourage the Government to work with councils to develop post-Covid-19 economic recovery options.

A key component of sustainable recovery and growth will be the creation of green jobs. The Local Government Association has just published new research about the opportunities of low-carbon job creation. The jobs outlined in the report will be crucial to meeting the Government's target of net zero by 2050, as well as aiding the economic recovery from Covid-19. Devolving national skills and employment schemes and funding to councils and combined authorities will be critical to ensuring that everyone benefits from these new local opportunities.

I welcome the Government's work on devolution and their efforts to build a sustainable economy that levels up all areas of the country. I would also be grateful if the Minister could use her closing remarks to provide an update on the expected timing for the devolution White Paper and whether it will empower councils to deliver a sustainable recovery in their communities. By empowering local government, we can help our economy recover and deliver a fairer and environmentally friendly future.

1.39 pm

Baroness Sheehan (LD) [V]: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for tabling this important debate. The inherent unfairness in UK society has been laid bare. The people who have borne the brunt of the Covid-19 crisis have been key workers in areas that include retail, transport, health and care settings. These essential front-line workers, often on zero-hours contracts, have to work. A disproportionate number of them come from BAME communities.

The Public Health England report of 2 June confirmed that black and Asian ethnic groups are up to twice as likely to die from Covid-19 and, shockingly, that deaths among black males were nearly four times higher than expected between 20 March and 7 May. We must work to still the huge unrest among these communities, and I, for one, want to state my support for the Black Lives Matter campaign. The PHE report failed to delve into the reasons behind the figures, but the Government have many questions to answer in the inevitable public inquiry that must take place.

The world had warning about the pandemic, but Governments, including our own, failed to act. We must not fail to act to tackle the warning of climate chaos that is hurtling down the track. If we do not act, the people who will bear the brunt will again be the most disadvantaged.

In rebuilding our economy, we must place greater value on people and on our planet. It would be foolhardy to do other than heed the many authoritative voices calling for just that, including the Committee on Climate Change, the *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* and more than 200 business leaders from the Prince of Wales's Corporate Leaders Group.

1.41 pm

Lord Chartres (CB) [V]: My Lords, as other noble Lords have said, there is obviously a risk that, as the lockdown eases, we shall be tempted to return to those

old ways of thinking and behaving which are at the root of so many of our environmental distresses. However, in order to change ways of thinking and behaving, we need more of a common mind, and we certainly need a strategy for developing and disseminating a code of environmental principles that are simple and memorable enough to be included in the national curriculum. The noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, has already referred to the importance of education in this area. Principles are the vital step in formulating sustainable policies and assisting in their implementation and enforcement.

Of course, we already have a start in the principles derived from European legislation, which figure in the Environment Bill. The principles of "polluter pays", prevention and the precautionary approach are a very good start, but we need to develop them in the light of recent public debate. It is important not to complicate things but, rather, to lift them out of the realm of international expert conferences and specialist papers so that simple and memorable environmental principles become part of ordinary, everyday conversation. A code of environmental principles ought to be at least as well known as the Highway Code. I believe that it ought to include a commitment to development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Covid crisis has given us all the time to reflect on how we live now; I hope that we will not waste the opportunity.

1.43 pm

Lord Risby (Con) [V]: My Lords, I declare an interest as president of the Association for Decentralised Energy.

The pandemic has reminded us of the importance of local community structures. This is the great challenge and the great opportunity in decarbonising heat, for heat is, at its heart, local. The best solution to decarbonising heat in any area is specific to, and determined by, that area. Coupled with the Government's commitment to improve energy efficiency in homes, schools and hospitals, locally driven heat solutions will come together to create a decarbonisation landscape.

Heat networks have a unique role in capturing and using otherwise wasted heat. The Government have demonstrated their commitment to heat networks by announcing a new green heat network fund to support, in particular, those using waste heat. An example is a project in Enfield to supply waste heat to at least 15,000 homes. In due course, that will save 5,700 tonnes per year, equivalent to the carbon sequestered by over 6,000 acres of forest.

During the Heat Networks Industry Council's launch last week, my right honourable friend the Energy Minister, Kwasi Kwarteng, underlined the alignment between government and the industry's ambitious vision for the role of the heat network sector in delivering a net-zero future. This council is committed to bringing in investment and creating up to 35,000 new jobs. A project in Leeds is specifically committed to new apprenticeships and jobs. It is surely more important than ever to invest in upskilling and retraining to create a green-collar workforce for the future. The heat networks industry is fully committed to playing its part in a fairer, cleaner and more sustainable economy post this pandemic.

1.45 pm

Lord Houghton of Richmond (CB) [V]: My Lords, I, too, welcome this debate and express my enthusiasm for using the recovery strategies from Covid-19 to help contribute to a fairer society, a cleaner environment and a more sustainable economy. However, I also advocate that the lessons of the pandemic, and particularly the data that flows from the experience of the international lockdown, are used to inform the ambition of those strategies.

I recently attended, in a virtual way, a RUSI event on the general subject of future energy. Data presented to the discussion indicated that, for an extended period of time this year, 4.2 billion people have been under lockdown, only a fraction of the world's airlines have flown and most people's cars have barely moved, yet the forecast impact this year of this unprecedented lockdown, which has brought global economies almost to a halt, is an anticipated 25% drop in oil use and, as the noble Baroness said in her excellent opening speech, just an 8% reduction in carbon generation.

I offer that insight not to discourage ambition but purely to put a reality check on both the time and effort needed to bring about significant change in carbon emissions and to add realism to those who use the language of acceleration. The strategies that we conceive must be bold but they must also be anchored in reality or they will lose credibility and, in the context of COP 26, will most certainly fail to attract international consensus.

1.47 pm

Lord Duncan of Springbank (Con) [V]: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for introducing this timely debate. Covid has affected the way that we see ourselves and how we see the landscape in forming policy affecting our economy.

The COP 26 meeting in Glasgow, which was due to take place this year, has of course been cancelled. Before that, there had been an attempt to create a series of drumbeats to allow policy announcements showing our commitment to net zero and the wider ambition of decarbonising the globe. Most of those have now been placed on hold, but I look to the Minister to give a commitment that this will not be for much longer and that we will begin to hear again about how the Government intend to meet their obligations to deliver net zero and how they intend to work with their global partners. The opportunities are still there, and the technologies, innovations and ideas are all still ready to be delivered. Therefore, I look forward to hearing from the Government when they will institute a timetable for setting out very clearly their ambitions and the concrete policies that they will deliver to meet their net-zero commitments.

1.48 pm

Lord Bhatia (Non-Aff) [V]: My Lords, according to the recent letter from the Prime Minister, as from 15 June all shops will be able to reopen. This means that thousands of small and large shops will open, provided that a safe distance between people is managed. Places of worship will be allowed to open from this weekend, and zoos and drive-in cinemas will also be allowed to reopen from 15 June. All that will bring

thousands, perhaps millions, out on to the streets and open grounds. The coronavirus is still alive and the Government's decisions could cause a spike in the pandemic across the country, thereby putting enormous strain on the NHS and other front-line workers.

All this will require the population to follow the guidelines. The risk lies in whether this will be possible. The videos of the recent processions show that social distancing was not observed. The effects of this will be reflected in coming weeks. The Government might be taking an enormous risk in opening things up prematurely. There is obviously a need to calibrate between priorities of health and the economy. The decision is one of the most difficult for any Government for perhaps the last two centuries.

1.50 pm

Lord Sheikh (Con) [V]: My Lords, the conditions created by the pandemic and the lockdown will probably result in this year representing the largest annual reduction in carbon emissions. The crisis and this result should, with the right approach, enable us to achieve reductions in our emissions to zero by 2050, stimulate the economy and create jobs. The crisis should be a springboard to achieving these objectives. It is anticipated that our GDP will fall by 12.8% and unemployment will be at about 7.3% by the end of 2020. My concern is that there will, in addition, be regional inequalities, which our Prime Minister is keen to level up. Therefore, it is important for us to take appropriate and immediate medium-term measures. During the pandemic, there was a need to spend, spend, spend. Now that we are coming out of the crisis, our motto must be to think green, to achieve growth and to create jobs. I commend the Prime Minister for his commitment to spending £2 billion investing in greener transport, including providing walking and cycling facilities.

We must all ensure that all the BAME communities are fairly treated in all aspects of the country, including the business sector, as part of our future strategy. This is a wake-up call for us to do so. What is the Government's reaction to the two letters sent to the Prime Minister by 200 business leaders and the Committee on Climate Change, and how are the proposals being considered?

1.52 pm

Lord Berkeley (Lab) [V]: I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on this excellent opportunity to debate how we will achieve zero carbon emissions in 2050.

The noble Baroness, Lady Randerson, talked about the importance of transport. Cars and trucks are probably the biggest polluters in this sector. We need radical solutions. One example is the retail system. We now can happily buy anything for home delivery the next day. The shops are replenished several times a day with multiple deliveries, often in white vans. This is all backed up by worldwide logistics, including air freight, container ships, 40-tonne trucks, distribution centres et cetera. We are still building motorways, mainly for trucks. So how do we reduce the carbon footprint?

There are many solutions. Clearly, rail freight into the city centres is one, as are electrical cycle last-mile deliveries. Most of all we need to change our lifestyle,

with fewer choices in shops. Do we really need air-freighted avocados every day of the year, unless there is a carbon tax attributed to them? We must have a massive reduction in car use, but the Government are still advising us to use cars rather than public transport. What about the people who do not have cars? The Government seem to have forgotten them, or they just do not care about them. Perhaps they should withdraw the car advice. I hope that the Minister will say something about that today.

On Monday, I raised a question about Manchester City Council not participating in a new cycle scheme for the Manchester area. Two days later, it applied to the Government for financing. I am pleased to hear this and hope that many other local authorities will support it.

We have the opportunity now to change our environment and set an example to the rest of the world. I hope we can do it.

1.55 pm

Baroness Walmsley (LD) [V]: My Lords, as we come out of the Covid-19 pandemic, we must find clean technologies that encourage investment, create jobs, provide opportunities and training for young people and address the climate crisis. I recommend one such innovation, which the Government should encourage in every way. As we build new homes, I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Risby, that we need to find local ways to heat them that do not use fossil fuels. In County Durham, the council has partnered with the Coal Authority and private developer Tolent Construction to provide district heating for a new garden village from the geothermally heated water that floods a network of disused coal mines in the area. I was very interested when I read about this because I live in north Wales, on top of a lot of disused coal mines, where there is a large development of houses in a village called Llay, which is less than half a mile from the shaft of the tragic Gresford coal mine. However, I do not believe that such an innovative solution to space heating is being used there.

The system works by pumping the water from the mine—which, year round, is always warmer than the air above—up through a heat exchanger. Warm water is then distributed to the homes and businesses in the new Seaham Garden Village. This renewable energy reduces the heating bills of local families, which contributes to equality, half of them being in affordable homes, provides jobs for the local economy and encourages investment in the area, as well as providing low-carbon space heating. There are hundreds of disused coal mines all over the country, many in disadvantaged areas that need levelling up. Will the Government invest in this innovation elsewhere to leverage private investment and create jobs? It is a nice irony that coal mines, which once contributed to global warming, can provide part of the solution to stopping it.

1.57 pm

Lord Eames (CB) [V]: My Lords, I too welcome this debate, introduced by the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, but there is a danger that, as we turn our attention to high-level economic issues, we lose sight of down-to-earth, human realities. We have reached a point in the Covid-19

nightmare where questions of high-level policy and planning for the future are becoming more and more essential, but if we allow that human face to become less important, we will have lost one of the most important aspects of a sustainable economy of the future.

For that reason, I emphasise one aspect of that human face: 4.5 million people in the United Kingdom have become unpaid carers in society as a direct result of the pandemic. This is in addition to the 5 million carers already involved. Thousands of people have had to make serious personal decisions affecting their everyday lives. They have had to weigh up responsibilities for family life when they have been crucial in every aspect. To organise caring duties while holding down paid work is a dilemma and far from easy. The recent announcement of the bubble relationship will ease the strain for some, but the bigger question remains: as we move towards national recovery, can that army of carers receive proper recognition and support for the burden that so many carry? Flexible working and a genuine appreciation of the human problems by employers are only two of the issues that we face in a fair economy and a fairer future. I urge the Minister: please do not lose sight of the human face of recovery at this time.

2 pm

Baroness Blackstone (Ind Lab) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interest as the chair of trustees of the Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation Partnership, as I want to focus on the urgent need for a cleaner economy with clean air.

Air pollution causes lung damage and is linked to early death. It can cause irreversible change to children's growing lungs and hearts. Moreover, people living in the poorest areas are more exposed to air pollution, reinforcing unequal health outcomes. It is bad for everyone, but for the 12 million people in the UK with a lung condition it poses a real threat to their health. A spike in levels of pollution can lead to worse symptoms, flare-ups and even hospitalisation. It also damages their quality of life as it can stop them leaving their houses for the justifiable reason that they fear dirty air. Research from around the world also shows a possible relationship between higher levels of air pollution and an increased risk of dying from Covid-19. More work is needed on why that happens.

One of the few benefits of the lockdown is that it has led to cleaner air with lower levels of NO₂ and particulate matter. We must not lose this gain. That means that we must develop policies for active travel, a reduction of car use, clean air zones and strengthened clean air laws. I welcome the announcement of £250 million funding for local authorities to promote walking and cycling with new guidelines on the need to take action urgently. However that is a very small amount of money, and I hope the Government will bring forward more funding for policies of this sort as well as advancing the requirements for electric cars.

Lastly, can the Minister confirm that, when the Environment Bill returns, it will commit to reaching at least WHO guideline levels on particulate matter by 2030 at the very latest?

2.02 pm

Lord Shipley (LD) [V]: My Lords, we have learned much from Germany in recent months. Germany has met the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic far better than us. Its policy of test and trace and its devolved structure of government have resulted in a much lower death rate from Covid-19, which stands at a quarter of ours.

Perhaps the Government will therefore now look very closely at how Germany is planning its economic recovery from the pandemic. It has announced an enormous fiscal stimulus worth €130 billion, with measures for the short, medium and long term. There will be a six-month cut in VAT to encourage consumer spending and a €300 payment for every child. There will be much more research investment in green technologies and significantly lower taxation on electric cars.

In the UK, the Chancellor has announced an intention for a green industrial revolution, and I hope he keeps to it. The UK is well positioned to build on the achievements of my party in government, which encouraged green investment and, particularly, renewable energy. We should just note that our electricity supply system ran without coal-fired electricity throughout May, when wind and solar power produced 28% of our electricity. We should build on that, insulate more homes and invest in a much more widespread electrical charging infrastructure.

Yesterday, the OECD forecast that the UK economy is likely to shrink by between 11.5% and 14% this year. The implications are very serious. Above all, we must avoid a return to 1980s levels of unemployment and, in particular, youth unemployment. Many young people have lost schooling. They may find their hoped-for career unavailable or non-existent. It will be necessary for our schools, colleges and universities to alter the courses they offer to reflect a changed economy and to be resourced accordingly.

2.04 pm

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB) [V]: My Lords, I make no apologies for devoting my remarks today to the international aspect of climate change, while many other speakers, led so admirably by my noble friend Lady Hayman, whose debate is so topical, will very justifiably be focusing on what we need to do ourselves. It is a simple fact that we in this country acting on our own cannot make any serious impact on global warming or the mitigation of climate change, but nor can we hope to play an influential part in the essential international effort if we do not set an example by what we are doing at a national level. Those two aspects are two sides of a single coin, and right now we are not winning the toss with either side of the coin.

The challenge of ensuring that the COP 26 meeting in Glasgow succeeds in consolidating the implementation of the Paris agreement and in strengthening action beyond its commitments is certainly no easy one. The postponement of that meeting is of course time lost, but it could prove a cloud with a silver lining if we factor in the consequences of Covid-19 and use them as an opportunity as well as a grievous blow. For COP 26 to be a success, three conditions must be met. First, it must be a genuinely co-operative venture, which will mean working closely with others, including

the European Union. Secondly, we need a critical path to success in terms of objectives and method. Paris showed it can be done, and Copenhagen showed how not to do it. Thirdly, we need to make a political input at the highest level, because decisions at Glasgow will be reached only if they are supported at that level. So far, I can see no sign of any of these conditions being met.

A word now about Africa, on which your Lordships' committee on which I serve will shortly produce a report. Africa is a victim of climate change, from desertification to sea level rise and deforestation. It is not a cause of that change. It has as yet underused capacity to mitigate those changes through the development of renewable energy: solar, wind and even hydro. By helping Africa mobilise those resources, we will be furthering our interest.

2.08 pm

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, not just on securing this debate and leading it so expertly and comprehensively but on her work on establishing the Peers for the Planet group, which is also working outside the Chamber to take forward many of these issues.

I would also, perhaps unusually, like to endorse the concerns expressed by the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, in his speech which followed that of the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman. He spoke about the tsunami coming towards us economically, and I would add that there is the impact on children right across the country, particularly vulnerable children, in their education, mental health, sport and physical activity with the closure of schools. There is a lack of an adequate strategy in the four nations of the UK to recover that educational opportunity, particularly for the most vulnerable children.

But I want to focus on the sustainable development goals. The Prime Minister said in May, shortly after he returned from his enforced period in the hospital, that he wanted to see a

“fairer, greener and more resilient global economy”,

and that he wanted to “build back better”. Indeed, he said on 28 May that

“there is every need for us to work together to get our shared goals back on track, including ... the Sustainable Development Goals”.

The 17 sustainable development goals agreed by the United Nations in 2015 give us a framework for a recovery that would ensure that we also do that as part of a healthy planet. They are domestic as well as international.

I welcome the Minister to her place today, and I ask her to say in her reply in what way the UK Government will build the sustainable development goals into their plan for economic recovery. On Tuesday, more than 100 business leaders and organisations called on them to do so, and I hope that the Government will respond positively.

2.09 pm

Baroness Jolly (LD) [V]: My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on securing this fascinating debate. My home is in Cornwall, where our economy is largely based on agriculture and tourism.

