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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 24 June 2020

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 4 June).

[NB: [V] denotes a Member participating virtually.]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Economic Prospects

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the prospects for the Northern Ireland economy in the next 12 months. [903599]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): While the Northern Ireland economy does have its challenges, as we do across the United Kingdom as we come out of covid-19, I am confident that Northern Ireland has a promising economic future as we recover from this crisis. We will continue to work with business, the Executive and local partners to make sure we do everything we can to get the economy not just back up and running, but turbocharged as it moves forward, laying the foundations for a stable and sustainable economic future.

Mr Robertson: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. Does he agree with me that the much talked about reduction in corporation tax in Northern Ireland to 12.5% would be a major boost to the economy of the Province? If one or two parties in Northern Ireland are not keen on that idea, would the Government consider introducing it once we are free of the shackles of the European Union in that respect?

Brandon Lewis: I think we are all looking forward to being completely free of the shackles of the European Union. We in the UK Government remain committed to supporting the Executive to achieve the devolution of corporation tax, so that they will have the power to make the decision that my hon. Friend has outlined. In the Stormont House and subsequent “Fresh Start” agreements, we made it clear that these powers would be devolved and provided, subject to the Executive demonstrating that their finances are on a sustainable footing for the long term. It is for the Northern Ireland Executive to take the steps necessary to place those

finances on a sustainable footing, such as by putting in place the fiscal council, which I hope they will do very swiftly.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): There are 600 job losses at Bombardier, 400 at Thompson Aero and another 200 at risk from the cancellation of the Airbus neo—new engine option—project. Northern Ireland cannot afford to lose these jewels in the crown of its economy, so will the Secretary of State ensure that the Government step in with a strategy and support for the aerospace sector similar to that provided by France, Germany and the US?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Lady asks a very important question about the aviation industry more widely. Obviously, I have spoken to the chief executive of Bombardier in particular, and my colleagues at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) have been in constant co-ordination and contact with the relevant companies.

The UK Government have provided some £2.1 billion through the covid corporate financing facility to the aerospace sector and airlines more widely, and additional flexibility for UK Export Finance to support £3.5 billion of sales in the next 18 months, as well as putting £0.5 billion into our aerospace research and development over the next few years. We are determined to do everything we can to support all sectors of our economy, including the Northern Ireland economy.

Covid-19: Co-ordinated Response

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): What discussions he has had with representatives of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government on co-ordinating the response to the covid-19 outbreak. [903600]

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): What discussions he has had with representatives of the Northern Ireland Executive on co-ordinating the response to the covid-19 outbreak. [903610]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): Throughout the covid-19 outbreak, the UK Government have continued to meet regularly with the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, as well as other Executive Ministers, to co-ordinate the response and, importantly, to take steps together towards a healthy and full economic recovery.

Sir David Amess: I am delighted to learn about the positive relationship that exists between the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government during this unprecedented crisis. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as the Northern Ireland Executive face some critical challenges in the near future, the spirit of co-operation, which will benefit not only Northern Ireland but the whole of the United Kingdom, should continue?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It has been a really positive period of working together, across all the devolved parts of the United Kingdom, with the UK Government. I have had regular weekly meetings with both the First Minister and Deputy

First Minister, apart from the wider Government meetings that they and their Ministers have been involved with. That is a positive sign of how we have been able to work together for the best interests of everybody in all communities in Northern Ireland. I hope that that will continue in the weeks, months and period ahead.

Felicity Buchan: I also welcome the positive way in which the Northern Ireland Executive have worked with the UK Government during this crisis. Does my right hon. Friend share my hope that this positive spirit of co-operation continues?

Brandon Lewis: Absolutely. There has been an absolute unity of purpose in dealing with covid over the period from all parts, and the relationships—east-west, and of the Republic of Ireland with Northern Ireland and the UK Government—have been very positive. We have worked together and met regularly and, as I say, I think that has been a positive sign for what we can achieve in the future.

Business Support: Transition Period

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): What steps he is taking to support businesses in Northern Ireland in preparation for the end of the transition period.
[903601]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): I am working closely with businesses across Northern Ireland to ensure that they are ready for the end of the transition period, which will come at the end of December this year. The first business engagement forum meeting was held on 10 June, and my officials continue to engage in detailed technical discussions, as we did pre that and as we will continue to do.

Tommy Sheppard [V]: The Prime Minister continues to insist that Northern Ireland businesses can simply throw customs exit declarations “in the bin”, while Michel Barnier continues to insist that this would be incompatible with the UK’s legal commitments. The Secretary of State says that consultations are ongoing, but does he not see that this cannot drag into the autumn? Business needs clarity now, given that preparation for a no-deal exit takes months. If he cannot provide this, he owes it to business to extend the transition period until proper answers are found.

Brandon Lewis: We will not be extending the transition period; we have made that clear. On the wider point, we will set out more detailed plans for extensive support from Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs for Northern Ireland businesses that will be engaging in the new administrative processes, and we will issue that guidance this summer. I shall be clear, as I have been previously at this Dispatch Box: Northern Ireland businesses trading with the rest of the UK are part of the UK customs territory. They will have unfettered access.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): On that point, are the Government actively seeking a waiver from the EU to prevent the need for customs declarations on goods being shipped between Great Britain and Northern Ireland? How advanced are such discussions, if they are taking place?

Brandon Lewis: We continue to take forward discussions on the implementation of the protocol in the Joint Committee and in the specialised committee, as the right hon. Gentleman is aware. As we set out in the Command Paper, we will discharge our responsibilities in a way that is effective, that upholds our international obligations and that respects the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland. Provisions must include the minimum possible bureaucratic consequences for businesses and traders, and we will respect what we promised, which is unfettered access.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. Are the Government promoting a trusted-trader scheme, particularly for key retailers such as those that operate between Great Britain and Northern Ireland? What discussions about that has the Secretary of State had with the business engagement forum?

Brandon Lewis: We are working with Northern Ireland businesses and the Executive to ensure that any new administrative procedures are streamlined, avoid any unnecessary burdens and do not affect any flow of trade. There should be no tariffs on internal UK trade because the UK is a single customs territory. For example, a supermarket delivering to its stores in Northern Ireland poses no risk whatsoever to the EU market. No tariffs would be owed for such trade. The principle needs to be formalised with the EU in the withdrawal agreement Joint Committee. We are talking to businesses, including via the engagement forum and other opportunities, to explore proposals to make sure that we maximise the free flow of trade.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) [V]: Hello from Dorset. My right hon. Friend knows that Northern Ireland businesses want to prepare to make Brexit a success; the problem is that they do not quite know what they are preparing for. In reflecting on last week’s Select Committee hearing, is my right hon. Friend persuaded of the merits of providing stepping-stones between now and 31 December, so that business knows what to prepare for and in what timeframe?