We have some of the best beaches and moorland in the country. Once known only for pilchards and tin, Cornwall is now recognised for fine food from our local farms and coastal waters. Educational standards are low but rising. Aspiration is on the up too. However, there are still too many who have not been as far as Devon.

In the past 20 years, and thanks to excellent fibre broadband right across Cornwall, young professionals have moved down and increased the diversification of employment opportunities. Falmouth University has been a great asset in supporting local entrepreneurship.

Sadly, however, we have a dependency on the car for travel. Too many cars are diesel powered—cheap to run, but not helpful for our air quality. Electric cars do not yet have the range to get about, and hybrids are expensive.

Using sun and wind, we now produce 37% of our electricity from renewables, and we are looking at how floating turbines could deliver jobs and prosperity to our coastal communities. I must not forget geothermal schemes, which are in the very early stages.

London outstrips Cornwall's economy by a factor of nine. Fifty years ago, 70% of our labour force worked on the land. The same percentage now works in food production, but not in farms. Our economy is growing. We had Objective 1 status, and, were we still in the EU, we would be eligible for more targeted support. Our MPs reassure us that it will continue. Can the Minister confirm this?

How our smaller businesses will thrive after Covid is another issue, but the local council, the LEP, and business and community organisations have a hunger for success. I feel sure that resilience, borne out of established partnership working, will stand Cornwall in good stead.

2.11 pm

Lord Ravensdale (CB) [V]: My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lady Hayman on securing the debate and declare my registered interests. Over the past few days, we have heard the forecasts of the scale of the hit that the UK economy could take this year. Investment is needed on a massive scale to rebuild the economy post Covid. It is essential that this investment focuses on building back better.

We have seen the devastating effects of one ecological crisis, in Covid. This must surely focus minds on working to avoid another, in the form of climate change. We must use post-Covid investment to focus on key recovery and our net-zero targets. The macroeconomic case is rock solid, with the Government able to borrow at negative real rates to invest in clean industries with high rates of return.

A key gap is investment in nuclear. Nuclear is currently the only mature low-carbon technology that can provide large quantities of firm, non-variable power into the grid. To mitigate the risk of no firm power alternative being available to meet the 2050 targets, the build rate of nuclear needs to expand significantly. The key issue remains the cost of capital, and the Government urgently need to clarify their approach to funding new nuclear. Will the Minister clarify in what timescales a decision and announcement will be made on the model for funding new nuclear?

Fairness must also be a priority of the recovery. Thousands of new high-skilled jobs are needed to rejuvenate and level up the regions of the north and the Midlands, where I live. We need an evidence-based plan for recovery that fits these regions. Data must play a key role in how government policy is targeted. I highlight the excellent work of the Midlands Engine Economic Observatory's independent economic review; it provides a unique dataset on the Midlands economy, which should be a key reference point for designing a recovery plan that fits the Midlands. Does the Minister agree on the importance of this data, collated at a regional level, to government policy-making regarding the levelling up agenda?

2.13 pm

Lord Adonis (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on her excellent speech, and indeed on her starring role in this House last week. I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, on his following speech, which linked the potential problem of mass unemployment after this crisis with meeting the green agenda. It is starkly obvious that we need a Keynesian boost after this crisis, linked directly to providing green infrastructure, which we will need as a society for the next generation. We also need what the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, mentioned: an opening up of the economy, so that people can get back to those companies that are working at the moment in as safe and speedy a way as possible. We need to put the two together.

Having been in government and seen these situations before, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 and 2009 crisis, I know that it is one thing to say that we need a big programme of public works and quite another to have shovel-ready projects. There is one massive shovel-ready project ready to go: HS2, the biggest infrastructure project in Europe. The Government have already let £16 billion-worth of contracts for the first phase of HS2 from London to Birmingham. More than 10,000 people are employed. More than 200 construction sites are in operation, with HS2 staff on them. That is almost all of the construction sites for HS2—they have been specially prepared with social distancing and the other measures needed to ensure that the work can proceed.

It is very clear what we need to do: we should accelerate the building of HS2 north of Birmingham. Legislation is before your Lordships to take the line up to Crewe. The detailed route planning has been done through to Manchester and Leeds. We should take the advice of Martin Sandbu, the *FT* columnist, in his excellent new book *The Economics of Belonging*. He argues that we should take a leaf out of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's book of the 1930s and have an equivalent approach to that of the Tennessee Valley Authority. We should accelerate the building of HS2 to Manchester and Leeds; legislation should come before this House to get the line all the way up to Manchester and Leeds by 2030. We should get on with it.

At the end of this debate, the Minister has a golden opportunity to agree to that, and to unleash the huge constructive potential of HS2 to generate tens of thousands of jobs across the country, and, ultimately, even to take it up to where the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, lives, in Scotland.

2.16 pm

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP) [V]: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for two reasons: on getting the debate, but also on her excellent opening speech. She used a phrase that I was going to use: this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We need transformation and it absolutely cannot wait.

The coronavirus crisis has shown us how the Government can move heaven and earth when they listen to scientists, put ideology aside and go all out to avoid disaster. There is a lot that Ministers can learn from this response and carry forward for the climate and ecological emergencies that we face.

The Government must put net-zero carbon targets at the heart of their economic policy. The Treasury should be required to produce carbon budgets for every single economic policy, showing how they will contribute to the Paris climate goals. We must stop propping up failing, planet-destroying companies with tax incentives and cheap borrowing. We have done far too much of that already in this crisis.

A green new deal is needed that can reshape our economy and create good and secure jobs that enrich our lives, communities and planet. Right now, the Government could provide access to online training and learning for all jobseekers and furloughed workers, to develop skills and knowledge for the green economy.

Greening our homes is still way overdue. Alongside grants and interest-free loans, the Government should abolish VAT on home improvements. We are all spending a lot more time at home; let us make it easier and more affordable to make our homes greener, comfier and more beautiful places to live and work. To all those sceptics who say, "How much will this cost?", I say: how much will it cost us if we do not do it?

2.18 pm

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con) [V]: I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on her contribution to the debate, and thank her for encouraging me to speak, as a member of Peers for the Planet. I am an unusual member because, as a businesswoman of long standing—I refer to my register of interests—I am essentially practical. I question the wisdom of virtue signalling and I argue for all countries to play their part, so that we are not disadvantaged economically.

I want to make practical progress on plastic. The crisis has shown that it is the magical substance that its inventors found it to be: flexible, light, clean, cheap and indestructible. It is being put to great use in PPE, ventilators, contactless payment and screens in shops, but the scale of indestructible plastic use has been a growing worry for years, and the crisis is creating an even larger mountain of plastic waste. As we know from experience, this will clutter watercourses and reach the sea, where it will mass in hotspots and have a devastating effect on wildlife and fisheries.

Can we use the crisis to introduce reform in the UK, and to dispense with the patchwork of different systems that I see when I move from Wiltshire to Southwark? There must be a single system of bins for both household and business waste, and a single, clear post-Brexit system of labelling, showing what can be recycled and what cannot. With an advertising campaign

of the kind that the Government have pioneered on Covid, citizens and business will get behind recycling. There have been literally years of consultation on different schemes and taxes, and mixed signals from different departments, but mountains have grown, and we have witnessed an unacceptable delay in bringing in a single system to encourage the right consumer behaviour. As others have said, Covid gives us an opportunity, here and elsewhere, to change the paradigm.

2.20 pm

Baroness Blower (Lab) [V]: My Lords, a fairer, cleaner and more sustainable economy in a more equal and socially just society cannot just be an aspiration: it must be seen as critical to our survival. We must build back better. This debate is indeed timely, with many people thinking that a target of 2030 rather than 2050 to be carbon neutral is actually needed. The situation of lockdown will have caused mental and emotional health difficulties for many. These came on top of pre-existing, deep-seated fears—in particular, but not exclusively, among young people—about the climate emergency. However, many will have walked and cycled in streets free of traffic and breathed cleaner air than for many years. New plans must be put in place to limit road traffic and ensure that there is not a return to the massive use of the car.

Nelson Mandela said:

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

But, as one noble Lord said earlier, a change in education is needed, too, to ensure that we have a focus on the climate emergency and on sustainability in our classrooms and lecture halls. We also have the opportunity to help young people, with projects such as Imagine 2030 being run in Hammersmith and Fulham, to help people look at what changes are needed and how they can help to make them.

The TUC has focused in its report not just on equality issues, vital though they are, but on the need for a plan towards net zero carbon, with a just transition for workers across the economy, rebuilding the UK's industrial capacity but on the basis of what a carbon-neutral economy and society actually needs. This will require investment in education and training at all levels and will offer a real chance for a more positive future, rather than the dystopian vision foreshadowed by the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, in her opening remarks, if we do not act.

2.22 pm

Lord Razzall (LD) [V]: My Lords, the Motion calls for a fairer, cleaner and more sustainable economy: three separate goals, all of which I endorse. As for fairness, we all seem to agree that we cannot simply go back to the world we had before. With at least 10% unemployment forecast by the Bank of England and even more by the OECD, there is no doubt that young people will be the worst hit. It is generally accepted—perhaps the Minister can confirm it—that the apprentice scheme needs to be extended and become universal.

I also wonder, with the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, whether this is the time to contemplate the introduction of a universal basic income. This concept has a lengthy

and not entirely utopian origin: although it started with Thomas More's *Utopia*, it was taken up by Tom Paine and ended up with the approval of the monetarist Milton Friedman. Even President Trump has introduced legislation giving \$1,200 per adult under certain income limits. Is it not time to look at this here?

As for a cleaner economy, we have all welcomed the clearer air as a result of lockdown. I support all the proposals of my noble friend Lady Randerson, but is this not also the time to bring forward the date for the scrapping of diesel cars from 2040 and to introduce a scrappage scheme for existing cars? In addition to the climate benefit this would provide, it would also provide a boost to the hard-hit car industry, with an encouragement for hybrid and electric cars.

Finally, as for a more sustainable economy, we must increase investment in green technology. One of the great achievements of the coalition was Vince Cable's introduction of the Green Investment Bank in 2012: before the sale to Macquarie in 2017, £12 billion had been invested in UK projects. The Government must ensure that significant sums are now invested in green technologies, including, of course, hydrogen projects, in which Germany has recently announced a €9 billion investment. The concern, of course, is that hydrogen investment will be significantly less attractive now that we are leaving the EU's single energy market at the end of December—yet another own goal by the Government.

2.24 pm

Lord Woolf (CB) [V]: My Lords, I refer to my entry in the register of interests and I start, as others have started, by congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on obtaining this debate, which has produced such excellent speeches. Of the subjects she raised, I shall focus on fairness. Without seeking to detract in any way from the horror of the disease, I note that Covid has helped to expose the lack of equality that exists between different sections of our society. There is the black minority and other discriminated minorities, the disabled, the elderly and the deprived members of our society, and indirectly there is the education of our children. Individually and cumulatively, these consequences are not only unfair but arguably result in contraventions of the Human Rights Act and damage society.

When I was a High Court judge, a small book was produced and made available by the Government with the title *The Judge Over Your Shoulder*. The picture on the cover was of a very frightening judge—I do not know whether it was a caricature of myself. I do know that it was intended to convey to civil servants that what they were doing could be breaching the law, and judges could intervene to prevent this happening. This is exactly what judges are doing and have been doing for more than 20 years now. However, the judiciary can intervene only if a member of society or a public interest body makes an application to the court to seek relief.

I do not want to encourage litigation, and this can be avoided if the Government and officials comply with the law. To achieve this, it is healthy for administrators to know that there is a judge looking over their shoulder. However, the courts can perform their role only if applications are made to them. Unfortunately, it is

increasingly difficult for judges to do this. This point was strongly emphasised by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in a letter it wrote to me just two days ago which said:

“We're here to stand up for freedom, compassion and justice in our changing times. We do it by promoting equality and human rights ideals and laws across the nation. Our work is driven by a simple belief; if everyone gets a fair chance in life, we all thrive.”

2.28 pm

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interests in the register and join others in congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on calling this very timely debate and introducing it so eloquently. Environmental sustainability must lie at the heart of any government policy. The results following the Covid-19 lockdown have been dramatic and the OECD report this week, which other noble Lords have referred to, highlighted the potential damage to the UK.

I welcome alternative means of transport to work, particularly walking and cycling. In their much-heralded and promised review of cycling strategy, I hope that the Government will use their good offices—I urge my noble friend the Minister in responding today to do so—to address the legal loophole which is also in my Private Member's Bill on road traffic offences, and set penalties for road traffic offences caused by cyclists and riders of e-scooters. Currently, deaths and serious injuries caused by cyclists, such as in the tragic loss of Kim Briggs, do not attract the same penalties as those for other road users. This is the legal loophole I seek to address, where death or injury is caused by their actions, and I hope that we can move forward. I note that many countries have banned e-scooters on safety grounds, and I hope that the Government will be mindful of that when they address this issue.

Covid provides an opportunity to address the balance between rural and urban economies—in particular, access to internet and mobile phone signals. So often, poor mobile phone signals and poor connectivity hold rural businesses and farmers back: they need the tools to do their job.

2.30 pm

Lord Goddard of Stockport (LD) [V]: My Lords, in partnership with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the Greater Manchester local enterprise partnership has launched the Build Back Better campaign, an initiative that sets out to build back the economy and create a better opportunity for a strong and successful recovery from Covid-19. Among the emerging themes are the need to embed good employment practices and deliver a sustainable low-carbon and green economy across the Manchester city region.

In Greater Manchester, 30% of households do not have access to a car, so public transport and a city region's ability to shape its networks are essential to prevent people being left behind figuratively and literally. The Clean Air plan can form an important part of Greater Manchester's post-lockdown recovery, cleaning up our commercial vehicles and providing bus operators and taxi drivers with the necessary funding to move to a modern green fleet. We are finally beginning to understand the value of the working classes—the drivers,

[LORD GODDARD OF STOCKPORT]
 delivery men, refuse men and council workers. They should be given the best employment rights in the world.

However, this is all aspirational; we need real powers devolved to deliver these things. Those powers, in transport and planning, have been outlined by other speakers today. City regions understand what city people need. We need support from the Government. It is not always top-down; sometimes we on the ground understand the needs of our communities. The sooner the Government get that and begin to devolve real powers to real city regions—that was the deal when we all signed up for them—the sooner we, all around this country, can deliver the services that our communities demand and which, at the end of Covid, will surely give us a better society for all.

2.31 pm

Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Lab) [V]: My Lords, like others, I am very grateful to my noble friend Lady Hayman for introducing this debate in such an excellent way.

What is Covid-19 about? Fundamentally, it is about cutting our numbers. What is climate change about unless we respond to that challenge? It is about cutting the numbers of the world's population. The issue has not been raised so far in the debate today. As I see it, at the heart of our problem is our human desire to acquire more and get bigger—to multiply and to grow, particularly materially, and as quickly as possible. I think nature is now hitting back.

We have triggered a steep rise in the population of our species; in the last 200,000 years it had barely moved. The Duke of Edinburgh celebrated his near-century birthday yesterday. In 1918, the population of the world was 1.8 billion. It is now 7.8 billion. The projection is that, by 2030, it will be in the order of 8.5 billion, yet scientists tell us that there is no way that the planet can sustain this continued growth. When we went into lockdown, I sent a Written Question asking what the Government are doing to try to restrain the growth in world population and, if possible, reverse it. I had a helpful reply about efforts to assist with contraception in many parts of the world, but we need more than that—much more. Covid-19 is just the first of many hits coming our way unless we address the fundamental issue of trying to bring all the parties together—churches and everyone involved with the growth in population—to seek a change in the direction in which we are going.

2.34 pm

Lord Kirkham (Con) [V]: My Lords, at a time of nationwide stress, sorrow and bereavement, it may seem crass to point out the upsides of Covid-19. But they are real enough; not least in the cleaner air and cleaner waters we have seen pictured across the world, from Venice to Beijing by way of the Himalayas. People are, of course, wasting less, walking and cycling more, supporting local shops and, above all, caring for each other.

The pandemic has effectively pressed a reset button on how we think and act, presenting a unique opportunity to change ourselves permanently for the better. It would

be utter folly not to seize that opportunity. The pandemic has created the greatest economic challenge of my lifetime—"a total catastrophe", as my noble friend Lord Forsyth described it—but as we take on the monumental task of rebuilding our economy, why would we not grasp the opportunity to do so in a greener way that tries to protect the natural environment? Why would we not seek to stimulate the creation of new jobs in green industries such as renewable energy? Why would we not invest in better home insulation, greener new housing, the development of hybrid-fuel aircraft or the national rollout of superfast fibre broadband?

We could even free up our frustrating, snail's-pace planning system. The public clearly accept that something must be done. Opinion polls show solid support for ensuring that our post-Covid recovery is a green one, and revolution is most definitely unnecessary to achieve that ambition. Accelerated evolution with the encouragement of the entrepreneurial spirit will do the trick. I earnestly believe that we must build back, and build back better, to ensure that the next chapter in our national story is greener, cleaner, stronger, fairer and more caring than the one we are leaving behind. I caution, however, that this should not be at any cost. We must retain perspective: urgent action to save and create jobs is vital.

2.36 pm

Baroness Crawley (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on securing this debate. I begin with a couple of general points. There is no way out of the worst economic crisis in living memory if the Government do not reject their magical thinking of pre-Covid days. Tax rises will need to happen from old and new sources, austerity must be shown the door and sustainability and diversity must be our watchwords. The Bank of England will not be able to just keep printing money; that way lies Argentina. The OECD prediction of the UK having economic shrinkage of 11%, even without a second spike, must surely send a red alert to our EU negotiations. As noble Lords have said, a new national consensus on investing in our public transport, our public services, our young people and our green, clean future has to be number one on the Government's to-do list.

I have one more specific point. It is 50 years since the Equal Pay Act received Royal Assent. The IFS states that mothers are more likely to have quit for family reasons, lost their jobs or been furloughed since lockdown. They are the majority in the current shut-down sectors, and their jobs' futures are as fragile as feminism in a Trump White House. What hope can the Government give to prevent women becoming Covid afterthoughts?

2.38 pm

Baroness Bull (CB): My Lords, the palpable improvement in air quality over the past three months has been the silver lining in the Covid cloud. In London, there has been an average fall in nitrogen dioxide levels of 26%, with even greater reductions in some of the capital's traffic hotspots. Across the UK, some cities have seen reductions of up to 60% compared with the same period last year.

We will all benefit from this given the well-evidenced connection between air pollution and physical as well as mental health, but a study from Harvard has uncovered important links between air quality and Covid-19. It found that even a small increase in long-term exposure to fine particulate matter—the main source of which is vehicle emissions—leads to an 8% increase in the Covid-19 death rate. This is of particular relevance as we think about not just a cleaner economy post Covid but a fairer one.

Air pollution inequalities are mainly an urban problem, with research finding higher levels of pollution in the UK's most deprived neighbourhoods and in areas with a population more than 20% non-white. This means that ethnically diverse communities are, in general, exposed to higher levels of air pollution, increasing their already greater susceptibility to Covid-19. It is therefore surprising that this aspect of risk was not addressed in the recent Public Health England report on the disproportionate impact of the disease on our black, Asian and minority ethnic populations.

Can the Minister tell us whether the Government have plans to design differentiated recovery strategies for those areas more heavily affected by poor air? Cleaning up these pollution hotspots would not just maintain the unanticipated gains in air quality, it would help to tackle some of the UK's most stubborn and persistent health inequalities. Levelling up is a laudable aim and one I support, but it cannot just mean rebalancing between north and south, urban and rural. It must also mean addressing the inequalities rife within our cities.

2.40 pm

Lord Wei (Con) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interests as in the register. Like other speakers, it is surprising to me—or perhaps not—that this year's lockdown may have done as much to reduce the impact of human behaviour on the climate as almost any other thing that we have tried to do in previous years. I find that curious. As the previous speaker mentioned, there could also be a link on the health side between pollution and those most affected by Covid.

Climate change is often presented as being in opposition to jobs and the economy. On one level, I do not blame the Government for focusing on getting the economy going in the short term and not necessarily taking a climate-orientated approach; whether we sell diesel cars or electric cars, people need jobs, and the Government will have to do a lot to get everyone working. However, I had a thought recently when I looked into the origin of the pandemic and our response, which made me wonder whether there is another way to attack this issue as we rebuild our economy and look at climate change—and how we can mitigate it—afresh: looking at resilience as a uniting theme.

As a country, we now know that we are vulnerable in terms of health and what is going on with the planet, as well as in business, because our many supply chains all over the world have been shown to be fragile. In future, we should make the goal not just to help the planet from a climate perspective or to create jobs and get the economy going at whatever cost, but to focus on how to make sure that this never happens again. How do we ensure that however many millions of

people are never at risk of losing their jobs because those jobs are primarily physical or, perhaps even worse, easily automatable? How do we ensure that our transport networks continue to support the country in future lockdowns? Can the Minister address this in her reply and talk about how the economy recovery plan will build a more resilient economy and society in future?

2.42 pm

Lord Desai (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I have a concrete, radical suggestion. Covid has proved that our way of doing politics, especially parliamentary business, cannot be restored to how it was. Whatever we do about decanting from the Palace of Westminster and restoring it, we cannot move back into it permanently. We must immediately and urgently commission the building of a new Parliament as soon as possible. That would make possible the latest electronic and other facilities that have been so brilliantly and quickly introduced to this Parliament. Let us make Parliament socially distanced, so that people may sit next to each other with proper desks, proper distances and proper equipment, and so that people living in remote areas of the United Kingdom do not have to travel all the way here to be part of Parliament. Let us build a modern, roomy and technologically well-equipped Parliament that decentralises the politics of the UK.

2.44 pm

Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick (CB): My Lords, my gratitude goes to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for allowing us to discuss fairness and sustainability in the same conversation.

I will focus on fairness, with two particular themes. First, as a result of this pandemic, many companies have decided that well over a million graduate placements or internship opportunities should be cancelled and removed from their working opportunity. Just as the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, said, this trashes the generation coming after us. I cannot understand why certain sectors have thrived in the course of the last 10 weeks to four months of this pandemic and therefore ask the Minister to give us clarity on that. The tech sector and anyone involved in food retail, distribution, health equipment, pharmaceuticals, any aspect of microengineering and, of course, computerisation and mobile have all boosted their massive profits and incomes legitimately. Surely they could mop up the internships and graduate work necessary to protect more than a million young people from coming out of university and finding there is no sustainable work for them. Will the Minister commit to rounding up the chief executives of those companies and requiring them to mop up the places left behind by other businesses?

Secondly, on fairness, this is the week of George Floyd's funeral. One great aspect of unfairness that remains in our society is the unique way in which black and ethnic minority people are harassed by our public services, particularly the police. If we are to have a fair society, we need sound experimentation in ending stop and search and seeing whether that delivers better criminal outcomes. After all, the tension on our streets will not go away unless a fair future is available to those people as well.

2.46 pm

Lord Oates (LD) [V]: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for initiating this critical debate and I thank noble Lords for their important contributions.

I do not always agree with the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, but I agree 100% with him that an urgent two-day debate on the economy is critical and that it is extraordinary that this has not happened already. I might not agree with everything that the noble Lord would say in that debate but the idea that he, and almost every other noble Lord, is limited to two minutes in debates on issues as important as this is absurd. I hope that the House of Lords Commission will look at this again.

How we respond to the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and rebuild our economy in its wake could not be more important. After all the sacrifices that have been made, after all the suffering that has been endured and after all that we have witnessed of the heroism of our front-line workers, this is not a moment to return to business as usual. It is a moment for a profound rethink about what we value in our society and how we can rebuild our economy to reflect those values.

Do we want to continue with an economy and society in which 10% of the population holds 50% of the wealth while NHS staff and care workers struggle to make ends meet, where 4.2 million children were living in relative poverty in 2019 and where the IFS expects that number to rise to 5.2 million by 2022? Do we want to continue with an economy and society in which 45% of children from black and minority ethnic groups live in poverty, compared with 30% of the population as a whole and 26% of the children of white British families, and where 72% of children growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one parent works? Do we want to continue with an economy in which not only are poorer people living shorter lives but, as research suggests, life expectancy is going down for some? Do we want to continue with an economy that fails to transform itself to tackle the climate crisis, misses the economic opportunities to lead the way on green technology and condemns future generations to an impoverished economy laden with stranded assets and trapped in feedback loops that destroy wealth and endanger our planet?

Those are the questions that we must answer. If the Government go back to business as usual, it will be clear that their answer is, “Yes, that is what we want.”—or, at least, that is what they will tolerate as a price for maintaining the status quo, although, as we know, it is future generations who will end up picking up the bill. I do not think that this is what the British people want, and I hope that it will not be the direction in which the Government travel. We have much work to do to tackle the challenges posed by pre-existing structural injustices in our economy, which are now being compounded by the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis: the lack of social mobility across our society; gender, racial and intergenerational wealth disparities; the discrimination that still exists in the workplace and with regard to access to capital; and the desperate plight of many of those on universal credit.

Yesterday, the Social Mobility Commission published its report on the government response to its recommendations over the past seven years. It marked the Government’s

responses to 76% of its recommendations as either red or amber—that is, that the Government had made either little or no progress or insufficient progress towards meeting them. The Government had met less than a quarter of its recommendations in full. The report notes that social mobility has never been more important, as the young and the poor will suffer most from the economic downturn as a result of Covid.

However, despite the rhetoric of government that it intends to level up opportunity, it is not acting to make its words a reality. If we are to build a dynamic and sustainable economy, it will be critical that we improve social mobility and remove additional obstacles facing BAME communities. Sadly, the Government’s record in that respect is no more encouraging. Their response to most of the recommendations in the report on *Race in the Workplace* by the noble Baroness, Lady McGregor-Smith, was one of either obfuscation or rejection—another opportunity to show that black lives matter was not taken.

Likewise, as we rebuild after Covid, we need to recognise the role of SMEs as the backbone of our economy. They need continued access to capital and protection from the frequent failures of the banking sector to provide the support they need. SMEs are particularly important to the economy for BAME communities and often find access to capital the hardest. The Government must give clear direction to the banks that, after all the assistance provided to them in the banking crisis, they now need to assist in supporting the productive economy.

It is critical that we get these things right as a country, and it is equally critical that the steps we take to emerge from the Covid crisis are rooted in delivering a green recovery and a sustainable green economy for the future. As the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, said, if we do not act decisively now, the climate crisis will deliver an increasingly dystopian future for all of us the world over. We have to use this crisis to accelerate our progress towards net zero.

I welcome the fact that the Government have placed themselves under a statutory obligation to meet the net-zero target by 2050. But the truth is that we are nowhere near taking the policy steps necessary to achieve the objective. The Government have to accept that their words will become increasingly hollow if they do not start to match them with actions. To date, the Government seem determined to pursue an approach that seems to be a combination of Saint Paul, “the good that I would I do not”, and Saint Augustine, “Lord, make me chaste—but not yet.”

We cannot afford for this approach to continue. Meeting our obligations under the Paris agreement will be incredibly challenging in any event. We therefore cannot afford to waste a moment in seeking to tackle them.

An immediate step, which was raised by a number of noble Lords, is the need for an urgent programme to start retrofitting our existing housing stock, which contributes about 15% of the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions. This would not only tackle climate impacts but would be a source of employment across the whole of the country. It should be a priority for the Government’s green recovery plan, and I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us what concrete steps the Government are planning in this regard.

Equally, we cannot go on building homes that do not meet zero-carbon standards. My noble friend Lord Stunell introduced such a policy of zero-carbon homes during the coalition Government only to see it scrapped by the Government that followed. As a result, we are allowing developers to profit from building properties that are not fit for purpose, while handing on a bill for the future. As the climate change committee has made clear, if we do not tackle the energy efficiency of existing housing stock and new build, we have absolutely no prospect of meeting our zero-carbon objective. We also need to look at the sort of innovative district local heating schemes raised by my noble friend Lady Walmsley and other noble Lords.

The UK's cutting-edge capacity in research and development, which the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, highlighted, offers us the opportunity to ensure that the UK is a leader, not a laggard, in building a productive and competitive green economy. However, as my noble friend Lord Shipley said, if we are to take advantage of that capacity, government will need to think hard about how it supports investment, research and innovation. Clean hydrogen is one area where the UK has the opportunity to lead the world, but it will require government investment to support research into scaling up cost-effective production through electrolysis from renewable energy sources. Tackling the challenge of producing cost-effective green hydrogen will be vital to tackle climate change, and we need government to take a much more committed and focused approach in that regard.

There is so much we need to do across every area of government if we are to build a fair, clean and sustainable economy. Above all, it will require a massive shift in the mindset of the Treasury and the Government as a whole. The Government have to recognise that the debt we have incurred and will continue to incur over the period of this crisis has to be managed for the long term, that we need significant investment to build the new green economy, and that any return to austerity will betray our people, exacerbate our economic challenges and do nothing to transform our economy.

2.55 pm

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I join other noble Lords in congratulating the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on securing this debate, and thank her for her excellent speech, which put forward real policies backed by evidence that not only is it possible to achieve a fairer, cleaner and more sustainable economy but that it is the right thing to do.

This is the third debate on the economic recovery post-Covid-19 in the last three weeks, and I thank all concerned for their contributions. This third debate takes us into the strategies that could contribute to a fairer, cleaner, and more sustainable economy here and, as the noble Lords, Lord Duncan and Lord Hannay, reminded us, through our international co-operation to greater effect.

It has been an excellent and wide-ranging debate, even although individual contributions have been severely curtailed. As the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, said, even taken together, we miss out when individual contributions to debates are so limited in time, and speaker numbers are so restricted. Your Lordships' House has a lot to offer, and we should be heard.

On a fairer economy, my noble friend Lord Tunnicliffe suggested that we had to think about the economy in wider terms than just GDP, and I agree. The noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, mentioned the recent IFS review of inequalities, which argues persuasively that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought existing inequalities in our society to the fore. As the noble Lord, Lord Birt, and other noble Lords reminded us, it says that it also risks exacerbating them.

Among the risks the report identifies are, as the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, pointed out, a widening in wage and employment inequalities. In the short run, it is overwhelmingly the low earners who are in shut-down sectors, being furloughed and at risk of unemployment. In the longer run, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Oxford said, more reliance on technology and working from home could favour the more highly educated at the expense of others.

There has been a widening in health inequalities. In the short run, the crisis appears to have widened even further the gap in death rates between better-off and less-affluent neighbourhoods.

There has been a widening in ethnic inequalities. Some minority ethnic groups, especially those of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin, are much more likely than others to work in shut-down sectors. Black groups are disproportionately represented in key worker occupations and, sadly, have been contracting Covid-19 at far higher rates than the white majority.

There has been a widening in generational inequalities. As my noble friend Lord Blunkett said, those leaving school or university this year will enter the toughest labour market in more than a generation, and workers under 25 are twice as likely as those over 25 to work in locked-down sectors.

The noble Baroness, Lady Burt, mentioned a widening in gender inequalities. The additional childcare and housework, as people stay at home and schools and nurseries are closed, has inevitably fallen far more on mothers than on fathers. There must be a risk that this disproportionately inhibits work and career progression for mothers, when progress in closing the gender wage gap had already stalled.

There has also been a widening in educational inequalities. The report points out that private schools are almost twice as likely to be providing online teaching as the state schools attended by children from the fifth most deprived families. So there is a long way to go for a fairer economy.

A cleaner, more sustainable economy is also a challenge that we can no longer afford to ignore. Last week, almost 200 chief executives, from companies including HSBC, National Grid and BP, signed a letter to the Prime Minister, which said:

“Efforts to rescue and repair the economy in response to the current crisis can and should be aligned with the UK's ... target of net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest.”

As the CCC chairman, the noble Lord, Lord Deben, said in a recent letter to the Prime Minister, recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic means investing in new jobs, cleaner air and improved health. The actions needed to tackle climate change are central to rebuilding our economy. The Government must prioritise actions that reduce climate risks and avoid measures that lock

[LORD STEVENSON OF BALMACARA]
in higher emissions. The Committee on Climate Change's advice to the Government is that actions to recover from the pandemic, in all UK nations, should be based on six resilience principles, which are worth looking back at.

We should use climate investors to support recovery and jobs; these should be labour-intensive, spread across the UK and ready to roll out as part of a targeted and timely stimulus package. We should lead a shift towards positive long-term behaviours. The Government can lead the way by introducing new social norms that benefit well-being, improve productivity and reduce emissions—this goes back to the point about not relying so much on GDP. There should be strong policies to reduce the UK's vulnerability to the destructive risks of climate change, and to avoid a disorderly transition to net-zero carbon. There will be more worldwide floods and other climate change difficulties, and we must prepare for them.

We should embed fairness as a core principle—this goes back to the earlier point about the fair economy. The benefits of acting on climate change must be shared widely, but the costs must not burden those who are least able to pay, or whose livelihoods are more at risk as the economy changes. As they kick-start the economy, the Government should avoid locking in higher emissions or increased vulnerability to climate change in the longer term. Support for carbon-intensive sectors should be contingent on their taking real and lasting action on climate change, and all new investments, whether supported by the Government or not, should be resilient to future climate risks. As the CCC chairman, the noble Lord, Lord Deben, said in a recent letter to the Prime Minister, the Government should use the funding that they are currently giving to companies to force behaviour changes in support of a greener economy.

Finally on this list, we should strengthen incentives to reduce emissions when looking at tax changes. This is a matter for the Government, and they must take it seriously. Revenue could be raised by setting or raising carbon prices for sectors of the economy which do not bear the full costs of emitting greenhouse gases. Global oil prices provide an opportunity to increase carbon taxes without hurting consumers at the present time.

If we want to build a fairer economy, we need to recognise that people are not affected equally by the Covid-19 pandemic, either in the immediate risk to health or in the negative social and economic consequences. In particular, some minority-ethnic groups, people in certain key worker occupations, and those in low-income jobs, are often at much greater risk, and of course these groups often overlap. Does the Minister agree that the immediate policy response should take steps to address these inequalities, and that we need to understand and mitigate the underlying systemic and institutional factors that can underpin them?

Today's debate has come up with a huge range of ideas about what a green new deal would look like in practice. We should expect to see an army of workers planting trees, building wetlands around our countryside, retrofitting insulation of our existing housing stock and office buildings, working on new green technologies,

and expanding the digital capacity of the country. This is all good stuff, but what about a scrappage scheme focused on switching private and public transport to electric vehicles, and, as others have suggested, local heating schemes and more, and more systemic, recycling approaches? Taken together, such a package could provide people—particularly those entering the labour force this year—with much-needed job security after a period of turmoil, and benefit everyone's financial security through lower energy bills.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, said, possibly the most important task must be for the Government to stop the piecemeal, incoherent approach that we have seen in policy-making in this area so far. Can the Minister confirm that this is on her agenda? At heart, this boils down to the Government coming up with a fair green rescue plan to drive up demand and reduce business uncertainty in the long term—a strategy which focuses on creating a fair society with good employment derived from sustainable investment and cleaner growth.

3.04 pm

Baroness Penn (Con): My Lords, I thank noble Lords for their words of welcome. My first appearance at the virtual Dispatch Box was to answer a Question from the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, on building a fair, clean and more sustainable recovery. It is therefore a particular pleasure that I am able to respond to a full debate on such an important subject. I add my words of congratulation to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, on securing it.

That I can respond from a physical rather than a virtual Dispatch Box, albeit one protected by a wipe-down plastic box, is a sign of the small steps that we have been able to take to ease social distancing measures and begin the process of carefully reopening our country and our economy. There is, of course, a huge distance still to travel. As we do so, I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Oates, that we cannot simply seek to go back to business as usual, but should take the opportunities from some of the very difficult and disruptive changes that this virus has brought about to do things differently—to build a recovery strategy that will contribute to a fairer, cleaner and more sustainable economy.