Brandon Lewis: As I said, we are working with Northern Ireland businesses and the Executive to support preparations for the end of the transition period at the end of this year. As we engage, including through the business engagement forum that we have already established, we will set out further details to help businesses to prepare for the end of the transition period at the earliest appropriate moment. I assure my hon. Friend that further guidance will be published this summer to make sure that people and businesses know what they need to do to prepare for the end of the transition period, which will be at the end of December this year.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP) [V]: An HMRC whistleblower recently warned that the new customs declaration service system is not only delayed but does not talk to other HMRC systems, some of which are 20 years old. With criminal organisations and smugglers ready to take advantage of any gaps in systems, how confident is the Secretary of State that this IT

solution will work and provide proper controls to prevent businesses and the Treasury from losing millions of pounds in tax?

Brandon Lewis: I am very confident that HMRC will be able to provide the support and the work that business needs to be ready for when we leave the European Union's transition period at the end of December this year.

Sporting and Cultural Events

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): What support he is providing to help attract major sporting and cultural events to Northern Ireland in 2021. [903602]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Robin Walker): Northern Ireland has a rich sporting and cultural heritage and is a great setting for any event, as proven by the success of the Open last year. While any decision to bid to host major events is a matter for the Executive, my officials are in regular contact with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and their devolved counterparts to support UK-wide events.

Ian Paisley: The United Kingdom's involvement in next season's world rally championship is currently very uncertain: nine of the 11 rounds have already been chosen and GB is not currently part of that choice. The WRC promoter has previously spoken about the need to rotate Rally GB into Northern Ireland, where most of the competitors wish to participate. Can the Secretary of State save WRC? Will the Secretary of State assist by co-funding the event with the Northern Ireland Executive during our centenary year?

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman in a consistent and passionate advocate of hosting a round of the world rally championship in Northern Ireland. We can safely say that if it does come to Northern Ireland, he will have been a driving force. In the "New Decade, New Approach" agreement, the Government have already pledged up to £2 billion to help the Executive to deliver on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, but I would be very happy to support the Executive to foster closer ties and better collaborative working across sectors of the UK to attract the WRC and a portfolio of other events to Northern Ireland.

Covid-19: Public Security

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to help protect the security of the public in Northern Ireland during the covid-19 outbreak. [903603]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): I maintain close contact with the Northern Ireland Executive's Justice Minister and the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Public safety obviously remains at the forefront of the PSNI's efforts, and thanks to its dedication during this period, public safety has not been compromised. By working closely with and financially supporting the Executive, we have worked together to protect our hospitals and frontline responders and maintained essential public and emergency services.

Alicia Kearns [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will he join me in commending all those involved in maintaining public safety in Northern Ireland for their commitment and efforts during the unprecedented and difficult circumstances of the past few months?

Brandon Lewis: Absolutely. I have had the great honour and pleasure over the past few weeks of being able to meet some of the teams in the ambulance service and the PSNI, who have been working through the covid period in some very difficult circumstances, having to prepare themselves to go out to work to keep people safe and healthy. We owe them all a huge debt of thanks for the amazing work they have done over this period to keep people safe and healthy; I absolutely join my hon. Friend in welcoming that.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP) [V]: Of course, keeping people safe in Northern Ireland should always be the priority. However, that has not always been the case. In 1981, Paul Whitters, aged 15, was killed in Derry, and Julie Livingstone, aged 14, was killed in Belfast. Both were killed with plastic bullets. The files relating to their deaths have been reclassified and withheld until 2059 and 2064 respectively. Does the Secretary of State agree that there is no good reason to keep those files closed, and will he now act to allow the parents of those children to see the files?

Brandon Lewis: I have enormous sympathy for those families who lost loved ones—especially children, which is a tragedy—during the troubles. The files mentioned by the hon. Member are currently held by the National Archives and were closed to protect the privacy, health and safety of individuals named in those files. A freedom of information request to the National Archives is the most appropriate next step to enable a full independent review of the files. Such a request can be made by anyone, including the hon. Member, and my Department would provide any necessary assistance to the National Archives if such a request were received.

Covid-19: Economic Recovery

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support the recovery of the Northern Ireland economy from the effects of the covid-19 outbreak. [903604]

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support the recovery of the Northern Ireland economy from the effects of the covid-19 outbreak. [903606]

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support the recovery of the Northern Ireland economy from the effects of the covid-19 outbreak. [903607]

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support the recovery of the Northern Ireland economy from the effects of the covid-19 outbreak. [903611]

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support the recovery of the Northern Ireland economy from the effects of the covid-19 outbreak. [903624]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Robin Walker): The UK Government have supported Northern Ireland businesses and employees through grants, loans and the job retention scheme. The additional funding available to the Executive as a result of the Government's coronavirus response amounts to £1.3 billion so far. In addition, the UK Government have provided £2 billion in new investment for Northern Ireland through the "New Decade, New Approach" agreement, to turbocharge infrastructure investment and provide the best possible platform for businesses to grow.

Catherine West: The impact on the economy in Northern Ireland has been severe. What will the Minister do to avoid a double whammy once the 28 weeks have passed in the case of a no-deal Brexit to stop chaos, confusion and potentially violence between parties in Northern Ireland?

Mr Walker: The hon. Lady is right to recognise that there has been a severe impact, and we are determined to work hand in hand with the Executive on the response to that. I was pleased to see them publishing their own plan, and their focus on skills and infrastructure are shared objectives with the UK Government. This certainly needs to be a joint endeavour, to ensure that we support a strong economy and the conditions for safety and security for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Northern Ireland is reported to be heading for a prolonged economic downturn. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) said, its aerospace industry is in crisis, with significant job losses at Bombardier and Thompson Aero. The Secretary of State can stop further decline by putting pressure on the Treasury to accelerate defence procurement programmes. Why has he not done that?

Mr Walker: The hon. Lady is right that the covid-19 outbreak has had a severe impact on the aviation and aerospace sectors around the world. The UK Government have already provided significant support to the sector, including through the business interruption loan scheme, the job retention scheme and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned, £2.1 billion through the covid corporate financing facility, with additional flexibility from UK Export Finance. Of course we will have contact with Ministers at the Ministry of Defence, and we are always happy to work with the sector to promote job opportunities in Northern Ireland.