The first step towards doing so has been to put in place measures to protect people's livelihoods and the economy while we have taken measures to control the virus. As the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, has noted, it is precisely because this disease is not a great leveller, but instead affects some of the most disadvantaged in our society in the most profound ways, that the scale of government action has been so great. Under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, £19.6 billion has been claimed by businesses to support 8.9 million furloughed jobs. Some 2.6 million people have made claims for a total of £7.5 billion under the self-employment scheme, and over 780,000 bounceback loans have been approved, worth over £23 billion. Nearly 2 million people have been granted mortgage holidays. The Government have increased the value of universal credit and the local housing allowance, and provided £3 million for accommodation for rough sleepers. Importantly, we are now translating that into funding for over 3,300 homes, to make that transition off the streets permanent.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, noted, it is not just the scale of the action that has been unprecedented but the speed at which these programmes have been set up and able to put money into people's pockets. At a human level, it has provided a layer of security for people at a very difficult and uncertain time. Economically, it has been essential to efforts to reduce the long-term impact of this pandemic and minimise the chances of future economic scarring. I reassure the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, that we are not complacent about those prospects; we will not be able to protect every job or business, but we know that the costs of inaction would be far greater.

We also know that, as we turn our thoughts from immediate protections to rebuilding our economy, we must focus our energies on ensuring that it is one in which everybody has the opportunity to thrive, while driving clean and sustainable growth across all regions of the UK. Noble Lords will know that, last year, we became the first country to legislate to end our contribution to climate change by 2050. We remain more committed than ever to that goal, and, next November, the UK will host the 26th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, in Glasgow.

This year's spring Budget reinforced the UK's strong track record in this area. Announcements included £460 million for tree-planting and peatland restoration, over £1 billion of further support for ultra-low emission vehicles, at least doubling funding for energy innovation, and tax measures to encourage greater energy efficiency and reduce plastic waste. We have already committed £2 billion for cycling and walking over the course of this Parliament, to support our ambition to encourage more people to opt for these greener modes of transport.

This week, we held our first recovery round tables, bringing together businesses, business representative groups and leading academics to consider measures to support economic recovery and ensure that we have the right skills and opportunities in place for our workforce over the next 18 months. These round tables cover five key themes, including ensuring a green recovery, capturing economic growth opportunities from the shift to net-zero carbon emissions, increasing opportunity and levelling up economic performance across the UK through skills and apprenticeships.

I should now like to turn to some of the specific points made by noble Lords. As the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, set out very well, the challenge before us is to restart the economy but without returning to the previous levels of carbon emissions. We must put a green recovery at the heart of government and I reassure noble Lords that climate change plays a central role in government decision-making. We have already legislated to end our contribution to global warming by 2050 and a number of government measures embed that approach. Under the Climate Change Act, the UK is the first country to set legally binding carbon budgets that limit the total amount of greenhouse gases emitted over a five-year period. We have the Green Book guidance for evaluating and appraising the policies of the Budget and the spending review. They account for the cost of extra carbon emissions as well as the wider social costs and benefits of a project. We are reviewing that Green Book and the process for

allocating spending to ensure that all the regions and nations of the UK have the opportunity to spread and drive growth.

We will seek to take action across all sectors of our economy, and a number of noble Lords raised the energy sector. Renewable electricity generation has more than quadrupled since 2010. It now gives us 38.9% of our total electricity and for the first time exceeds the share of generation from gas. Using research and innovation to reduce the costs of meeting net zero will be essential and will put the UK at the forefront of the new technologies needed to decarbonise the economy. The Spring Budget therefore committed to at least doubling the size of the Energy Innovation Programme. We will also create a carbon capture and storage infrastructure fund to establish this technology in at least two sites by 2030.

The noble Lord, Lord Risby, and the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, talked about heating, which accounts for 18% of our emissions. We will need to get that to virtually zero if we are to meet our climate change targets. To support this transition and future-proof our infrastructure, the Government committed in the Spring Budget to over £400 million of new funding for low-carbon heat pumps and heat networks and are consulting on improving standards in new homes.

A number of noble Lords raised transport. As I said, to encourage greener modes of transport, we have introduced a £250 million emergency active travel fund so that people can use cycle and walking routes while public transport is more difficult for them to use during this pandemic. This will encourage them not to return immediately to their cars. The Government have also committed to ambitious targets to increase zero-emission vehicles on the roads and are consulting on bringing forward the phasing out of the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2035 to 2040. On air quality, the Spring Budget allocated an additional £304 million to enable local authorities to take immediate steps to reduce nitrogen dioxide emissions, bringing the total funding to £880 million.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, and the right reverend Prelate were right to say that we must embrace not only new technologies in transport but new ways of working, to reduce the demand for transport. To do that, we must recognise that the digital infrastructure is just as important as our physical infrastructure. The Government's existing superfast broadband programme has shifted its focus to delivering gigabit-capable broadband and has already delivered full fibre to more than 370,000 premises.

On biodiversity, as promised in our manifesto, the Government will invest £640 million in England to plant more than 40 million trees and restore 35,000 hectares of peatland. The 2019 spending round included an extra £30 million for biodiversity measures, and the Government are providing up to £25 million of match funding to help communities to create and enhance wildlife-rich habitats through the Nature Recovery Network.

On climate finance, last year we launched the Government's Green Finance Strategy, with an ambition to align private sector financial flows with clean, environmentally sustainable and resilient growth and to strengthen the competitiveness of the UK financial

[BARONESS PENN]

sector. We have also worked with the City of London to launch the Green Finance Institute to cement the UK's position as a global hub for green finance.

As noble Lords have noted, we cannot meet this challenge on our own and, as I said, the UK is hosting COP 26 next year. In the run-up to November 2021, the UK as host will continue to work with all involved to increase our climate action, build resilience and lower emissions. The new date will also allow the UK and our Italian partners to harness our upcoming G7 and G20 presidencies to drive our climate ambitions. Last year, the Prime Minister committed to doubling the UK's international climate finance to developing countries to turn the tide against climate change and species loss. The UK spend on climate finance over the past eight years has already helped 57 million people to cope with the effects of climate change. This ranges from support for poor farmers to grow climate-resilient crops to preserving water in areas facing an increased risk of drought, while investing in systems to help communities affected by extreme flooding and other effects of climate change.

A fair recovery will also require international efforts to tackle Covid. The IMF predicts that global GDP will fall by 3% in 2020, while GDP in emerging markets and developing economies will fall by 1%. This would be the worst recession since the great depression and much worse than the 2008 financial crisis. It is also predicted that sub-Saharan Africa will experience its first recession in 25 years, and DfID modelling suggests that an additional 70 million people could end up living in extreme poverty. That is why the UK has redoubled its efforts on the international response to Covid. We have committed over £700 million in ODA-eligible spending to the Covid response as well as reprogramming existing country spending to this effort. We are the leading contributor in the G20 towards global efforts to produce a vaccine. Perhaps I may also reassure noble Lords that the sustainable development goals remain at the heart of our approach.

Moving on to the economy, we must also ensure that we build a fairer recovery at home. Noble Lords have raised the prospect of looming unemployment as the furlough scheme comes to an end. As my noble friend Lady Eaton said, green jobs will be essential to provide new opportunities for those affected and the Government are committed to working with local government on this. We also remain committed to bringing forward a devolution White Paper.

The noble Baroness, Lady Kramer, referred to the Taylor review and the forthcoming employment Bill. We are committed to bringing forward the reforms contained in that review. The noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Eames, spoke movingly about a new cadre of unpaid carers brought into being by Covid, while the noble Baronesses, Lady Crawley and Lady Burt, talked about the impact of the pandemic and the lockdown on mothers. I would like to reassure all noble Lords that the Government will keep the human face of recovery in the forefront of our minds, although I will have to disappoint the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, and the noble Lord, Lord Razzall, on a universal basic income. I am just not able to make the promises that the noble Baroness asked for.

A number of noble Lords raised the tragic death of George Floyd in America and the protests that it has sparked here in the UK. They are not just about events abroad, but the racism and inequalities faced by black people here in this country. To build a fairer country, we must recognise that black lives matter. We must listen, engage, converse, reflect and, importantly, act. One of the tools that will help us to do so in government is the Race Disparity Audit. It shines a light on outcomes for different ethnicities. It is guided by the principle of "explain or change" and has already led to a programme of work by the DWP to tackle high unemployment rates in 20 hotspots; to taking forward the recommendations in the Timpson review of school exclusions; and to taking forward the recommendations in the Lammy review of the disproportionate treatment of and outcomes for black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system. However, I know that there is more to be done.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, and others have pointed out, the Public Health England review into Covid has shown the disparity of its impact on different ethnicities and communities and, as a number of other noble Lords noted, the disparities in its economic impact too. The Public Health England review is an important piece of work, which sets out firm conclusions. We are taking its initial findings very seriously. As the review makes clear, there is more to do to understand these disparities and what we can do to close the gap. We are determined to address them, and that is why the Equalities Minister will be taking forward important work to build on this review, including considering what changes might be required to future policy and existing guidance, as well as how data collection and quality can be improved.

A number of noble Lords raised how the current social distancing measures have impacted on our economy and on particular sectors as we move out of the lockdown. Perhaps I may reassure noble Lords that the two-metre rule is kept under constant review, including by looking at evidence from other countries. At the same time, noble Lords have talked about the careful balance between protecting our economy and protecting our health. These two are not mutually exclusive. The lockdown has had a significant impact on the country's health, and the recovery will be held back if we face a second peak in infections, so this is a careful balance and we will continue to be guided by the science.

The contributions to the debate have highlighted the link between the impact of the Covid pandemic and the climate crisis on young people and our next generation; if we are not able to address both of these, we will have failed in the question of intergenerational fairness. Those contributions have provided rich food for thought as the Government develop our recovery plan and ensure that we do not fail that test. I once again thank the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, for securing this valuable debate.

3.20 pm

Baroness Hayman: My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister. I congratulate her on a comprehensive and indeed encouraging wind-up speech. My thanks go to

everyone who has contributed and made this a rich and fascinating debate. It has been wide-ranging and covered an enormous number of subjects.

Despite that diversity, there are three themes that I would like to highlight which for me emerged as moral imperatives going forward. The first is the multiple inequalities in our society, and the fact that we will be able to say that we have succeeded only if we address them in the policies that we adopt. The second is the effect on the young, who are most at risk not only from the economic consequences of the pandemic but from the potential consequences of unmitigated climate change. My generation, the post-war generation, has had a golden life in many ways. We were not tested by war as our parents' generation was but we have a test now, and that test is the legacy that we leave to our children and grandchildren.

The third theme is the need to rise to the scale of the challenges that we face and, perhaps above all in this excellent debate, to recognise that we will be judged not only on our words but on our actions.

Motion agreed.

3.23 pm

Sitting suspended.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

4.01 pm

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): My Lords, we now come to the Question in the name of the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours. A limited number of Members are here in the Chamber, respecting social distancing. If the capacity of the Chamber is exceeded, I will immediately adjourn the House. Other Members will participate remotely, but all Members will be treated equally, wherever they are. For Members participating remotely, microphones will unmute shortly before they are to speak; please accept any on-screen prompt to unmute. Microphones will be muted after each speech. I ask noble Lords to be patient if there are any short delays as we switch between physical and remote participants. I remind the House that our normal courtesies in debate still very much apply in this new hybrid way of working.

This is a time-limited debate; the time limit is one hour and speaking time is one minute. There is no spare time, so I invite all speakers to observe the one-minute limit.

Covid-19: Masks

Question for Short Debate

4.02 pm

Asked by Lord Campbell-Savours

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to review their advice on the wearing of masks in public to address COVID-19.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab) [V]: My Lords, 14 weeks ago, I raised in the House the issue of masks. The Government's response was to reject my case. I have

repeatedly raised the issue. Meanwhile, nearly 60 countries worldwide have adopted mandatory mask wearing. During that period, we have registered the second-highest incidence worldwide of death and new cases. Indeed, today there are more cases in the UK, with a population of 67 million, than in the whole of Europe, with a population of 460 million. We are struggling in the UK against an avalanche of reported new cases—between 4,000 and 7,000 a day—and we have moved into second place worldwide for deaths per 1,000 of the population.

I am not arguing that our shocking record is down to PPE shortages, though I do argue that mask policy has been a major contributory factor. The Government's whole approach to this pandemic has been riddled with miscalculation, misjudgment and mistake. Their errors in the case of the elderly, on PPE, on testing and in the dispersal of the elderly from hospitals to care homes—all unparalleled in medical history—have undoubtedly cost thousands of lives. Those responsible will never be forgiven—never.

Obsession with the herd, the abandonment of test and trace, reliance on Public Health England's advice on testing and an early failure to take the big decisions have all contributed to this disaster. The sight last week, televised worldwide, of MPs lined up over a kilometre to vote in our Parliament has made us an international laughing stock. That is the background to this affair: the worst example of government incompetence in my political lifetime.

Last week, the policy on masks was finally rescinded. It would be churlish of me, despite what I have said, not to welcome this decision, limited as it is. I understand that, for many in government, the change would have been professionally embarrassing. One would hope that comments in the *Lancet* of 27 May, where it is stated that there is increasing evidence of aerosol spread of Covid-19, meaning that people further than two metres away are all at risk, help to strengthen their resolve. If that is so, why are the Government still so wedded to hesitant change at a time when the country is desperate for real action and resolve? The truth is that they should never have allowed procurement and supply to compromise their professional judgment. The policy change does not go far enough.

In setting out my case, I thank Mr Philip Collett of Banbury, who has been of invaluable help in carrying out my research. First, on the evidence of transmissibility in the absence of masks, there have been innumerable case reports. In the particularly interesting Hunan bus case in China in January, more than half the people infected were more than two metres away and three were infected at 4.5 metres. People wearing masks were not infected. In a call centre in South Korea, of 1,100 people tested, nearly 100 tested positive—that incident speaks for itself. On 10 March, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that one person in a choir in Skagit County, Washington, infected 53 choristers, of whom two died. The virus was spread by a superspreader. This well-documented case was a clear indicator of breath-borne transmissibility. In another choir case, this time in Amsterdam and again well documented, a single chorister infected another 102 choristers. The list goes on. These and many more

[LORD CAMPBELL-SAVOURS]

similarly documented cases should have alerted policy-makers to the dangers of transmissibility and the need for masks.

What has been the response of government? We now have the revised WHO guidance, which recommends mask wearing not only on public transport but in grocery stores, at work, at social and mass gatherings and in closed settings—including schools, churches and all places of religious worship. Then we have the view of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which strongly recommends the wearing of face coverings in public settings including stores and pharmacies. We have the Royal Society's working group now strongly supporting masked protection. We also have the comments of KK Cheng, professor of public health at Birmingham University, who charges that without masks we have no defence whatever against asymptomatic superspreaders.

We then have the views of Professor George Gao, who heads the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. He is a highly respected veterinarian with an Oxford PhD in biochemistry. He did his post-docs at Harvard, specialising in immunology and virology. He states:

"The big mistake in the US and Europe, in my opinion, is that people aren't wearing masks."

You have to wear a mask, otherwise droplets come out of your mouth when you speak. He continues:

"Many people have asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic infections. If they are wearing face masks, it can prevent droplets ... escaping and infecting others."

He has co-authored papers in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Lancet*. Researchers at the National Institutes of Health used lasers to demonstrate transmissibility at up to five metres—that is with people without symptoms. That is said to be responsible for half of all cases. Now we have the BMA view. Again, I quote:

"Given there remains a considerable risk of infection ... wearing masks can reduce the spread of the virus ... measures should not be restricted to public transport but to all areas where social distancing is not always possible - the risk will be much less if the public adopts this now - not mid-June ... the Government should ensure a supply of face coverings for the public, similar to practices in other nations."

Yes, that is the BMA. The Government say that they go on the advice of experts; now they have it in that presentation.

On 14 May, 100 of the world's top academics released a statement asking for mask wearing in all public places. During our researches, we were able to identify over 80 highly reputable research sources pointing to the use of masks in reducing onward transmission. I was particularly interested in the suggestion of the noble Lord, Lord Skidelsky, about distributing disposable face masks to all households, because it brings us to the nub of the problem. There can be no doubt that the failure to organise procurement, and inadequate mask-manufacturing capacity in the United Kingdom, have influenced policy.

To put it simply, in wartime the Government direct; we are in a war, with hundreds of thousands of lives lost and many more at risk, yet our approach to procurement has been appalling. We need a Beaverbrook Ministry of Supply, not a Hancock. Ministers are far too preoccupied with hiding behind preconceived views

on virus transmission. They should spend more time more accurately interpreting reports from the Covid-19 Mobility Data Network.

Where do the public stand? In this debate, YouGov's recent polling shows that 73% want compulsory masking in shops and 64% want masking in crowded spaces, such as town centres. The public are not stupid; they live in the real world. So where do I stand? I believe that a combination of track and trace, vaccination and masks will bring it all under control and avoid a second wave. We should have mandatory masking in offices, shops, schools, libraries, factories, hotels, pubs and garages—indeed, all confined areas apart from, obviously, one's own home. A combination of these measures should bring it all to an end.

Finally, in *Stop Press*, I hear that only yesterday a Cambridge University modelling study, backed by considerable data, called for the immediate and universal adoption of face masks by the public. It stated that if widespread face-mask use by the public is combined with physical distancing and some lockdown, it may reduce the all-important R factor and offer an acceptable way of managing the pandemic, while reopening—before there is a vaccine—economic activity. That is all we want; let us just all get on with it.

4.12 pm

Lord Balfe (Con) [V]: I think the debate is no longer about face masks. We accept that there may be shaky evidence that they are needed, but what we need to debate is when they should be worn and what sort of face mask? The overall European opinion is that they need to be worn in enclosed spaces and where people are together for a minimum of 10 minutes, because that is where the danger lies. I hope that we will look into this and not talk just about face masks. There are different types, with different levels of effectiveness. I would like the Minister to comment on what is going to be done to get them distributed. This morning, at King's Cross station there were no face masks; at St Pancras, they were being given away free; and in Cambridge station, there were none. What do HMG have in the way of plans to distribute face masks and to look at the quality control of the types of masks that are going to be used?

4.13 pm

Baroness Northover (LD) [V]: My Lords, many people now wearing masks may feel that they are protecting themselves. The WHO makes it clear that any role non-medical masks have is to protect others. It advises Governments to adopt a comprehensive strategy to suppress transmission. Only where physical distancing is difficult should Governments encourage the public to use non-medical fabric masks.

In the UK, people have been asked not to buy medical masks so that they do not deprive the NHS and care sector. Will the Government therefore stop companies from advertising these masks, for example in newspapers? The care sector still reports not being able to get adequate PPE, especially via Clipper. When will there be sufficient? Are the Government building reserves of PPE for a second wave of the infection? These issues must be addressed if the risk of coronavirus is genuinely to be reduced.

4.14 pm

Lord Skidelsky (CB) [V]: My Lords, I welcome the Government's decision to make mask wearing compulsory on public transport from 15 June, but I believe that this needs to be accompanied by two further measures. First, mask wearing should be encouraged by distributing free masks to all households. Japan and Turkey have done just that. Secondly, the recommended measurement for social distancing should be cut. We are now almost alone in asking for two metres. One metre is the distance recommended by the WHO; Austria, Germany and Holland advise 1.5 metres; and Hong Kong, Singapore, France, Italy and China advise one metre. Our Government have made no effort to test the trade-off between social distancing and wearing masks. The noble Lord, Lord Bethell, admitted on 1 June in his reply to a Written Question that I asked:

"No assessment has been made of the change to a face covering's health benefit when social contact is at two, one and zero metres."

Common sense suggests that wearing a mask reduces the distance you should keep from someone else. Giving people the confidence to interact normally is the key to reopening schools and to economic recovery.

4.15 pm

Lord Clark of Windermere (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I am pleased to be here supporting the increased use of face masks in public—so ably argued by my noble friend. In his argument, which he made with conviction and authority, he used evidence, information and knowledge to make his case. I want to highlight two of his arguments.

First, he gave us an indication of the bodies that support the increased use of face masks—the BMA, the World Health Organization, the Royal Society, the *Lancet*, and so on. Then—this is critical—as further evidence, he cited 80 research sources worldwide that found that wearing a face mask increased the success rate in the battle against Covid-19.

4.16 pm

Baroness Anelay of St Johns (Con) [V]: My Lords, can my noble friend the Minister say what work is being done with health experts to ensure that face coverings on sale are in good supply, of sufficient quality to stop the virus spreading, and affordable? I looked online yesterday for sales of face masks and saw that some well-trusted high-street retailers now have non-surgical masks in stock—but they are not cheap, especially for those on lower incomes and for those who need to use masks on public transport every working day, perhaps for many months ahead.

Finally, I watched online as Members of the House of Commons voted yesterday and noticed that some wore masks. Has advice to parliamentarians been changed to permit or indeed encourage the wearing of masks while on the Parliamentary Estate?

4.17 pm

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, this debate, as well as the one introduced last week by the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, and the one earlier this afternoon are really opening this House to ridicule, with the lack of ability for us to debate some of these important issues properly.

I live in the Scottish Borders and from next week we will begin to see people again travelling across the border frequently or every day on public transport for retail purposes or for business or securing public services. From next week, those people will also have an unacceptable level of uncertainty over the guidance, legal requirements or ministerial requests on the use of face coverings if they are under 60 or medical face masks if they are over 60. Therefore, I want to ask the Minister a very specific question. Next week, what will be the law—not guidance or ministerial requests—for those crossing the border on public transport to secure public services without being able to socially distance and for those carrying out business activities?

4.18 pm

Lord Wood of Anfield (Lab) [V]: My Lords, this is the Government's history on the issue of face masks. On 6 March, NERVTAG expressed concern that the public did not understand why face masks were acceptable for healthcare staff but not for them. The minutes explained that, unlike the public,

"healthcare staff are trained to use the masks and know when to change the masks when they become soggy or contaminated."

In the remainder of March, as lockdown measures were introduced, face masks were not discussed. On 7 April, NERVTAG concluded that the increased use of face masks would have minimal effect on stopping people becoming infected. SAGE agreed. There was no further mention of face masks in SAGE until 11 May, when the Prime Minister issued advice that the public should wear "face coverings" in enclosed public spaces. On 4 June, the Transport Secretary said that face coverings would be mandatory on public transport from 15 June.

I support the use of face masks, but what on earth is the scientific rationale that justifies this handbrake turn in policy? We cannot expect people to know what they are doing unless the Government explain what they are doing. Until they do so properly, people will conclude that the Government do not know what they are doing.

4.20 pm

Lord Blencathra (Con) [V]: My Lords, it seems that there are two ways to protect oneself and others from the virus. One is distance and the other is face masks and hand washing. Face masks seem to give limited protection to the wearer of the mask from inhaling the virus from others, while giving much more protection to others who do not get exhaled upon. The further the distance the lower the risk, and that risk increases until one is up really close. If two metres is regarded as the safe distance without a mask—except in closely confined public transport—then it seems a no-brainer to reduce the distance to one metre and insist on face masks for all out in public, as the noble Lord, Lord Skidelsky, said. This is a sensible compromise, giving as little risk as possible while opening up the economy. Therefore, we should reduce the distance to one metre and make it compulsory to wear a mask.

4.21 pm

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD) [V]: My Lords, as we relax the lockdown, the Government have the opportunity to put forward a triad: wash your hands,

[LORD CAMPBELL OF PITTENWEEM]

keep your space, and wear a mask. In doing that, they will not only assist the relaxation, but continue to make clear to the public just how important it is to take the necessary precautions. When we come to precautions, I have a question for the Minister: supposing the wearing of face coverings had been essential—even compulsory—in all the care homes in this country, how much more successful would we have been in preventing the quite tragic number of deaths that have occurred there?

4.22 pm

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB) [V]: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, on the excellent way in which he introduced this topic. While it is important to understand that the wearing of the face mask offers only slight protection to the wearer, it will offer a degree of protection to others, especially where social distancing rules become difficult. It is also important to understand that we need protection against those who may have the virus without realising it. A face mask worn by a carrier will reduce the chance of the spreading of the infection. A rudimentary mask or scarf is better than nothing; common sense requires that we must use all means if we are to defeat this deadly virus.

4.23 pm

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (Non-Afl) [V]: My Lords, I will start with a simple question because, like all those who have spoken, I am not clear as to the Government's evidence or why they are hesitating to recommend the widespread use of face coverings across the board, not just for public transport. There is one question that has not been answered: have the Government had discussions with the security services, the police or other law enforcement bodies on whether they have views on the implications of people being at large, out and about in public, wearing face coverings? I wonder whether that is one of the reasons why they are hesitating so much. I join with others in saying that we need to reduce the social distancing rule to one metre so, if face coverings are the way to go, perhaps we need to find some other ways of reassuring those who are concerned about crime.

4.24 pm

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab) [V]: I am grateful to my noble friend for giving us this opportunity to discuss another government U-turn. Originally, masks were not recommended: we were told that they were counterproductive, ineffective and would produce a false sense of security. What has changed and why? Is it advice from SAGE, Dominic Cummings or a focus group?

I have four questions for the Minister. First, will sufficient masks be available for those who are now required to use them? Secondly, what measures are there to make sure that the masks available to the public are of an appropriate quality? Thirdly, will there be a kitemark so that the public know whether what they are buying is of good quality? Finally, what are the Government doing to prevent retailers hiking up prices and making excessive profits on the masks they sell?

4.25 pm

Lord Duncan of Springbank (Con) [V]: My Lords, there is a significant difference between cloth coverings that can be reused and disposable face masks. Will the Minister commit to explaining clearly to the public how cloth coverings for faces can be disinfected to ensure that there is no accidental spread of the virus?

4.25 pm

Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (LD) [V]: We have compulsory mask wearing for NHS staff on 15 June at all times. At the daily rate at which the NHS uses face masks, are there enough masks? The Government announced on 28 May that all dental practices would open as normal from 8 June. They also have to source masks, competing with hospitals and care homes.

What about the general public? An article in the *BMJ* raises the ethical question: should the Government apply the precautionary principle and encourage the wearing of masks on the grounds that we have little to lose and maybe something to gain?

There are four key messages on Covid-19. The precautionary principle is to act without definitive evidence. It is contested that wearing masks will reduce transmission, and limited protection could prevent some transmission, but because it is such a serious threat, the wearing of masks in public should be advised under the precautionary principle.

4.26 pm

Lord Randall of Uxbridge (Con) [V]: My Lords, as my noble friends Lord Duncan of Springbank and Lord Balfe said, there is a great deal of confusion among the public about not only the wearing of face masks but what constitutes a suitable face covering. For example, does a cotton scarf constitute a suitable face covering? I hope that my noble friend the Minister will tell us that there will be ample publicity to ensure that the public know exactly what is what.

4.27 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB) [V]: My Lords, the University of Cambridge has just said that we have little to lose from the widespread adoption of face masks, but the gains could be significant. On 15 June, face coverings will be mandatory on public transport in England. On 5 June, the WHO updated its guidance on using face masks.

Does the Minister agree that the reduction of social distancing from two metres to one metre is really crucial now? The risk goes up from 1.3% to just 2.6% by doing so. Denmark has moved to one metre, as have France, Singapore, Hong Kong—I could go on. From a business point of view, one metre could be the difference between survival or bankruptcy. A pub or a restaurant can operate at barely 30% with two-metre social distancing; with one-metre social distancing it can operate at more than 70%. With one-metre social distancing, we can get four times as many people into any space than with two metres. The difference between opening or not is for not just the hospitality sector, which employs 3.5 million people, but schools, theatres, cinemas and universities. The wearing of masks on public transport can add to making one metre even

safer. For the sake of our economy and livelihoods, could the Government please bring social distancing down from two metres to one metre immediately?

4.28 pm

Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I too welcome the Government's sadly rather late decision to advise the mandatory wearing of face coverings on public transport from next Monday. The Mayor of London had recommended this two months ago at the height of the pandemic, when drivers were already dying.

I asked on two occasions in late April when Ministers would consider encouraging the public to wear coverings, only to be told that there was insufficient scientific evidence to do so. Surely the Government must regret taking so long to make this recommendation. No one is suggesting that masks are a cure but, as SAGE said on 20 April:

"Wearing facemasks outside the house could complement existing government messaging of social responsibility".

They could have helped to provide protection from others who showed no symptoms but were infectious. It is regrettable that the Government have again been too slow to act, disregarding lessons from abroad.

4.29 pm

Lord Naseby (Con) [V]: Back in March, we were told by the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, that the science behind the general population wearing masks was "extremely weak". At the same time, the WHO said to wear masks, and Germany and the others followed. Two months later, based, presumably, on new evidence that no one has seen—if, in fact, there is any evidence at all—we have advice on transport and hospitals; I am not sure about advice for care homes, or whether they have been forgotten again. The WHO continues to advise 1-metre distancing, and that is immediately followed by France, Italy and the others. Meantime, we poor souls have to stick with 2 metres, and a whole host of queries around why the WHO advice is yet again being ignored. Frankly, this is not acceptable.

4.30 pm

Lord Holmes of Richmond (Con) [V]: On a related issue, can my noble friend confirm that there is no longer any out-of-date PPE in the NHS and care home delivery pipeline, and if there is, when that will no longer be the case?

To the matter at hand, it is clear that if one wears a face mask, it does not stop one getting the disease, but it prevents others getting it. To that end, would the Minister agree that, logically, if we all come together and wear face masks, we will all necessarily stop each other getting the disease? Does he agree that it is time to mask up and make the difference? It would enable us to drop 2 metres to 1 metre, get the economy back up and get kids back in school—they desperately need to be learning. If the Government want a line for it, does he agree that it is time to come together as a country, mask up, cover up and kill Covid-19?

4.31 pm

Lord Roberts of Llandudno (LD) [V]: We all know how indebted we are to certain centres that care for rough sleepers. But, unfortunately, some of these centres

are unable to function and, shortly, folk who need help will have to go by public transport. They go a lot from the west to the east. This morning, the Whitechapel Mission served over 300 breakfasts. People travel, and they have to travel on public transport, so who is going to be responsible for giving these folk fresh, clean face masks to face the day? Is it going to be the local authority, or the Government themselves?

4.32 pm

The Earl of Clancarty (CB) [V]: I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, on his persistent campaign, and only wish that the Government had acted earlier. We knew in April, from Jeremy Howard's research, of the significant effect that mandatory face masks had in Austria and Czech Republic. A new German study finds that masks reduced reported infections there by 40%. Lives will still be saved in the UK if mandatory mask wearing is extended to other public spaces. That is particularly important in those areas of the country where there is still a high rate of infection, and local authorities should be involved.

Will the Government ensure that masks are worn on station platforms and concourses, by all station staff, as well as those on trains, and by the British Transport Police, who should be seen to set an example? Will this measure be extended to shops, where close contact with people is often unavoidable, as well as to restaurants and pubs providing takeaways? Current guidance for restaurant staff does not recommend face masks for Covid-19. Will that be urgently reviewed?

4.33 pm

Lord Kirkham (Con) [V]: My Lords, I grew up in a world where the only wearers of face masks were bank robbers, sexual deviants and the Lone Ranger, in a mining community where the underground workforce would have benefitted from wearing face masks, but did not, and paid the price. It seems now that, in many situations, masks will be mandatory, yet not long ago, we were informed by Public Health England that face masks were worse than useless outside of clinical settings. The subsequent volte-face, inconsistency across the devolved Administrations, and publicity given to more draconian recommendations by the World Health Organization are confusing and damaging to essential credibility and trust. Whatever the veracity of the mask concept, if we want the public to take our advice, then the message needs to be bold, clear and, above all, consistent until the pandemic is over. At that time, I trust that non-clinical masks will be worn only as a fashion accessory, and by those with unusual hobbies.

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Garden of Frognal) (LD): My Lords, I understand that the noble Lords, Lord Pendry and Lord Wei, have withdrawn, so I call the noble Baroness, Lady Barker.

4.34 pm

Baroness Barker (LD) [V]: My Lords, on 4 March, the government advice on face masks was that they do nothing, so do not wear them. On 17 April, the advice was that they do more harm than good, and on 11 May, it was that wearing one is an added precaution.

[BARONESS BARKER]

As of 4 June, wearing them is to be compulsory. In that time, the science did not change but the death toll rose. Why have the Government failed to distinguish between PPE standards necessary in acute treatment settings and masks which are suitable for people using public transport? Why, given this record, should the public trust them during a second spike?

4.35 pm

Baroness Kennedy of Cradley (Lab) [V]: My Lords, there is strong scientific evidence to support the obligatory use of face masks as part of a strategy to fight Covid-19. To name a few examples, as mentioned by my noble friend Lord Campbell-Savours, there is the modelling survey published yesterday by the Universities of Greenwich and Cambridge; the compelling evidence from Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Germany; and evidence that shows that droplets can linger in the air for tens of minutes, which potentially rides roughshod over the effectiveness of measures for queuing in shops. With shops reopening on Monday, social distancing will become harder. The government advice is to wear a face covering where social distancing is not possible, especially indoors, but when we decide to go to a shop, we will have no idea how empty or busy the streets or shops will be. Rather than the government advice remaining vague and weak, should the advice not now be strong and clear: wear a mask to protect others and their mask will protect you?

4.37 pm

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Con) [V]: My Lords, first, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, for his very cogent presentation. I have several questions for the Minister. The first relates to supply: do we have enough, and enough for venues other than transport? If it is right for transport, it is hard to see why it is not right for religious buildings, town centres, shops and so on. As others have said, surely that is the case. We need to make sure that masks are of an appropriate quality—is that being monitored? We need to make sure that appropriate publicity is given to this.

As a country, we seem to have been a bit too leaden-footed in our response to this. To get the R rate down, we clearly need face masks in all sorts of venues. I hope that the Government will proceed with this, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister on those specific questions.

4.38 pm

Lord Mann (Non-Afl) [V]: I do not intend to tell the Government what they should be doing, but I hope that they are following the science. In Germany, Berlin is not mandating or requiring the use of face masks, unlike some other regions, such as Saxony, which are. Are the Government evaluating any difference in the prevalence or death rate in Berlin compared to, say, Saxony, where the policy on face masks is entirely different?

Some football clubs are now producing their own face masks. Can we anticipate, at some stage later this year, socially distanced spectators at outdoor sports, such as cricket and football, wearing face masks in order to watch their favourite team?

4.38 pm

Baroness Fookes (Con) [V]: My Lords, I very much welcome the chance to enter this debate. If there are powerful reasons now for wearing face masks, I think it is up to the Government to give very clear, practical guidance to members of the public as to what kind of face mask they should use. I feel that single cloth masks are probably worse than useless, but I would like guidance on that, as well as guidance on actually using them. On my limited excursions outdoors, I have seen people take them on and off, and touch their faces. I wonder whether this really makes it difficult for them to be as hygienic as they should be. Finally, I think we need guidance on their disposal. Are they to be the type that can be washed thoroughly, and if so, how? If they are to be disposed of, are they to be disposed of very safely indeed? I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some real guidance on these matters.

4.39 pm

Baroness Massey of Darwen (Lab) [V]: My Lords, there is evidence that wearing a mask can reduce the risk of transmitting and succumbing to infection. The most precise that I have seen is from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which states that if a Covid carrier wears a mask and a close contact also does so, the risk of contagion is a mere 1.5%. I wonder why the Government are not giving more clarity on the use of masks. I also wonder whether there have been discussions on potential protection from masks making school openings possible. It may be difficult to insist that younger children wear masks, but surely older pupils and staff can. This will be essential if lessons cannot be outside or classrooms cannot have good ventilation. Will the Government, while relaxing some of the measures, enforce the wearing of masks more widely? The wearing of masks is an important issue, and I thank my noble friend for raising it.