Alex Cunningham: Virtually every major commercial aircraft programme in the world comes back either in structure, services or parts to Northern Ireland, yet the recent redundancies have been greeted with no more than a shrug of the shoulders from Ministers, who seem to think that general statements are enough. When will the Minister meet the workforce at those plants and put his weight behind a plan to help them survive this crisis?

Mr Walker: UK Government Ministers and officials have been engaging with key stakeholders in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State has met the key business leaders in this respect to inform our response to covid-19. The lead Department on this, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, has been engaging

extensively with the trade unions. Only this morning, I spoke to my ministerial colleague at BEIS to ensure that we can continue to co-ordinate our work on aviation.

Mr Speaker: We are heading to lovely Lancashire, with Rosie Cooper.

Rosie Cooper [V]: Given the Secretary of State's previous answer that business will have unfettered access within the UK, could the Minister explain why HMRC is telling businesses to prepare for new formalities in west-east trade, and could he describe them?

Mr Walker: The simple answer is that it is not. We want to make sure that we meet our commitments in a way that imposes a minimal burden on business and provides unfettered access. We are absolutely clear that we will provide that unfettered access and legislate for it through this House.

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State has already mentioned the severity of job losses at Bombardier, which drives a whole host of other supply-chain companies. What is the Minister doing to support capital investment in the supply chain to maintain jobs and skills at this particular time?

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the supply chain is crucially important to this industry. Making sure that we take the right approach to unfettered access and that we provide support across both the UK and the Northern Ireland economies is crucial in that respect. That is why we are working very closely with colleagues at BEIS and in the Executive to make sure that the support is there up and down the supply chain.

Covid-19: Hospitality and Tourism

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support Northern Ireland's hospitality and tourism industries to prepare for the lifting of covid-19 lockdown restrictions. [903605]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Robin Walker): The UK Government have made £1.3 billion of additional funding available to the Executive as part of the coronavirus response. That has enabled them to provide £25,000 grants to businesses in these sectors and to extend the initial three-month business rates holiday to 12 months for most Northern Ireland businesses. Prior to lockdown, I visited many of Northern Ireland's beautiful tourist attractions and saw first hand the amazing experience and the giant welcome that Northern Ireland offers to visitors. I look forward to encouraging everyone to visit as soon as the public health guidelines allow.

Caroline Ansell: I agree wholeheartedly that tourism is indeed a jewel in Northern Ireland's crown. Does the Minister agree that, subject to public health guidance, of course, now is the opportune time to really promote Northern Ireland as a destination? Being in the common travel area, quarantine does not apply to English, Welsh and Scottish visitors, so they can fly into Belfast or sail across the Irish sea and still be on staycation.

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I absolutely encourage people to avail themselves of those opportunities. It is worth noting that on 1 May the UK Government, together with the Executive, announced a generous £5.7 million funding support package for City of Derry and Belfast City airports so that we can keep this connectivity going. There is a huge opportunity for Northern Ireland tourism. As we enter the recovery phase, many more people from across the UK can go and visit the beautiful sights across Northern Ireland.

Cross-border Transfer of Jobs

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What discussions he has had with representatives of businesses in Northern Ireland on the cross-border transfer of jobs to the Republic of Ireland. [903608]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Robin Walker): Northern Ireland is and will remain a great place for businesses to invest and grow. Only this week we saw Belfast listed among the top 10 tech cities of the future. A number of companies have recently announced investments into the Northern Ireland economy, including Randox, Cygiant and Hypixel Studios.

Mr Carmichael: May I bring to the attention of the Minister, in case he has missed it, the words of the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Julian Smith), who said recently that businesses in Northern Ireland were telling him that because of the uncertainties they faced they were considering shifting jobs into the Republic of Ireland? Will he not listen to the warnings of a very highly respected former Secretary of State and actually start engaging with businesses instead of just disregarding them?

Mr Walker: I share the right hon. Gentleman's respect for the former Secretary of State, but there is no need for Northern Ireland businesses to move elsewhere to trade with the UK. The Government will provide unfettered access for Northern Ireland businesses to the UK market. Working together with the Executive, we can provide strong conditions for recovery that will make Northern Ireland an excellent place to invest.

EU Relationship

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the progress of negotiations on the UK's future relationship with the EU in relation to Northern Ireland. [903609]

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the progress of negotiations on the UK's future relationship with the EU in relation to Northern Ireland. [903615]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): We are committed to working hard to deliver a relationship with the EU based on friendly co-operation between sovereign equals and centred on free trade. The relationship we are seeking will work for all of the UK, including Northern Ireland, and will best serve the interests of Northern Ireland businesses and consumers.

Brendan Clarke-Smith: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Does he agree that, with business facing the hardest level of uncertainty in our lifetime because of coronavirus, it would be an enormous mistake to do as many Opposition Members are suggesting and extend the transition, the talks and all the unwanted uncertainty, delaying the start of our new relationship indefinitely?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend is quite right. First, extending the transition period would bind us into future EU laws, without us having any say, yet we could still have to foot the bill. Secondly, extending the transition period would simply prolong the negotiations and increase uncertainty for business. That is why we will not extend the transition period. This country needs to be able to design our own rules in our own best interests, and that is what we will do.

Joy Morrissey: What assurances can my right hon. Friend give that, when discussing the protocol of the EU, the UK will be ambitious in how flexible we can make the system?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend asks an important question. Our top priority is to protect the Belfast Good Friday agreement and the gains of the peace process to preserve Northern Ireland's place as a key part of the UK. Our approach is at all times guided by these priorities and sets out how we will meet our obligations in the protocol. The Command Paper that we published in May outlines how the protocol can be implemented in a flexible and proportionate way to protect the interests of people and businesses in Northern Ireland, as well as the whole UK, and indeed the EU. The protocol puts legal obligations on both sides and makes it clear that it is for both the UK and the EU to respect Northern Ireland's integral place in the UK customs territory. We stand ready to work with the EU in a collaborative and constructive way to uphold the integral role that Northern Ireland has in our community and the role of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): Since Patrick was a boy, trade across these islands has been critical to our economies in all parts of these islands. Trade for businesses is worth some £14 billion with Northern Ireland and £35 billion with Ireland. What guidance are the Government giving to British businesses about the different rules they have agreed with Northern Ireland and on trade with the Republic as part of the European Union?