4.40 pm

Baroness Uddin (Non-Afl) [V]: My Lords, in support of the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, I call on the Government to give explicit instructions about the mass use of masks in all public spaces, including community organisations, retail and the hospitality sector. In countries where masks are mandated, the infection rate appears drastically lower. How will the Government ensure that local health and community organisations are given adequate supplies, particularly for households in areas deemed vulnerable and disadvantaged by low income? Finally, I acknowledge Edmund Yeo from the Chinese Information and Advice Centre, Yisha Xieu, Emma Zhong and the Beijing association for enabling me to distribute thousands of masks to vulnerable women in the East End of London.

4.41 pm

Lord Sheikh (Con) [V]: My Lords, it has been announced that from 15 June anyone travelling on public transport must, as a rule, wear a face covering. In addition, all hospital visitors and outpatients will

have to wear a face covering and all staff will have to wear surgical masks at all times. The WHO has now revised its guidance relating to the wearing of masks. Will the Minister comment on the recent announcement by the WHO and on whether we should make it compulsory for face coverings to be worn by everyone where social distancing is not possible, as advised by the BMA? As someone who wears a face mask all the time when I go out, I would like us to follow the BMA's advice. I also feel that the social distancing rule should be reduced from two metres to one metre. Lastly, we need to ensure that face masks sold in the market are of appropriate quality.

4.42 pm

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op) [V]: My Lords, the serious failure of the Government over face masks lies in communication. They have been neither clear nor consistent, which makes the situation all the worse. Wearing face coverings when you are out, travel on public transport or go shopping helps stop the spread of this terrible infection. Business wants to get back to work and our economy needs to start moving again, so we need a secure supply of non-medical face coverings and a proper communications plan. We need a clear, consistent message broadcast from the Government on social media, national and local government websites and terrestrial television channels and through civil society: "Wear a face mask when you leave your home as we ease lockdown. You will help stop the spread of this terrible disease, help save lives and help our country get back on its feet." That should be the clear and consistent message.

4.43 pm

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con) [V]: My Lords, the advice of the World Health Organization is very clear: wearing a face mask or face cloth protects the wearer against any infected person and prevents an infected person infecting another person. Does my noble friend therefore agree that wearing a mask can help and that the guidance from the Government could and should be clearer, particularly on the use of masks in restaurants and hospitality in addition to on public transport? Will my noble friend agree to extending the guidance to the wearing of gloves by all of us, further to protect the wearer and others from being infected or from infecting surfaces, where we know the infection can remain for a long time?

4.44 pm

Lord Truscott (Ind Lab) [V]: My Lords, as we have heard, the Government's policy on wearing face masks has been shambolic, like much of their response to Covid-19. My wife and I went into voluntary lockdown on 14 March, and if the Government had brought lockdown forward similarly, tens of thousands of lives would have been saved. The president of the Royal Society has pointed out that mask-wearing countries have a much lower rate of transmission of Covid-19, as has been mentioned. The evidence for wearing masks is now overwhelming. I shall ask the Minister two questions. First, where does he expect people to buy the masks required to travel on public transport et cetera? Secondly, will Her Majesty's Government,

like some other countries, be handing out free masks at railway stations and shopping outlets, as some noble Lords have suggested?

The Deputy Speaker: Lord Rennard? I apologise, but we cannot hear the noble Lord. Baroness Thornton?

4.45 pm

Baroness Thornton (Lab) [V]: My Lords, a speed dating debate such as this one at least ensures brevity. I congratulate noble Lords. There is a theme to the questions: our regret at another issue that exemplifies the Government being slow to act. Is this yet another policy announced without discussion with the devolved Administrations?

Two months ago, Labour backed the Mayor of London's call for face masks on public transport to be compulsory. Two months ago, we raised the issue of bus drivers needing PPE, and asked whether buses should still run if there is not sufficient PPE. Does the Minister know the answers to these questions, and is he aware of the vulnerability and risk to bus drivers? We must wear masks on public transport from Monday, but who will enforce this policy, and who will help those who forget to bring their masks, forget to put them on, or cannot afford them? We need a comprehensive transport policy, to get our public transport moving, to protect staff and to protect passengers.

The Deputy Speaker: My Lords, may I just see whether the noble Lord, Lord Rennard, is available before we come to the Minister? No, I think he is not. In that case, I call the Minister.

4.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Bethell) (Con) [V]: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, for raising this important issue. I pay tribute to his passion and perseverance on the issue of masks. I thank all noble Lords who have contributed to this debate for their thoughtful comments, which I will tackle at pace. I apologise if I am unable to namecheck each contributor or address each question as I would have liked.

As we ease lockdown restrictions, the debate on these non-pharmaceutical interventions is key, and I very much welcome the debate and the points raised. As for our strategy, the noble Lord, Lord Campbell of Pittenweem, suggested a Covid-19 defence triad, which I welcome, but our triad, which the Government support, is, first, one of social distancing; secondly, one of hand hygiene; and thirdly, one of isolation. This triad offers the best protection from the spread of the disease. These three measures are our priority and our advice on face coverings does not negate this.

The noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, asked what plans the Government have to review their advice on this issue. Noble Lords will be aware that last week the Government made two announcements on the use of face coverings in specific situations. On 4 June, the Transport Secretary announced that the Government will work with transport operators to make it mandatory

[LORD BETHELL]

for passengers to wear face coverings when using public transport in England from 15 June. On 5 June, the Health Secretary announced that all hospital staff in England will be provided with surgical masks, which they must wear, and that all hospital visitors and outpatients should also wear face coverings from 15 June.

Many noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, and my noble friend Lord Blencathra, provided interesting and well-considered ideas on the exact distance that we need to enforce in our social distancing policy. I assure noble Lords that we will continue to review the evidence on social distancing, and on the question of one or two metres, we will be led by the science and the advice of experts on any changes to this policy.

On 11 May, the Government issued their first set of guidance on the use of face coverings. Informed by the scientific evidence, we advised that, if they can, the public should wear a face covering in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible and where they will come into contact with others they do not normally meet. This announcement and the accompanying guidance from Public Health England came after a careful review of the latest scientific evidence by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, SAGE. The noble Baroness, Lady Northover, makes an important point about the risk of cannibalising the supply of masks to the NHS.

In reply to my noble friend Lady Anelay, I also commend the work of my noble friend Lord Deighton, who is charged with securing a resilient supply of PPE; the progress that he has made is impressive. I assure the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, and my noble friends Lord Holmes and Lord Bourne that his work, and the hard work across all NHS procurement, has ensured that we are now confident in stocks and sources of supply of PPE to meet the needs in health and social care over the next 90 days. We also continue to pursue contracts for additional stock both to manufacture and to purchase.

My noble friend Lord Balfé and the noble Lords, Lord Skidelsky and Lord Harris, raised the important issue of the distribution and supply of face masks to the general population. Our guidance has been and remains proportionate to this evidence, and we have been clear that a face covering is not the same as a surgical mask or respirator used by healthcare or other workers as PPE. These should continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in the workplace. I emphasise that it is a considerable challenge for the Government to undertake responsibility for the distribution of masks to the whole population.

In response to the noble Lords, Lord Palmer of Childs Hill and Lord Bilimoria, I want to explain that the principle of “There is little to lose” is not one that we subscribe to. If we support measures that do not work, we create a false sense of security and distract from the measures that really do work.

My noble friend Lord Duncan made a critical point about the hygiene of masks and the danger that they can be a vector for infection. A badly maintained or dirty mask, or a mask that is handled badly, can be a dangerous object that spreads disease. We have published

guidance to show people how to properly remove masks and wash them. None the less, the public can and should wear face coverings that they make at home. Accordingly, the Government have provided advice online on how to make these using scarves and other textile items. The advice on face coverings was in addition to the key advice about maintaining social distancing and washing hands regularly, which has proven to be crucial in preventing the spread of this deadly virus. We have been clear that wearing face coverings cannot replace those important practices, and if you are symptomatic then you must self-isolate.

In relation to workers in numerous sectors, including public transport, we advise that they continue to follow the advice of their employers and make sensible workplace adjustments. I welcome the comments by the noble Lord, Lord Skidelsky, on this.

Since that initial advice we have continued to review our position, consider the evolving context in the UK and refine our approach accordingly. However, we should note that, whatever we would like to be the case, the available evidence on the efficacy of face coverings has not moved substantially from the initial advice.

I want to update my noble friends Lord Naseby, Lady McIntosh and Lord Sheikh that in recent days the WHO has updated its advice to encourage the wider use of face coverings in public settings, but it has been clear that

“the widespread use of masks by healthy people ... is not yet supported by high quality or direct scientific evidence”.

Evidence from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies suggests that face coverings may help to reduce the risk of transmission if you are suffering from coronavirus but not showing symptoms. SAGE also advised that using cloth masks as a precautionary measure could at least be partially effective in enclosed spaces, such as public transport, where social distancing is not possible.

In continuing to take a risk-based and evidence-led approach to guidance, the Government have continued to adapt our guidance proportionately to the science. In answer to the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, I say that it remains guidance, not law. As lockdown restrictions ease, more people will now come into contact with others and there may be incidences where social distancing is more difficult to maintain consistently. For example, as the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, mentioned, we expect that more people will leave their homes to make essential journeys, returning to work if they cannot work from home, and some children are returning to school.

While we encourage the public to walk, cycle or drive, this may not always be possible and we can expect the transport network to become increasingly busy. That is why, on 4 June, the Government announced that we will work with transport operators to make it a requirement for passengers to wear face coverings when using public transport in England from 15 June. On board public transport is a space in which it is less easy to socially distance, and people may spend extended periods of time in close contact with others they may not normally meet. The Government remain clear that social distancing and hand hygiene remain the most

important ways to guard against the virus, but face coverings may help to prevent individuals who have coronavirus but are not presenting symptoms from spreading it to others.

The noble Lords, Lord Campbell-Savours and Lord Mann, the noble Baroness, Lady Healy, and others shared helpful interventional anecdotes. But the consensus in scientific literature is that the evidence base for the effectiveness of face coverings is inconclusive. Mandatory face covering specifically on public transport is the approach taken in a number of countries, including France, Germany and Italy. Although face coverings are more habitually and widely worn in public in some countries, such as China or Japan, the evidence remains inconclusive around their widespread efficacy in protecting individuals from Covid-19. In answer to my noble friend Lord Blencathra, I say that there is no evidence that these masks are interchangeable with other measures in the triad.

The Government have recognised that, as we bring the overall incidence of Covid-19 down, it is important that we cut down on infections passed on in hospitals. We have noted the evidence that healthcare workers are 10 to 20 times more likely to be Covid-19 positive than the general public. In light of this learning from NHS hospitals and IPC teams, the Government announced on 5 June that all staff in hospitals in England will be provided with surgical masks, which they will be expected to wear from 15 June. NHS staff already wear face masks in clinical areas where they come within two metres of a patient. But this new guidance will apply to everyone working in all areas of hospital, including non-clinical settings. Furthermore, all visitors and out-patients will be expected to wear face coverings at all times. These are measures that some organisations have already started to adopt. We are clear that this will not mean that anyone is denied care. If necessary, a mask will be provided for a patient if they arrive without a face covering.

Detailed guidance on these measures will be published this week to enable hospitals to get stocks and put plans in place; we are confident in the stocks of face masks needed to meet this new demand. We also continue to pursue contracts for additional stock, both through manufacture and purchase. The noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, asked at the start of this debate what plans the Government had to review our advice on face coverings. As I have set out, we continually review these measures, evolving them as we have from 11 May by continuing to follow the evidence and the scientific advice. We will therefore continue to review this latest iteration of advice too. As I have set out, the Government will always look to the scientific evidence and advice we are given in continually reviewing and refining our guidance.

I thank the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, who has pushed hard on this important issue and rehearsed these important arguments. As the pandemic evolves and the science develops, he will have an impact on our understanding of this important issue.

4.59 pm

Sitting suspended.

Arrangement of Business *Announcement*

5.15 pm

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Henig) (Lab): My Lords, we now come to the repeat of the Statement on the wider opening of education and early years settings. For Members participating remotely, microphones will unmute shortly before they are to speak; please accept any on-screen prompt to unmute. I remind Members that our normal courtesies in debate still apply in this new hybrid way of working.

It has been agreed in the usual channels to dispense with the reading of the Statement itself, and we will proceed immediately to questions from the Opposition Front Bench.

Education Settings: Wider Opening *Statement*

The following Statement was made on Tuesday 9 June in the House of Commons.

“With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a Statement regarding the wider opening of nurseries, schools and colleges as part of our response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is now over two and a half months since we asked schools, further education colleges and nurseries to remain open only for vulnerable children and those of critical workers. I continue to be immensely grateful for the way that our teachers and parents have responded to these challenging circumstances. I would like to say a big thank you to all those working in education, childcare and children’s social care for the huge efforts they are making on a daily basis to support families and make sure our children do not miss out on their education.

We all know how important it is for children and young people to be in education and childcare, and it is vital that we get them back there as soon as the scientific advice indicates that we can. I am very pleased that last week we were able to take the first cautious step towards that. As the Prime Minister confirmed on 28 May, the Government’s five tests are being met and we are beginning to ease the lockdown restrictions across England. Based on all the evidence, this means that nurseries and other early years providers, including childminders, have been able to welcome back children of all ages. Pupils in reception, year 1 and year 6 have been returning in smaller class sizes, alongside the children of critical workers and vulnerable children of all ages, who continue to be able to attend.

Ninety-seven per cent of schools that submitted data to the Department for Education were open at the end of last week. Last week, we saw the number of primaries taking nursery, reception, year 1 or year 6 pupils steadily rise as part of the phased, cautious wider reopening of schools. By the end of the week, more than half of primary schools were taking pupils from these year groups, and as of yesterday that had risen to over 70% of primaries that had responded.

I know that schools need time to put in place the strict protective measures that we have asked for, and we continue to work with the sector to make sure that

[BARONESS HENIG]

any schools experiencing difficulties are supported to open more widely as soon as possible. Some schools, in areas such as the north-west, are concerned about local rates of transmission. I can assure them that SAGE's R estimate for the whole of the UK is below 1. If robust data shows that local action needs to be taken, we will not hesitate to do so, but we are not in that position. I know that the House will be as impressed as I have been by the work and efforts of head teachers, teachers and childcare staff, who are finding ways to make the necessary changes while still ensuring that schools and nurseries are a welcoming place for children, as well as reassuring families who may be worried about sending their children back.

The next step of our phased approach will enable secondary schools and colleges to provide some face-to-face support from 15 June for years 10 and 12 and 16-to-19 students in the first year of a two-year study programme, who are due to take key exams next year. This is such a critical time for those students and this extra support will be in addition to their remote education, which will continue to be the main method of education for them this term, as only a quarter of this cohort will be able to attend at any one time to limit the risk of transmission. Children of critical workers and vulnerable children in all secondary year groups will continue to be able to attend full-time.

We have published guidance for secondary schools and ensured that schools have the flexibility to decide how they want to use face-to-face support in the best interests of their pupils. Since the announcement of our proposals on 10 May, my department has published detailed guidance for settings on how to prepare. This includes planning guides for early years providers and primary schools, and further guidance for secondary schools and colleges. Crucially, we have provided detailed guidance on the protective measures that schools and other settings need to take to reduce the risk of transmission. This includes restricting class sizes, limiting mixing between groups and encouraging regular handwashing and frequent cleaning. This advice was developed in close consultation with Public Health England.

The safety of our children, young people and staff remains my top priority. That is why all staff and children, including the under-fives, will have access to testing if they develop symptoms of coronavirus. This will enable the right response where a case is confirmed, including using a "test and trace" approach to rapidly identify people most at risk of having been exposed to the virus, so that they can take action too.

We continue to follow the best scientific advice and believe that this cautious, phased return is the most sensible course of action to take. While we are not able to welcome all primary children back for a full month before the summer, we continue to work with the sector on the next steps, where we would like schools that have the capacity to bring back more children—in those smaller class sizes—to do so if they are able to before the summer holidays.

We will be working to bring all children back to school in September. I know that students who are due to take exams in 2021 will have experienced considerable disruption to their education this year, and we are

committed to doing all we can to minimise the effects of this. Exams will take place next year, and we are working with Ofqual and the exam boards on our approach to these. While these are the first steps, they are the best way to ensure that all children can get back into the classroom as soon as possible.

I want to end by thanking the childcare, school and FE staff who have gone above and beyond over the past eight weeks, and who are now working so incredibly hard to welcome our children and young people back, while also continuing to support those who remain at home. I commend this Statement to the House."

5.16 pm

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I normally thank the Minister for repeating the Statement, but we take it as read. It represents an inevitable volte-face. Head teachers, education unions, school staff and many parents were right to describe plans to open whole primary schools before the summer as incompatible with implementing social distancing safely.

That is not to say that I welcome the continued closure of schools. There is a very real risk that so many children losing up to six months of formal education, socialising with friends and a structured routine to their day will have lasting serious consequences. Together with many others, I am extremely worried that a deepening learning disadvantage gap will be the result, with possibly millions of children lacking the education they need to progress in life.

Sadly, the current hole into which the Government have dug themselves is the result of education having been the poor relation in the response to this pandemic. In part, that reflects the fact that the Government have never had a coherent plan for dealing with Covid-19, frequently defaulting to panic mode, it seems.

Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition called for the establishment of a national task force to help the Government put together a plan for schooling not just in the months ahead but in the longer term. I urge the Minister to tell noble Lords that the Government will indeed adopt such a collegiate approach as a means of moving forward and helping those children whose education has been left in limbo.

The national plan must be robust. It should build consensus among key stakeholders—schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities—which properly understand what is required and what they can do collectively to deliver it. It is about bringing together top-down planning with bottom-up planning to make the most difference in the shortest possible time. The key to developing such a plan and then making it effective may be the most demanding factor: strong leadership from the top—a factor that has been absent thus far.

More immediately, does the Minister accept that there is a need for all children of compulsory school age to have a one-on-one meeting with a teacher from their school, with parents if appropriate, before the summer holidays start? Without teachers being able to assess the needs of their pupils at this stage, there is a danger that valuable time will be lost when the new school year begins in September, as we all hope it will. Does she agree with the Children's Commissioner that

some schools should be open during the summer holidays, staffed on a voluntary basis, to provide classes as well as clubs and activities for children, enabling them to re-socialise and re-engage with a love for learning?