Brandon Lewis: I would just say that if the hon. Lady has a read of the Command Paper, she will see that it outlines our position on the protocol. As I said earlier, we will be publishing guidance for businesses shortly. The key issue for businesses in Northern Ireland is that they will have unfettered access to the UK as part of the UK's internal market.

Restoration of Assembly Powers

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What steps he is taking on the restoration of full powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. [903613]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Robin Walker): As my hon. Friend knows, following successful talks in January this year, the Executive and Assembly were restored on 9 January with their full powers. We

are grateful for the progress that they have made since in delivering public services, bringing to an end the nurses' pay dispute in Northern Ireland and working alongside other parts of the UK to tackle coronavirus.

Bob Blackman [V]: My hon. Friend will know that this House has passed draconian laws that have been put on the people of Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to abortion. Can he confirm that it is now up to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive to decide whether to keep those laws, to reform them, or even to revoke them?

Mr Walker: As my hon. Friend knows, the regulations to which he refers do not replace or remove powers from the Executive. I remind him that they were introduced and approved by this House via an amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, following a three-year absence of devolution. We have delivered regulations that came into force on 31 March, as we were required to do. Parliament has now approved the regulations and they remain the law on access to abortion services. Abortion remains a devolved issue, and the Northern Ireland Assembly can legislate on that or amend the regulations, so long as it does so in a way that remains compliant with the CEDAW—convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women—recommendations and convention rights.

New Decade, New Approach Deal

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): What progress his Department has made on the implementation of the “New Decade, New Approach” deal. [903616]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Robin Walker): The Government, despite the challenges of the pandemic, have continued to progress work where possible to implement our commitments. These include helping to end the nurses' pay dispute, launching and progressing the recruitment process for a veterans' commissioner, releasing £553 million of funding out of the £2 billion made available to progress implementation, and making changes to immigration rules. We will also be restarting the process with the Executive for organising a joint board that will provide quarterly review of UK Government funding provided under the deal.

Jerome Mayhew: Now that covid and our response to it is thankfully less all-consuming, does my hon. Friend agree that now is the time to see some real progress from the Northern Ireland Executive?

Mr Walker: Absolutely. I agree with my hon. Friend, but we should recognise the manner in which the Executive have worked collaboratively to tackle the immediate crisis, including the way in which the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have demonstrated leadership and the ability to put their differences aside, working together to protect the public.

The Government and the Northern Ireland Executive have set out our complete commitment to ensuring that the “New Decade, New Approach” deal is implemented in full. As the Secretary of State said earlier, one aspect we would welcome rapid progress on is the independent fiscal council.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

[903739] **Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con):** If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 24 June.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Sarah Atherton: My constituents in Wrexham welcome the announcement by the chief medical officers of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England about reducing the UK covid alert level from 4 to 3. Indeed, through my work at the Wrexham Maelor Hospital, I have seen a reduction in the number of covid-positive cases needing to be treated. Does the Prime Minister therefore agree that the UK-wide approach works and we need to continue with it to beat the pandemic?

The Prime Minister: First, I personally pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the shifts she has put in throughout the pandemic and of course thank all her colleagues at the Wrexham Maelor Hospital, which I know. Working together across all four nations of our country is indeed the way in which we will beat the pandemic.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Yesterday, the Government announced the next stage of easing lockdown restrictions. If that plan is to work—and we want it to work—we need an effective track, trace and isolate system. The Prime Minister promised that a world-beating system would be in place by 1 June. The latest figures from yesterday's press conference hosted by the Prime Minister show that 33,000 people are estimated to have covid-19 in England. The latest track, trace and isolate figures show that just over 10,000 people with covid-19 were reached and asked to provide contact details. I recognise the hard work that has gone into this, but if two thirds of those with covid-19 are not being reached and asked to provide contact details, there is a big problem, isn't there?

The Prime Minister: On the contrary. I think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been stunned by the success of the test and trace operation. Contrary to his prognostications of gloom, it has got up and running much faster than the doubters expected. They are getting it done—Dido Harding and her team have recruited 25,000 people and so far they have identified and contacted 87,000 people who have voluntarily agreed to self-isolate to stop the disease spreading. I do not think the right hon. and learned Gentleman would have predicted that a few weeks ago. I think he should pay tribute now to Dido and her team for what they are doing.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister just has not addressed the question I put to him. I was not asking about those who have gone into the system—the 10,000—or those who have been contacted; I was asking about the two thirds of the 33,000 with covid-19 who were not reached. That is a big gap. The Prime Minister risks making the

mistakes he made at the beginning of the pandemic—brushing aside challenge, dashing forward, not estimating the risks properly. If two thirds of those with covid-19 are not being contacted, that is a big problem. If we do not get track, trace and isolate properly running, we cannot open the economy or prevent infection from spreading, so let me ask the question in a different way. What is the Government's strategy for closing the gap between the number of people with covid-19 and those going into the system—not what happens to those who go into the system?

The Prime Minister: I hesitate to accuse the right hon. and learned Gentleman of obscurantism. He is misleading on the key point. The number of people with covid in this country is, of course, an estimate.

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: Inadvertently misleading—

Mr Speaker: Order. Prime Minister, one of us is going to have to give way and it will have to be you. Obviously, no hon. Member misleads or ever would, whichever side they are from.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is inadvertently giving a false impression of what test and trace is doing. The 33,000 cases in the country is, of course, an estimate. NHS test and trace is contacting the vast majority of those who test positive and their contacts and getting them to self-isolate. It is a formidable achievement. Yesterday, the right hon. and learned Gentleman was kind enough to say that he supported our policy and our programme—I seem to remember him saying that loud and clear yesterday. Today—as I say, I understand the constraints of the profession in which he used to work; I know how it works—he seems to be yo-yoing back into a position of opposition. Which is it: is he supporting what we are doing or is he against it?

Keir Starmer: The figures I have, which the Prime Minister says are inadvertently misleading, are the slide at his press conference yesterday and the slide at the Government's press conference last week—the latest figures. They are the two figures. I do support the next stage of the operation, but the Prime Minister is wrong to reject challenge. Sixty-five thousand people have lost their lives because of covid-19. The Prime Minister should welcome challenge that could save lives, rather than complaining about it.

Another risk to this plan is if local councils do not have the powers and resources to implement local lockdowns. There is a report today that eight out of 10 councils face bankruptcy or cutting services, with many of those in the north-east and midlands, where, as the Prime Minister knows, there are the worst affected areas for covid-19. The real concern among council leaders is that they do not have the powers or guidance to implement lockdowns quickly if needed. The Conservative leader of Oxfordshire County Council said it would be “interesting” for central

“government to confirm what is meant by the local lockdown”—including—

“clear guidance as to those powers and what is expected of us”.

Can the Prime Minister tell us when local authorities will get the guidance that they need?

The Prime Minister: Everybody understands—we have seen it already, across the country—that when there are local outbreaks, for instance in Weston-super-Mare or in GP surgeries in north London, there have been local lockdowns and local crackdowns. We have a very effective cluster-busting operation, which is designed to ensure that we keep those outbreaks under control. Local councils understand how to do it, with the local resilience forums backed up by the joint biosecurity centre. That is how it works and that is how it is going to work, and it is a very effective way of keeping this disease under control. I am not going to pretend to the right hon. and learned Gentleman or to the House that this thing is beaten or that the virus has gone way, because clearly that is not the case. We have to remain extremely vigilant, and local councils will be supported in doing their vital work in implementing local lockdowns.

Keir Starmer: May I now turn to the app? This really matters because unless someone with covid-19 can name and identify everybody they have been in contact with, the app is the only way of tracing unknown contacts. My hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) made precisely that point yesterday. He gave the example, “How on earth do you trace everyone in close contact at a seafront or in a park without an app?” Up until last week, the Government maintained that the app was “critical—another of their slides—but at the weekend the Health Secretary downplayed the app, saying it was only ever additional support. So which is it: critical or not?

The Prime Minister: I wonder whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman can name a single country in the world that has a functional contact tracing app—there isn't one. What we have—and what, I am afraid, has left the Opposition slightly foundering—is a very successful NHS test and trace operation, which yesterday they supported. Yesterday, they said it was good enough for this country to go forward with step 3 of our plan, but today they are yo-yoing back again and saying that it is not good enough. They need to make up their mind. They need to get behind NHS test and trace, support it and take the country forward together.

Keir Starmer: Germany. It had its app working on 15 June and it has had 12 million downloads—I checked that overnight. *[Interruption.]* Twelve million—it is way beyond. The Health Secretary said that we would have the app by mid-May—presumably that was on advice. The Prime Minister said that we would have it by 1 June, but now Government Ministers say that it will not be ready until the winter. We have spent £12 million on this. Other countries are ahead of us. When are we going to have a working app?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is completely wrong, because no country in the world has a working contact tracing app. I have always been clear—we have always been clear—that the app would be the icing on the cake. If we can get it to work, it will be a fine thing, but there is not one anywhere in the world so far. What we do have is a fantastic NHS test and trace operation that is already up and running, that is going to get better and better, and that will be indispensable to our future success. I

think that he should support it and, by the way, that he should make it much clearer that he supports our programme going forward.

Since the right hon. and learned Gentleman mentions Labour councils and support for Labour councils, perhaps he might clear up the position of yesterday and say once and for all that Labour councils should now be encouraging children in their areas to go back to school. We heard some warm words from him yesterday. Can he now confirm that he wants all children who can go back to school to go back to school this month?

Keir Starmer: Yes. The only U-turn here was the Education Secretary on 9 June, who ripped up the Government's plans to get children back into school before the summer break.

There is a theme to these exchanges. Last week, I asked the Prime Minister about two claims about child poverty. He said that absolute child poverty and relative child poverty

"have both declined under this Government".—[*Official Report*, 17 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 796.]

On Monday, the Office of the Children's Commissioner ruled that the Prime Minister's answer was "mostly false". The Prime Minister also said that there are 400,000 fewer families living in poverty now than there were in 2010. On Monday, the Office of the Children's Commissioner ruled that that was simply "false". He has been found out. He either dodges the question or he gives dodgy answers. Mr Speaker, no more witnesses; I rest my case. Will the Prime Minister do the decent thing and correct the record in relation to child poverty?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to point out to m'learned friend that actually, there are 100,000 fewer children in absolute poverty and 500,000 fewer children falling below thresholds of low income and material deprivation. This Government, as he knows, are massively increasing universal credit with £7 billion more to help the poorest and neediest families in our country. We are getting on with it. We are taking the tough decisions. He still cannot make up his mind.

Talking about child poverty, the single biggest determinant of a child's success is whether he or she goes to school. The right hon. and learned Gentleman still will not say whether children should go. I think it is absolutely infamous for him to come to the House one day and say he supports the programme and then, the next day, not to confirm that he wants kids to go to school now.

[903741] **Ms Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): Seafarers, global key workers, have given us goods from food to medicine during covid, but that is now under threat. Some 400,000 mariners are stuck on board their ships due to the failure of countries to agree crew changes. The United Kingdom is the world's leading maritime nation, and we are home to the International Maritime Organisation, which gives us a unique responsibility. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree to meet the Chamber of Shipping to marshal the global community to help to get our seafarers home and ensure that free trade continues to flow?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend knows a great deal about the subject whereof she now speaks. We remain fully committed to the welfare of all seafarers,

regardless of their nationality. We ask all states to do the same. I look forward to discussing that in person with her.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP) [V]: I am sure the whole House will join me in passing on condolences to the family of the three children who sadly lost their lives in a house fire in Paisley last Friday evening, Fiona, Alexander and Philip Gibson—such a terrible tragedy.

This morning, we heard growing concerns from medical experts about the real risk of a second wave of covid-19. At the same time, experts at the Fraser of Allander Institute outlined the scale of the economic challenges ahead, with a raft of redundancies and business closures if financial support is withdrawn. They warned that measures that risk a second wave of the virus would delay recovery in Scotland until 2024. The health and economic emergency requires an unprecedented response.

On Monday, the Scottish Government's advisory group on economic recovery, led by independent business leaders, published its initial analysis to secure a strong recovery. Will the Prime Minister welcome those efforts to find a way forward out of this economic crisis?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed. I would be only too happy to study the documents to which the right hon. Gentleman refers.

Ian Blackford: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for that answer, and I am glad that he agrees that we need to take every action to study and aid the economic recovery. I am sure he is aware that the Scottish advisory group has called for an accelerated review of the devolved fiscal framework. Crucially, it has supported a significant increase in access to capital to stimulate an investment-led recovery in Scotland. Scotland can make different choices and invest in a strong recovery, but we can only do it with the necessary financial powers. Our First Minister and our Finance Secretary have already made a request for more borrowing powers. Will the Prime Minister implement the recommendations of those business leaders and give the Scottish Parliament the economic powers it needs to fuel a recovery in the wake of the pandemic, or will he put Scotland's economic recovery at risk?