When the pandemic started, one of the Government's few successes was the Nightingale hospitals, constructed within a matter of days. On a much smaller scale, could not something like that be done for education? Portakabins are hardly unknown in school playgrounds, and many could be built quickly to accommodate children during the summer to access the learning and other activities that they need while observing social distancing requirements. Rather than rely solely on regular teachers, many of whom have been working flat out to maintain education for their students and deserve some respite, why not invite retired or trainee teachers to assist? They all have much to offer in these critical times for so many children.

All that is required is some imagination. Has the Secretary of State considered, as Scotland has done, using public buildings, such as libraries, sports halls and other council properties to relieve pressure on classroom space? Surely the independent sector should be told that their wide range of facilities should be opened up to state school students during the summer. There are already examples of state/private collaboration of that sort on which to build, and opportunities should be maximised.

The Statement also concerns early years settings. If the Government do not act soon, there will not be many nurseries left to send children to. There is currently no additional funding to help childcare providers manage this difficult transition, or even pay for vital safety measures such as PPE and regular cleaning. Over two-thirds of nurseries and other childcare businesses expect to operate at a loss for at least six months, so without more support it is unclear how many will be able to survive. The Government need to wake up to the reality that millions of childcare places could be lost in this crisis unless there is a properly funded plan to save the early years sector.

I therefore ask the Minister: when does the Secretary of State intend to come forward with a realistic plan to protect these essential nurseries and other early years provision?

5.21 pm

Lord Storey (LD) [V]: My Lords, I thank the Minister for the Statement.

We all want to see children and young people back in school as soon as possible, not least because if we are not careful, we will see a whole generation of children whose educational progress has been blighted, and we know that the children most at risk are those from disadvantaged circumstances, those in care, and those with learning difficulties.

If I was being kind to the Government's handling of the reopening of schools, it would be to describe their approach thus far as cack-handed. This is not a time for Boris Johnson's high-command approach but a time for bringing education stakeholders together to agree the way which is rooted in good practice, which can work and be implemented, will provide a safe environment for pupils and staff, give the reassurance to parents that their children are safe and, as the

Children's Commissioner said, use some imagination in what we are able to do. That imagination might include keeping children in nurseries for longer and admitting them to reception for the term of their fifth birthday. It may include part-time schooling, or changing the school day and school holidays, and staggered starts—anything which helps our children.

Can the Minister now agree that the Prime Minister's proposal to have a big plan will bring together council leaders, teachers' unions, experts, opposition parties and parent voices to agree that big plan for the reopening of schools in England before the disadvantage gap becomes a gulf? My party has a five-point national plan, which our education spokesperson, Layla Moran, has sent to the Prime Minister.

As well as getting schools open safely in September, we also need to ensure that we are providing high-quality educational provision now and over the next three months of the summer. As good as the BBC has been in providing Bitesize, this is only a small-bite step in what is needed. Parents who have finances will buy in resources, pay for online tutors and will have the time to go on walks of learning, but for a large number of families this is not possible.

It is interesting to note that the hubs that were set up for key workers and disadvantaged pupils, not surprisingly, saw a massive drop-off rate of the disadvantaged pupils. Can the Minister tell us of any ideas that she might have to ensure that those pupils are being mentored and encouraged to do their work?

The Minister previously has told us of the IT provision that the Government are providing, but in reality it not available to all disadvantaged pupils. In my home city of Liverpool, the laptops provided for children in care were for only 40% of those children. Can the Minister assure us that there will be IT equipment for all children in care so that they can access learning?

Many families are worried about family budgets and how they can provide the resources their children need. Can the Minister take back to her ministerial colleagues the need to look at extending the free school meals over the summer holidays, recognising the scheme is flawed and so combining it with an emergency uplift in child benefit of £150 per child per month, with £100 for every subsequent child, during the crisis? They could also implement a catch-up premium of £700 per disadvantaged child to enable schools and charities to give them a much-needed boost for the next academic year.

Also, could the Minister take on the idea of creating a summer learning fund so that councils can run summer learning camps for children, focused on local authorities in the most deprived areas? Incidentally, that proposal was first made by the Children's Commissioner for England.

We are living through very difficult times. We need to look to our future as well as our present. Just as the Prime Minister wants our economy to bounce back, surely we want to see our young people and children bounce back. That means doing whatever it takes to make that happen.

Finally, will the Minister agree to abolish SATs and Ofsted inspections during this period and give us regular updates on plans laid and progress made?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Department for International Trade (Baroness Berridge) (Con): My Lords, I am glad to join the noble Lord, Lord Watson, in his desire to welcome everyone back to education. It is the Department for Education's desire and ambition to see all children back in school, when the scientific evidence allows. We are very concerned about the learning disadvantage gap that experts tell us is probably growing during this period.

As in many other countries, schools have been open throughout this period for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. The Secretary of State made it clear in the other place that we need a plan for beyond the summer. We are working with the stakeholders that have been outlined to ensure that we can deliver the catch-up across the summer and into the next academic year. In fact, local REACT teams are working jointly with redeployed Ofsted workers, department officials and local authorities to ensure that we are in touch with what is happening on the ground, both locally in schools and in children's social services departments in councils. Indeed, as of Monday, year 10 and year 12 pupils will be back in school for some form of face-to-face contact, with a maximum of 25% being in school at any one time. We are looking at all of the options for targeted support through the summer and beyond, as I said.

On premises, there are thousands of varieties of school buildings across the country. Some of them do not have the outdoor space that would be appropriate for temporary buildings such as Portakabins. We are grateful to the independent sector, however, which has worked closely with the state sector in many areas; we welcome those collaborations.

The noble Lord, Lord Watson, raised concerns about the early years sector. I am happy to say that, as of Thursday last week, 48% of those settings were open. Over the next year, it is planned that the £3.6 billion of early years entitlement will be paid to that sector, regardless of the children who attend. It is clear from Public Health England advice that normal education settings do not need personal protective equipment and that a very limited supply is needed for circumstances where a symptomatic child may be on the premises. Of course, it is different for special schools if they are open and providing care akin to medical care. Only in those very limited circumstances—which education settings can manage through their own supply chains, or, if needs be, can approach the local resilience forum—do they need to think about personal protective equipment.

The early years sector has a blend of incomes. The sector's loss of private income is one reason why the comprehensive schemes made available by the Chancellor of the Exchequer are open to the sector, on the basis that salaries that they pay were previously paid using income from private sources. The sector can go to the job retention scheme or apply for a business interruption loan and, if they are eligible for small business rate relief or rural rate relief, they are eligible for the £10,000 small business grant.

I say to the noble Lord, Lord Storey, that we are very concerned about disadvantaged children and children in care. We are working with all the sector's stakeholder

groups. We based our guidance on the PHE guidance, outlining to schools the measures that they can take to provide a safe environment in which to learn.

On reception admissions—I thank the noble Lord for his advance notice on this question—we do not anticipate that, as a general rule, children will need to delay their admission to school purely as a consequence of the coronavirus outbreak. However, where parents genuinely believe that delaying admission is right for their summer-born child, we expect admissions authorities to give careful consideration to the needs of that child. Admissions authorities must provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. However, parents cannot be required to send their children to full-time school before they reach the compulsory age.

As the noble Lord mentioned, we are deeply concerned about the attainment gap, which has been narrowing since 2011. That is why we have now made available the Oak National Academy for remote learning, which offers 140 lessons a week. The noble Lord mentioned the BBC. In the week commencing 11 May, there were 5 million users. This is not an insubstantial resource and we thank the BBC for making it available. This is why we have prioritised disadvantaged students in year 10 as well as care leavers and children with social workers for access to the over 200,000 remote devices that we have purchased and for which delivery is in train.

I am pleased to say that yesterday the Prime Minister announced an additional £63 million of funding for local authorities over the summer, as they are best placed to know who might be in acute need of food over that period. Some £9 million has been made available for summer provision; there will be holiday clubs, building on the programme of 2018 and 2019, that can be accessed.

During this period, routine Ofsted inspections have been suspended. That is why Ofsted has been redeployed in other areas. It can still inspect settings when safeguarding has been raised. GCSEs, A-levels, SATs, the two year-old assessment and the assessment at the end of the early years foundation stage have all been suspended; no performance tables will be published this year. However, this Government stand by their ambition that every child in this country should have a world-class education and were right to have an ambition to bring all children back to school. It is sad, particularly for those children, that in the circumstances of the scientific evidence that has not been possible.

The Deputy Speaker: My Lords, we now come to the 30 minutes allocated for Back-Bench questions. I emphasise that it is 30 minutes, not the 20 minutes that was on the Order Paper. I ask that questions and answers be brief so that I can call the maximum number of speakers.

5.32 pm

Lord Lexden (Con): My Lords, would it not be appropriate to extend to the secondary sector the flexibility that primary schools have been given to allow more children back when they can do so safely? Can my noble friend confirm that independent schools, which are actively engaged in the national effort to

bring pupils back into school, as she has mentioned, can bring children on to the school site as long as the correct protocols are observed?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, the flexibility is to respect the professionals on the ground. Unfortunately, because of the specific risks that secondary pupils travel greater distances to school, often use public transport and usually have a wider range of social contacts, we have not been able to have the numbers back in a secondary setting. We are grateful to the independent sector. The guidance is that boarding schools should not expect year 10 and year 12 back; if they can have that face-to-face contact on a day basis, that is permissible. I am grateful that, as they have atypical transition years, they have heeded the Government's guidance to bring back reception, year 1, year 6, year 10 and year 12, as I have outlined.

Baroness Bull (CB): My Lords, does the Minister agree that schools play a vital role in not just academic learning but the development of social and emotional skills that lead to better mental health and academic outcomes? It is shown that the relationships built at school serve as a buffer against psychological and social risks, so the continued closure increases the vulnerability of many children, especially disadvantaged ones. Can the Minister help ensure that schools prioritise social and emotional learning when they reopen, alongside academic learning, and that they have access to adequate resources and specialist input to help support the most vulnerable pupils?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, from speaking to many teachers and multi-academy trust leaders, I know that they are concerned about the emotional stability and well-being of children when they re-enter school, particularly of those who are vulnerable. On mental health support, certain teams are on the ground, particularly in secondary settings, and we are doing the remote training-up of the allocation that we had hoped would be in schools by now. We have also funded a coalition of charities for vulnerable children to the tune of £7 million, being led, I believe, by Barnardo's; it is a "see, hear, respond" service, because we are acutely aware of what will walk through the door of a school when vulnerable children are back in that setting.

Baroness Morris of Yardley (Lab): There are a lot of warm words from the Government about this, but it really has been a totally inappropriate response to what is fast becoming a crisis in a critical area of our society. In particular, how can the Government think it is acceptable to present a Statement at a time like this that is nothing more than a list of things which cannot be done? It does not contain one new idea and makes no response to the many ideas that have come from people across society. I want to push the Minister to say why she is not encouraging primary schools to use the space that is available—she just made that clear in response to a previous question—to enable secondary schools to provide access to outdoor space and classroom space, to ensure that they could offer the sort of education to children that we all want to see.

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, the Government have been acting on this matter. We are working with the Education Endowment Foundation to make sure that the interventions we put in place to help these children to catch up are based on evidence. I can assure the noble Baroness that we are seriously considering a package of measures in relation to the catch-up provision. However, I will take back her comments about using space in other premises.

Lord Addington (LD) [V]: My Lords, do the Government have a clear picture of what has and has not worked when it comes to the underlying issues around learning and teaching? Many reports are coming out on how some children are missing out, while others are getting quite a good deal. Unless we have a good idea about what is actually happening, we cannot plan for how we will support and correct any problems later on.

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, the changes which this virus crisis has brought about to how children learn are unprecedented. The move to remote learning and to the use of technology will change some teaching practices for ever. We are of course gathering evidence about what is and is not effective in remote learning. As I have said, the Oak National Academy and BBC Bitesize will be part of the effort to analyse what effect this has had on children's learning going forward.

Lord Baker of Dorking (Con) [V]: It is 80 days from today until September, when secondary schools are expected to open. Those are 80 days during which schools will be closed, padlocked and empty. I think that that is unacceptable. They should become learning centres during June, July, August and September. Will my noble friend encourage the Secretary of State to urge for the reopening of secondary schools as soon as possible? Will he also make representations to the Prime Minister and to the Cabinet that social distancing for children in schools should be reduced from 2 metres to 1 metre, because they are the least vulnerable members of our society? To protect them further, teachers, and any other staff who go into a school, should be tested for the virus daily, which it is now quite possible to do.

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, since schools reopened for the priority year groups, testing has been available for staff, pupils and anyone in a household who displays symptoms. On summer schools, I have outlined that holiday activity clubs are being funded. We are working closely with Magic Breakfast and Family Action in relation to breakfast provision over the summer holidays. Moreover, imaginative consideration is being given to the kind of targeted support which can be offered over the summer. But it is not anticipated that schools will be open throughout the summer holidays.

Lord Knight of Weymouth (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I remind the House of my interests as set out in the register. Last week, the Minister said in Oral Questions that the Secretary of State has made it clear that schools will not be expected to open throughout the summer holidays, and she has just said something

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similar. Given that, what exactly are the Government planning? Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that there will be a

“huge amount of catch-up over the summer months.”

Is that the £9 million for holiday clubs which the Minister has just mentioned, which is the equivalent of just £360 per school in England? Where will this huge amount of catch-up take place? Who will attend and who will lead it?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, noble Lords are tempting me, but I am not permitted to—nor will I—steal the Secretary of State’s thunder. But I am aware, and can tell noble Lords, that, working on an evidence base, there will be a programme of targeted support over the summer holidays and beyond. We are acutely aware of the loss of learning, as Ministers and as people who have been through the education system. The effort and energy are there, and will continue to be, to have the appropriate support and programmes for these young people to catch up. As I said, we have purchased, and are about to deliver by the end of the month, more than 200,000 devices to enable some of the most disadvantaged children to catch up on their learning.

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Non-Aff) [V]: My Lords, notwithstanding the differences in timetables and school schedules between the devolved regions and England, what discussions have been held with devolved institutions about eliminating and eradicating inequalities for vulnerable children, because there should be many similarities right across the regions? What will the Government do about that?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, the recovery response to the virus in education is, of course, a national response, but we are obviously in touch with the devolved Administrations, at ministerial and official level. Education is a devolved matter, but any of the plans to return will be done on a phased basis, but in different circumstances—for instance, Scotland has a different start date for its terms and different examinations. We are seeking to learn best practice from across all the nations of the United Kingdom.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury (LD) [V]: My Lords, I apologise that noble Lords cannot see me, but it was a choice between seeing me and hearing me. I think that hearing me is probably better—and I hope that noble Lords can hear me.

Does the Minister agree that creative activities have been central in helping children and their parents get through the challenges of lockdown? I hope that this has been heard loud and clear by the Department for Education. Cultural education is also of central importance for facilitating learning across subjects, and for children’s general well-being. Will the Government ensure that creative subjects will not be overlooked in the school timetable from September, and that the emphasis will be moved from STEM to STEAM?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, the Government agree that the creative subjects and children’s cultural development are important. That is why music, art,

design and drama are part of the national curriculum. Post 14, all pupils in maintained schools must be offered the opportunity to study at least one subject in the arts. That is why, since 2016, almost £500 million has been invested in those subjects, and an arts premium will be given to secondary schools. With the new Ofsted framework as of September last year, arts is an essential part of schools’ broad and balanced curriculum, which it inspects against.

Baroness Pidding (Con) [V]: My Lords, much is spoken about the attainment gap between richer and poorer students widening during time off school. This Government were elected on a promise to level up society. What measures will the Government take to close that gap and reassure parents that we are committed to see every child, from every background, reach their full potential, despite the challenges that Covid has presented?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, as I outlined, we are keen to ensure that the narrowing of the attainment gap is not lost during this period. The £2.4 billion a year pupil premium, which is paid for disadvantaged students, will continue to be paid to schools for their funding, even though most pupils are obviously not in school at the moment. We are looking at interventions for vulnerable children in particular, to ensure that they have not fallen behind.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB) [V]: My Lords, I declare my interest as I chair the Commission on Alcohol Harm. At the outset of lockdown, we know that alcohol sales increased by 67%. It is now said that 29% of people report drinking more during lockdown, and one in seven families report an increase in tension in households where there is a child under the age of 18. The highest number of children on record are calling the NSPCC helpline—with a 32% increase from previously—and reporting domestic abuse. How can these children, who previously accessed a place of safety at school, be case-found now? What safety is being provided for them since they are a hidden, silent and vulnerable population?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, it is incredibly sad to think about the lack of the protective good for children in schools during this time. I am pleased that the £1.6 million for the NSPCC helpline has been useful to it. We are also pleased that among vulnerable children in contact with a social worker, we have now seen a considerable increase in the numbers in school. There are 47,000 of them in school, up from 37,000 on 21 May, which is to be welcomed. As I say, the teams reacting on the ground are working closely with local authorities’ children’s services, so that information about children who are not in school is passed on. We have redeployed Ofsted staff to bolster local authorities where they have needed it. While it is not possible to replace the protective good that school is for those children, we are seeing a steady increase in the numbers going to school.

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I had the opportunity to hear from the Chief Inspector of Schools and the Children’s Commissioner yesterday at a Select Committee in this House. They found

the Statement disappointing and said that it lacked urgency and creativity. Is it not clear that, despite the attention with which the Minister feels that she and others in the department have been addressing these issues, the measures to prevent some children falling behind are failing at the moment? We need a detailed action plan, with stakeholders involved to get those falling-behind children into school before September, and for the Government to act with that creativity and urgency which was sadly lacking from this Statement.

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, it is a great regret that the scientific evidence on social distances does not allow us to achieve our ambition of getting all primary schoolchildren back before the summer. However, as I say, more vulnerable children are in school. We have also acted with specific initiatives on behalf of, for instance, those transitioning from alternative provision at 16. We recognise the risk that they could drop through the net, so we have announced £750 per year 11 pupil in alternative provision. We are obviously aware that it is unprecedented to be in the Department for Education at a time when we had to close schools. There is urgency and a plan to catch up for those children.

Lord Caine (Con) [V]: My Lords, I endorse the wise words of my noble friend Lord Baker of Dorking. As the product of a state comprehensive school in a predominantly working-class part of Leeds, I need no lessons on the importance of tackling educational inequalities. Does my noble friend agree that the longer schools remain closed, the more difficult this will be to achieve and that those who suffer most will be from less well-off backgrounds? Is it not about time that the leadership of some of the teaching unions adopted a more constructive, responsible and sensible approach to these matters?

Baroness Berridge: I am grateful to the noble Lord and, as someone who is also the product of state education, I know that there will be children falling behind because their education is not offered in schools at the moment. Away from what I might call the bluster of the headlines, I am aware of many teachers who are getting on with their job and have been planning to reopen. Along with the Department for Education, they long for the situation—and for the scientific evidence—to be such that we can welcome all our students back into school. In addition to the remote learning I outlined, there are tales of teachers dropping worksheets at the door for students. They are acutely aware of the disadvantage to those students, and we will work together with teachers on the front line and all support staff to help them catch up.

Baroness Scott of Needham Market (LD) [V]: My Lords, with social distancing set to continue for quite some time, capacity on public transport and dedicated home-to-school transport will be significantly reduced. Is a strategy being developed to ensure that transport is available for all students, particularly secondary students, when they return in September?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, as I have outlined, secondary school children travel greater distances. Local authorities and schools are still under a duty to provide

home-to-school transport within the social distancing rules. If there is capacity on those services, we have said that it should be made available to other students and that it can be charged for. We are aware that an essential part of getting students back to school will be ensuring that they can get there safely.

Lord Robathan (Con) [V]: The risk from this virus to children of primary school age is, frankly, negligible. For secondary school pupils, it is still pretty tiny. There is a higher risk to teachers, who will be older and may have underlying health conditions, but it is still pretty low for anybody under 50. Why then do pupils need social distancing at all? Teaching is a profession to be admired, so does my noble friend share my huge disappointment—that is an understatement—that some teachers, and only some, supported by their unions, are putting minor risk to themselves above the very real threat to their pupils' futures?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, there is indeed a high degree of confidence that the severity of the disease is lower in children than in adults. In the primary setting, we have been clear that we do not expect the younger cohorts to socially distance; the measures to enable children to come back state that they should be in groups of a maximum of 15, that they should not mix across groups and that there should be good hygiene in schools. As soon as the scientific evidence allows, we will be relieved to be able to welcome children back to their education.

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Lab) [V]: Has the Minister seen today's report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies showing that the closure of schools is accentuating the socioeconomic divide? Does she recall that, four weeks ago, I asked her at Question Time to prepare for summer schools, in particular so that youngsters transferring from primary to secondary school in September are not absolutely disadvantaged? Some may have been out of school for six months and have had no education at all. Can some concentration be given to the easy entrance of those children to secondary education so that they do not lose out completely? We need summer schools and not just holiday activity clubs.

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, the clubs that I have outlined offer educational provision as well, but the noble Baroness is right about the transition year. That is why we have recommended that schools bring back year 6 so that the transition into secondary school is managed for those children. However, we are aware that a number of reports indicate that more provision is available to children from more affluent backgrounds. I have outlined the remote devices and other support that we have given to schools to try to level up some of that gap.

Lord Moynihan (Con): My Lords, the Children's Commissioner and others have argued that the Government should fund summer sport and fitness courses, with voluntary organisations and governing bodies of sport using school sport facilities. Given that ukactive has data suggesting that children's health and fitness levels may drop by 80% this summer, with the hardest hit the poorest children, will the Government prioritise and support this proposal?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, even before the summer, the Government have been clear in their guidance to schools that they should use outside space wherever possible when they reopen. We have provided guidance even on how to introduce team sports for the small groups that are back. However, we are aware that many children will have been sedentary over this period and that is a concern. We have linked to resources to encourage people to get the 60 minutes of exercise a day that Sport England recognises. I will take back my noble friend's specific question about summer provision of physical activity.

Baroness Blackstone (Ind Lab) [V]: My Lords, I want to re-put the question put by the noble Lord, Lord Baker, as the Minister did not answer it. Why has the two-metre social distancing rule not been relaxed in line with WHO guidance, since this rule is the main block to all children returning to school at the earliest possible time? Will she accept that a failure to bring children—especially disadvantaged children—back to school poses much greater risks to their academic development, mental health and safety from abuse, whether on the streets or in their homes, than the negligible risks to their health of returning?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, throughout the crisis, the Government have been guided by the science. The view at the moment—based on SAGE and the best science we have—is that social distancing should be at two metres. Should that view change, the Department for Education will of course be the first to welcome that, as it would ease many of the issues that schools have in relation to their buildings. As I said, it is important that the offer has been there for vulnerable children to come to school during this time. The provision for vulnerable children is made in addition to provision for the year groups as they come back.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD) [V]: My Lords, few children with special needs have currently returned to school due to parents' concerns. Children attending special schools come from a wide area, especially in rural locations, and often have personalised school transport. More than others, those children need tailored plans to ensure that they are safe and happy. What arrangements have been made to ensure that these vulnerable special needs children are able to access their schools?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, throughout the crisis, those children with an EHC plan—the overwhelming majority, if not all, of the children in special schools—have had a school place available to them. Risk assessments of those children have been encouraged, specifically to work out whether they are better in school or at home during this period. Where there is equipment in the school that could be of use to parents with children at home, we have encouraged schools to make that available. In line with the increase in attendance of vulnerable children as of last Thursday, the number of those attending schools who have an EHC plan is now 42,000 children, up from 23,000 as of 21 May. We want to see all children back, but this is a significant increase in those attending school, which is obviously to be welcomed.

Baroness Massey of Darwen (Lab) [V]: My Lords, the chair of the Education Select Committee said this week that 70,000 disadvantaged children are not working at home and have no access to the internet. Will the Government ensure that all children entitled to free school meals be guaranteed internet access, immediately?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, there are indeed 1.3 million children currently entitled to free school meals. We have offered that provision over both the half-term and Easter holidays since schools closed. As I have outlined, over 200,000 devices have been purchased and delivery will be made by the end of June.

Lord Truscott (Ind Lab) [V]: My Lords, first, the Statement said that Her Majesty's Government would be working to bring all children back to school in September. Do the Government actually have a plan to achieve this? Secondly, what is the message from the Minister to international pupils and students? Should they make plans to come back to study in the UK in September, or should they look to study or complete their studies in another country which is perhaps better organised?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, obviously the plan is to bring all students back to school in September if the scientific evidence allows for that. In relation to international students, there has been an amendment to the guidance on the visa regulations. We are working closely with the boarding school sector and the independent sector to enable them to plan for a full reopening, along with all other schools, in September.

Lord Pickles (Con) [V]: My Lords, this morning the chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee made three brief suggestions. The first was for a catch-up programme with an army of volunteers consisting of retired teachers, Ofsted inspectors, education charities and graduates, paid for by a catch-up premium; the second was the establishment of Alan Turing summer schools; and the third was a national education service on TV for those without internet services. Does my noble friend feel that Robert Halfon has a point?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, I assure my noble friend that the Secretary of State is listening carefully to the suggestions from Mr Halfon, as chair of the Education Select Committee. As I said, a targeted programme of catch-up provision for the summer and beyond will be announced, and of course there is already access to BBC Bitesize provision, as I have outlined.

Baroness Andrews (Lab) [V]: My Lords, I can understand that the noble Baroness does not want to pre-empt what the Prime Minister has called his very big plan, but can she give us some indication of who might be targeted for special provision? To follow up on the question from my noble friend Lady Taylor of Bolton, I ask whether the noble Baroness can give us an assurance that creative and accelerated learning will be on offer and not simply holiday clubs.

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, the department's ambition is obviously to offer universal catch-up provision for all students in our schools but with a particular

focus on those who are disadvantaged. I gave an outline of the summer catch-up provision and what will happen beyond that. We are talking about catch-up of educational attainment so that these students are able to fulfil their potential and are not blighted by the lack of provision that they have had to endure due to the health crisis that we have all been living through.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP) [V]: My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Bull, referred to school as a place where social skills are learned and emotional intelligence is developed. The Minister is not allowed to tell us about the summer schools, but perhaps she can tell us whether they will be targeted not just at disadvantaged pupils, who obviously have huge needs, but at pupils who are not at obvious disadvantage. I should perhaps declare an interest, having been an only child. A single child will have been in the company of one or two adults for months, and for younger children that will have accounted for a large part of their lives. Will there be provision over the summer for all children at least to develop those social skills, even if there is no educational component?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, over this period the department has published guidance on a number of matters. We have aimed to get the balance right between guidance and respecting the professionals on the ground. School leaders have been able to apply that guidance at the school gate in relation to vulnerable children, even though those children might not fall into the categories that we have outlined. As I said, we are concerned that all children should catch up, but disadvantaged children in particular. We respect the leadership in schools and will continue to do so in relation to catch-up provision, so that children whom school leaders deem to be disadvantaged and in need of support can get access to that support.

6.03 pm

Sitting suspended.

Arrangement of Business

Announcement

6.15 pm

The Deputy Speaker (Lord Faulkner of Worcester) (Lab): My Lords, we now come to the last business of the day: questions on the Answer to a Commons Urgent Question on support to sub-postmasters wrongly convicted in the Post Office Horizon scandal. The Answer itself will not be repeated. For Members participating remotely, microphones will unmute shortly before they are to speak. Please accept any onscreen prompt to unmute. I remind the House that our normal courtesies in debate still apply in this new hybrid way of working. Please keep questions and answers short.

Horizon: Sub-postmaster Convictions

Commons Urgent Question

The following Answer to an Urgent Question was given on Wednesday 10 June in the House of Commons.

“I have listened to a number of postmasters’ stories personally, and I saw the recent ‘Panorama’ programme. It is impossible to ignore the negative impact that the

Horizon dispute and court case have had on affected postmasters’ lives, livelihoods, financial situations, reputations and, for some, as we know, their physical and mental health.

Convicted claimants seeking to overturn their convictions are going through a further process with the Criminal Cases Review Commission, which has the power to refer cases to the Court of Appeal to consider whether any of the convictions are unsafe. As the honourable Lady will appreciate, it is important that the Government do not seek to influence this process or comment on any individual cases. I can confirm, though, that the Post Office is co-operating with the CCRC to the fullest extent and the Government are monitoring this. Forty-seven of the 61 CCRC cases have now been referred to the Court of Appeal, and it is for the courts to decide whether the convictions are unsafe.

Let me acknowledge the strength of feeling on this matter on both sides of the House, which was evident in the debates I participated in earlier this year and in the correspondence I have had from many Members. That is why the Government are committed to establishing an independent review to consider whether the Post Office has learned the necessary lessons from the Horizon dispute and court case, and to provide an independent and external assessment of its work to rebuild its relationship with its postmasters. Full details of the terms of reference for that independent review are set out in a Written Ministerial Statement that I laid in the House this morning. We are keen to see that review launched as soon as possible, and we are in the process of identifying a chair to lead the work of the review.”

6.16 pm

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab) [V]: My Lords, the whole country owes a considerable debt of gratitude to Kevan Jones MP, Andrew Bridgen MP and the noble Lord, Lord Arbuthnot, who have been campaigning tirelessly to expose this appalling scandal for over seven years. Too many sub-postmasters, often respected and hard-working pillars of their local community, have been imprisoned and many have been ruined financially, physically and mentally. By settling in mediation before the Horizon trial judgment was made public, the Post Office avoided public scrutiny and the facts of its transference of operational risk to sub-postmasters, persistent denials of fault and coercive behaviour were covered up. Thanks to recent TV and radio programmes we now have a lot of detail, but much more clearly needs to be uncovered.

The question that we have to answer first is whether the proposed independent review will do what is needed, as it is not a public inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005. Can the Minister confirm that the review will have the same powers that a public inquiry would have had under statute to compel the disclosure of documentary evidence and to compel witnesses to come before it to give evidence in public?

Secondly, can the Minister confirm that the review, which presumably is being set up by Ministers, will have sufficient power to investigate the same Ministers who were responsible for the Post Office over the relevant period? Can he confirm that all the

[LORD STEVENSON OF BALMACARA]

costs of the victims of this scandal who may be asked to testify and provide evidence, many of whom have yet to receive the full compensation that they seek, will be met?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Callanan) (Con): My Lords, I join the noble Lord in paying tribute to all those Members from both Houses who have laboured for many years to draw attention to this unfolding scandal.

While the terms of reference for the review chime with that of an inquiry, we are undertaking a review in order to allow progress to be achieved in an accelerated timeframe. I can tell the noble Lord that the Post Office has committed to fully co-operating with the review, and Ministers will hold it to that commitment. The purpose of this non-statutory inquiry is to ensure that there is a public summary of the failings that occurred at the Post Office, drawing on the judgments from the Horizon case and listening to those who have been most affected, so that we make sure that those lessons have genuinely been learned and this cannot happen again. With regard to documentary evidence, as I said, the Post Office is expected to co-operate fully with the review.

Lord Fox (LD) [V]: My Lords, I associate myself with the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, regarding the campaigners in this case, because hundreds of people have had their lives ruined, and sometimes ended, by this terrible scandal. The Prime Minister in February committed to getting to the bottom of this, and we have to take that at face value, but in answer to the question of the noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, I do not think it is entirely clear what powers this independent inquiry will have. Yes, the Post Office has committed, but will this inquiry actually have legal powers to command people to give evidence and to sequester evidence? Unless it is able to do that, I do not think the Prime Minister is going to get his wish—we will not get to the bottom of this. I understand the time element, but can the Minister reassure the House that this will be an inquiry with teeth?

Lord Callanan: Well, we are committed to getting to the bottom of this scandal. I can tell noble Lords that, yes, the Post Office has committed to co-operate fully with the inquiry; Ministers will expect it to do that. We expect others involved to co-operate with the inquiry as well, and if we need to take further action to make sure that they co-operate, we will be prepared to look at that.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con) [V]: The Horizon case is an appalling matter. It was, as I have mentioned before, the most worrying issue that I had to deal with as a Minister, because it involved many respectable individuals with no record of criminal activity, many of whom we now find have had their lives ruined. Does my noble friend agree that the immediate need, from information already available, is to remove the Post Office's unusual right to act as prosecutor itself, and to do this forthwith?

Lord Callanan: My noble friend makes a good point, but powers to bring a private prosecution are not specific to the Post Office. The Post Office has the same rights as any other person, whether an individual or a company, to bring a private prosecution. I can tell her that the Post Office is conducting no current private prosecutions and it has provided assurances to Ministers that it has no plans to indulge in any further prosecutions.

Lord Craig of Radley (CB) [V]: My Lords, depending on court appeals, the Post Office may be liable to pay further compensation. Does it have insurance against computer system failure? Is it obligatory for businesses to take out insurance against any serious computer malfunction? If not, does this Horizon scandal suggest that it is required?

Lord Callanan: The Post Office operates as an independent business. As noble Lords would expect, it has all the necessary insurance in place for a company of this kind. It is not, however, obligatory for businesses, including the Post Office, to take out insurance against computer malfunctions or liabilities to third parties that could result from such malfunctions. It is therefore unlikely that any of the Post Office's insurances would provide cover for any compensation payments the business may be required to partake in.

Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom (Con) [V]: My Lords, when did the Government's representative on the Post Office board first know that the Post Office had privileged access to sub-postmasters' accounts, so that the Post Office or Fujitsu could alter those accounts at will without the sub-postmasters being aware of it? Was it from the Ernst & Young management letter to the board of 27 March 2011, or was it earlier than that? If my noble friend does not know, will he please write to me?

Lord Callanan: First, I pay tribute to the work my noble friend has done, both in the other place and in this House, to draw attention to this unfolding scandal. The issue of privileged access was discussed throughout the Horizon case and highlighted in the Horizon issues judgment. The Ernst & Young management letter he refers to was issued before Post Office Ltd was separated from Royal Mail Group. At the time, there was no government representative on the board. The first government representative was appointed to the board of the Post Office in 2012. The Government were aware from the information they received, such as that by the forensic accountants, Second Sight, in 2013, that branch records could be accessed remotely; however, we were then advised that any transactions entered remotely would be visible to sub-postmasters in branch. As far as I am aware, the Government were only made aware that this was incorrect early in 2019, via witness statements that were used by Fujitsu in the court case.

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab) [V]: My Lords, it is a privilege to follow the noble Lord, Lord Arbuthnot, on this issue, for all the reasons that have been mentioned. He deserves significant recognition for his effective leadership on this issue. While I support the call for an

inquiry, already every parliamentarian, including every Minister, believes that those damaged by this scandal deserve to be exonerated and properly compensated, so how much additional evidence do the Government need before that can be achieved? For more than a decade, while covering up the truth, the Post Office spent in excess of £100 million maintaining the convictions and the impoverishment of hundreds of innocent sub-postmasters. Not one director or senior executive has been held to account. What do the Government, who own the Post Office, plan to do about this shocking failure of corporate governance?

Lord Callanan: The Horizon IT system was put in place in 1999, with the first issues being raised by sub-postmasters in the early 2000s. Mr Justice Fraser has considered what happened over this period and has set out his findings in considerable detail in the court case. Of course, the senior directors responsible at the time of the prosecutions against sub-postmasters are no longer at the Post Office. Any further proceedings against such individuals is a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service, and the courts and the justice system.

Lord Mann (Non-Aff) [V]: Being experienced, knowledgeable and of impeccable character, and having no vested interest, were seen to be the appropriate qualities required for the person to chair this inquiry. Can the Minister think of anyone better suited than the former postman Alan Johnson?

Lord Callanan: I thank the noble Lord for his question. We are actively considering who should chair the inquiry at the moment, and as soon as I have further information, I will refer it to the noble Lord.

Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill [HL]

Message from the Commons

The Bill was returned from the Commons with a privilege amendment. The amendment was considered and agreed to.

House adjourned at 6.26 pm.

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