The Prime Minister: I respectfully remind the right hon. Gentleman that, as part of our UK campaign against the coronavirus, Scotland has so far received £3.8 billion in Barnett consequentials—a fact that I am sure is seldom off his lips in his discussions with SNP colleagues. We will continue to invest massively in Scotland because Scotland, like the whole of the UK, benefits from being part of the oldest and most successful political partnership anywhere in the world. I congratulate the SNP, by the way, on its U-turn—which could be copied with advantage by our friends on the Opposition Front Bench—on education and getting all kids into school.

[903742] **Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): The people of Keighley and I are sick of drug gangs openly selling drugs on Keighley's streets and grooming young, innocent children to do their dirty work. Can the Prime Minister update me on what progress is being made to deliver on our manifesto commitment to ensure that

West Yorkshire police have the resources and personnel they need to tackle those drug dealers, who are infecting Keighley's soul?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the evil that is done by drug gangs around the whole country. County lines operations have spread across our country, and we must roll them up. That is why we are tackling them directly with every technological resource at our disposal, and that is why we are making sure that we invest in another 20,000 police officers going to Keighley and across the country as well.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Mr Llefarydd. Covid-19 has now broken out in three Welsh food factories. There are 200 cases in Llangefni in Ynys Môn, 70 in Wrexham and 34 in Merthyr Tydfil. A plant in Germany has also seen 1,500 workers test positive. The difference, of course, is that German employees get sick pay worth 100% of their salary. Here, workers get sick pay worth on average perhaps 20% of their salary, so they lose 80% of their salary. These are low-paid workers. For any future local lockdown to succeed, people will need to be supported. Will the Prime Minister now commit to local furlough-like schemes for self-isolating workers?

The Prime Minister: As I said in my statement yesterday, the coronavirus job retention scheme—the furlough scheme—as well as what we have done for self-employed people, which has also been considerable, and the expansion of universal credit have been massive commitments by our Government to the workforce of this country. We will continue to make those commitments and, as I said yesterday, if we have to move back—obviously we do not want to—to local lockdowns, or indeed a national lockdown, nobody should be penalised for doing the right thing. So there is the right hon. Lady's answer.

[903744] **Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): Eastbourne's dependence on tourism and its position as a coastal community mean that it has been particularly hard hit. Indeed, this very weekend we were to stage our international tennis tournament, which puts us on the map and brings in millions of pounds. In that light, may I ask my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to look at a reduction in VAT so that the hospitality sector can get back on its feet and be part of the recovery to get our country moving?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly look at all proposals that my hon. Friend makes on taxation. As she must know, they are a matter for the Chancellor and for the next Budget, although what we have already done is give business rates holidays—pushing back business rates right until the end of next year—and huge coronavirus loans, bounce-back loans and grants of £25,000 for every business. What we will also do is support tourism across the whole of the UK, and I hope that she will put the welcome sign above Eastbourne this summer, so that people can enjoy its attractions.

[903740] **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab) [V]: In order to access benefits quickly, people with unpredictable terminal conditions, such as motor neurone disease, are having to prove that they have six months or less to live,

and they risk losing their benefits altogether if they live longer than three years. A year has now passed since the Government announced their review into access to benefits for terminally ill people, but there is still no progress. When are the Government going to act?

The Prime Minister: We have massively increased our spending on universal credit, but the hon. Lady raises an important point about access to benefits for terminally ill people, and I will undertake, if I may, Mr Speaker, to revert to her as soon as possible by writing.

[903745] **Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I have the honour of representing the market town of Newcastle-under-Lyme, and I am very pleased to inform the Prime Minister that our markets are now back. However, the town is also very proud of its hospitality sector. It has purple flag status, recognising the quality of its early-evening and night-time economy—the pubs, clubs, restaurants and cafés. I know that they will hugely welcome what the Prime Minister said yesterday, but he knows they will need further support in the months ahead. Can I ask him what the Government intend to do to support the hospitality sector?

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to what I said to our hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) just now. We will continue to support the hospitality sector in all the ways that I have described, but, of course, what could also happen is that people in Newcastle-under-Lyme could be encouraged to enjoy themselves sensibly, in a covid-secure way, and keep the purple flag flying above it.

[903743] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: The ongoing impact of covid on international travel threatens over 100,000 jobs in the aerospace industry, including hundreds in my constituency. Will the Prime Minister commit to protecting vital aerospace jobs and invest in a green aviation recovery to reduce future carbon emissions?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady has an extremely important point. It is one that we are working on very intensively now in Government, so that we use the opportunity of this crisis to bounce forwards with new low-carbon technology that will continue to drive the UK's formidable aerospace industry.

[903747] **Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): I have been contacted by Cotesbach and Shawell parish councils, along with the excellent Harborough District councillor Jonathan Bateman, about a proposed new waste processing facility in my patch. All I ask the Prime Minister is if he would help me organise a meeting with the relevant Minister, so that I can put forward the views of my constituents on this issue.

The Prime Minister: We have of course invested a huge amount in south Leicester. The local growth fund is expected to deliver 2,700 jobs and 5,000 new homes, but, as I am sure the House will understand, this is a planning decision, with which this Government obviously cannot involve themselves.

[903746] **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab) [V]: Public Health England and the joint biosecurity centre are undergoing a deep dive in Bedford to understand why the infection rate in my constituency is so high. The pillar 2 commercial mass-testing cases are still not being included in the individual totals for England. How does the Prime Minister know that the people of Bedford and Kempston are safe to embrace his new lockdown-easing measures when he does not know how many people are infected with coronavirus?

The Prime Minister: As I think the Leader of the Opposition himself confirmed just now, we do have a pretty good estimate of what is happening in the country. Overall, we think the numbers have moved down from, say, one in 400 four weeks ago to maybe one in 1,700 today. The incidence continues to decline across the country. Where there are particular outbreaks and particular hotspots, such as in Bedford or elsewhere, we now have the resources of our test and trace operation and the joint biosecurity centre, which are getting better and better the whole time, to implement those local crackdowns and cluster-busting operations.

[903748] **Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): Many market traders and independent business owners in Aylesbury have told me how much they appreciate the tremendous help that they have received from the Government during the coronavirus crisis, but we do know that, sadly, many people will still lose their jobs in the months ahead. I wonder if my right hon. Friend could ensure that Government Departments will work together to provide both the resource and expertise that are necessary for people to learn new skills so that they are fully equipped to take on new and different types of work in the future.

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed. I thank my hon. Friend for what he is doing to represent his young constituents. It is vital that we invest in people's skills during what will unquestionably be economically difficult times. We are not just investing in training through our new £2.5 billion national skills fund: we also want to encourage as many in-work placements as possible and get people the live experience that they need.

[903749] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Prime Minister, the rehabilitation of offenders is supported right the way across the political spectrum, but the current operation of the Disclosure and Barring Service is a major obstacle to people turning their lives around. It is inefficient, unfair and, frankly, discriminatory. The Lammy report dealt with this in some depth nearly two years ago, so we do not need any more commissions or inquiries. We need action and an end to the endless Home Office obstruction and delay. You can break the logjam, Prime Minister. Will you do it?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important point. Any MP will have had very hard cases caused by the DBS system. It is important for the protection of children and young people, but we are considering the Supreme Court's judgment and will set out our opinion in due course.

[903750] **Ruth Edwards** (Rushcliffe) (Con): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement yesterday that we can start to reopen our economy? Will he join

me in praising the fantastic charities and volunteers across Rushcliffe, including the West Bridgford Community Helpers, Cotgrave Super Kitchen and the Friary, who have worked so hard to support vulnerable people throughout the lockdown?

The Prime Minister: I have absolutely no hesitation in commending and congratulating all the groups that my hon. Friend mentions—the Friary, the Cotgrave Super Kitchen and West Bridgford Community Helpers. I congratulate them all.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Prime Minister stated that when we leave the EU at the end of this year Northern Ireland will still remain a full part of the United Kingdom. But I have in my hand a letter received by the management of the port of Larne only this week, stating that it has to prepare to become a border control post, and 14 acres of land has been looked at for car parking, for lorry parking and for construction. There is a sense of urgency, as the proposals have to go to the EU by the end of the month. Can the Prime Minister explain how Northern Ireland can remain a full part of the United Kingdom if people coming from the rest of the UK into Northern Ireland have to pass through a border control post? Would he advise management to tear this letter up as well?

The Prime Minister: I have not seen the letter the right hon. Gentleman describes, but I can tell him absolutely categorically that there will be no new customs infrastructure for the very simple reason that, under the protocol, it is absolutely clear in black and white that Northern Ireland is part of the customs territory of the whole of the United Kingdom. We will be joining the whole of the United Kingdom in our new independent trade policy and doing free trade deals around the world.

[903751] **Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Right now across the country, there are a lot of employers speaking to their staff about redundancies ahead of the furlough scheme unwinding. Sadly, for many families, it will be a hard landing, moving from furlough to benefits. I know that my right hon. Friend has done a huge amount already, and he deserves enormous credit for it, but can I really encourage him, as he thinks about his going for growth strategy, also to consider ways to strengthen the safety net at this time?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend, and he is quite right that there will be tough times ahead for people and for families. That is why we have massively increased universal credit. We stand by, as we have throughout this crisis, to help the British people through it.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: I have been contacted by hundreds of my constituents about racial inequality in the UK. We had the Lammy review of the justice system, we had the race disparity audit in the workplace, and we now have the independent review of the Windrush scandal. What is the Prime Minister's timeframe for implementing those recommendations?

The Prime Minister: Actually, we are getting on with implementing a huge number of the recommendations we have already had. Sixteen of the Lammy recommendations have been implemented. A further 17 are in progress; two of them we are not progressing. The Home Secretary

will set out further what we are going to do later—before recess—about Windrush with Wendy Williams’s report, and we will go on with our cross-governmental commission to ensure that we stamp out racism and discrimination across this country and throughout our system of government. We take it exceptionally seriously, and I am glad that the hon. Lady raised it.

[903752] **Ian Levy** (Blyth Valley) (Con): As we exit the covid crisis, we will need essential minerals to supply the UK’s steel, cement and brickworks, which will help build our homes, hospitals and infrastructure of the future. Mining them here in the UK in a sustainable way is not just better for the environment but reduces reliance on foreign imports. Will my right hon. Friend please assure the people of Blyth Valley that he and his Government will do all they can to encourage investment and support jobs in this area?

The Prime Minister: Absolutely. I can certainly say to my hon. Friend and to the people of Blyth Valley that we are going to do absolutely everything we can in the course of our infrastructure revolution to ensure that UK steel manufacturers are at the front of the queue for the great projects that we are going to construct. We have already identified about £3.8 billion worth of opportunities.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): My constituent Elizabeth Smurthwaite contracted coronavirus in her care home and was refused admission to hospital. This Government’s policy of discharging patients with coronavirus into homes has led to over 16,000 deaths. Sadly, Elizabeth has since passed away. Last week, the Health Secretary said that he accepted responsibility for these deaths in our care homes. Does the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Of course this Government accept responsibility, and I accept responsibility, for everything that has happened throughout this crisis, but I will say that what happened with the discharge of patients into care homes was all done according to clinical decisions, as the NHS has confirmed, and actually there was a 40% reduction between January and March in the number of people going from the NHS into care homes. Thankfully, we are now seeing a massive reduction, thanks to the efforts of care workers and our care home action programme, to get the numbers of deaths in care homes down to the levels we would expect to find this year.

[903753] **Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): Last week, fatal conflict resumed in Ladakh on the line of actual control between India and China. What are the implications for British interests of a dispute between a Commonwealth member and the world’s largest democracy on the one side, and a state that challenges our notion of democracy on the other?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw the attention of the House to a very serious and worrying situation, which we are monitoring closely. Perhaps the best thing I can say to her is that we are encouraging both parties to engage in dialogue on the issues on the border and sort it out between them.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): The last few days have been very difficult for our town. I offer my deepest condolences to the families of those who died in the dreadful attack in Forbury Gardens on Saturday evening. It is impossible to imagine what they are going through. My thoughts are also with the injured and their families, and with all those who have been affected by this terrible attack. I thank Thames Valley police and the other emergency services for their swift and effective response and for the incredible bravery shown by officers. Will the Prime Minister ensure that the investigation now receives all the resources it needs and that our town is properly supported? We have a strong and diverse community. We can and we will get through this together.

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed. I thank the hon. Member for his question and for how he expressed it, because I think the whole House shares his feelings of support for the police and acknowledges their bravery in running towards danger, as well as that of the members of the public who themselves intervened. It was a really extraordinary moment, but it was also an appalling crime and an appalling tragedy.

Obviously there is a case that must now be properly proceeded with, and I just make two comments. First, if there are any lessons that we need to learn about the way we handle things in the future, we will of course learn those lessons and this Government will act in this Parliament. Secondly, as I said yesterday to the House, and I think it is a common view, we will not let this kind of attack—this kind of senseless murder—distract us or in any way allow us to be intimidated or to change our way of life.

Mr Speaker: I have a short statement to make about Divisions. With effect from today, the doors will be locked 18 minutes after the start of a Division. As at present, this can be extended if there is a queue at that time.

In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am now suspending the House for three minutes.

Virtual participation in proceedings concluded (Order, 4 June)

12.35 pm

Sitting suspended.

BILL PRESENTED**POLICE STOP AND SEARCH (REPEAL) BILL**

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Edward Davey presented a Bill to repeal sections 60, 60AA and 60A of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 in so far as they apply to England and Wales.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 147).

Demonstrations (Abortion Clinics)

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

12.40 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to restrict demonstrations in the vicinity of abortion clinics; and for connected purposes.

The demands in this Bill are not new, and although its title includes the word “abortion”, the termination of pregnancy is not at issue here—not the number of weeks, or anything of that nature. This is about women being able to present themselves for legal healthcare free from intimidation.

Many Members with a clinic within their boundary will know the issue at stake. In 2017, I and 113 cross-party colleagues wrote to the then Home Secretary Amber Rudd, which resulted in her commissioning a review. Alas, by the time it reported back, her successor recognised the problem but deemed it was not serious enough to address. Yet any harassment is surely wrong and since then things have worsened. Pre-lockdown, there were scenes of scores of protesters obstructing the entrance to the BPAS Finsbury Park clinic. That made national news. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) called on the Government to bring forward legislation to protect women from Cardiff to Eastbourne and Doncaster—even my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has this menace on his patch.

Lockdown provided some respite, but they are at it again. It took over three decades of protests outside the Marie Stopes clinic in Ealing until the exasperated council in 2018 introduced Britain’s first buffer zone—a public spaces protection order, a local authority byelaw—so that women could access healthcare services in confidence and dignity, with their journey down the street and up the path into the clinic unimpeded by anti-abortion or even pro-choice campaigners after having probably made the most difficult decision of their lives.

But with the covid-19 crisis preoccupying local authorities—although the protesters do not seem deterred by it—councils have enough on their plate without having to find the time and resources for the onerous process necessary for a PSPO. While a PSPO is an infinite improvement on what was there before, it is cumbersome and only temporary. Ours ends next year, and it took a six-figure sum to gather evidence and redeploy a senior team of officers from elsewhere for six months, and to pay for the subsequent signage and the legal fees from the inevitable challenges from the well-endowed people on the other side.

I have been aware of Ealing protests since the ’90s, which included disturbing 2D and 3D foetus images lining the road. When I became a parent and had to walk my own past there, I shuddered more. As an MP, I received representations from constituents from neighbouring houses, with people saying that they there were not sure whether to comfort the women in distress. Worse still was the anguish felt by women clinic users. They were usually young and about to go through a challenging process, sometimes after rape or a fatal foetal abnormality. The last thing they needed in that situation was to be met by lifelike, medically inaccurate

foetus dolls and graphic images, handed misleading literature on the way in, or called “mum” and told they would go to hell. I held a meeting at the clinic, and we only got in because it was raining that day and the protesters were put off by the precipitation. The clinic keeps an incident log, and staff reported being hounded themselves, and told me about women either missing appointments or turning up in tears due to groups congregating outside, thus causing potential physical and emotional harm to themselves. There was a record number of submissions to the PSPO consultation, including reports of clinic users being shouted at, having their arms grabbed, and being filmed on camera phones. While pro-life supporters claim that handing out leaflets and kneeling with rosary beads is not harassment or intimidation, nor needs police intervention, as Justice Turner said when upholding the Ealing decision at the High Court, it is “uninvited attention” when women are “vulnerable and sensitive”.

Ealing’s chief superintendent told me that the police would prefer national protections as this order is about to run out and the whole onerous process must start again. Policing has been made a lot better now, with officers freed up to fight crime, rather than keeping rival groups apart at the gate since the emergence of the pro-choice advocacy group, Sister Supporter.

In reality, however, only one side protests not in the traditional sense by targeting legislators like us to change decisions, but by targeting individual women on their way to make this agonising decision that they have often made as a forced choice, and with judgments on their morality cast all over them. The High Court, the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court have all affirmed the Ealing decision, with my brilliant barrister constituent, Kuljit Bhogal, defending each time, but the cash-strapped council and our leader Julian Bell now fear further expense because the next stop is going to be the European Court of Human Rights, at a time when every penny from the public purse counts.

Life is all about weighing up competing interests, and freedom of thought, of conscience, of expression and of assembly are often cited, but clinic users also have a right to privacy. Pregnancy is something we tend to keep private until it shows: I definitely did—and look at Carrie; we didn’t know until later, did we? Pregnancy is a personal thing, and shaming people undergoing it, with the added dimension of abortion, and pushing them into the spotlight in a public place—a public highway—violates this. As our chief superintendent put it, protesters can still protest; they have just moved a few hundred yards down the road.

Many MPs on both sides of the House who are supporting this Bill are devout Christians, and we should not muddy the waters of the issues at stake here. When that vicar’s daughter, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey), was an Ealing councillor, she was a prime mover behind our PSPO, and local clergy, such as Nick Jones of Saint Mary, Acton, are completely 100% on side, as are a plethora of other groups: the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, the End Violence Against Women Coalition, Women’s Aid and Mumsnet to name but a few.

Australia and Canada have adopted this approach and this type of legislation functions fine, but we do not want to go down the road of America, where there are

horrific stories of medical professionals’ cars being booby-trapped and all sorts of scary things; I fear we could head in that direction if action is not taken now.

This is not about the rights and wrongs of abortion. While emotions run high, and there are sincerely held opinions on both sides of the argument, we must accept that it has been legal for 50 years in this country. This is about the rights of vulnerable women seeking access to healthcare in safety, anonymity and dignity, without the accompanying paraphernalia designed to induce guilt, such as grossly inaccurate quasi-medical leaflets or being filmed and livestreamed entering and leaving the clinic, which no other medical procedure would attract. Access to health services should be a fundamental human right enjoyed by all without interference.

Following our buffer zone in Ealing, Richmond has followed suit, and apparently the constituencies of my good friends my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) and for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) are next on the cards. Although Ealing’s PSPO was a necessary and local solution to a local problem, women should not effectively be in an uneven, patchy postcode lottery in order to be able to access harassment-free reproductive healthcare. This is a national problem that requires a national solution. Where Ealing leads, the world should follow, but we should better what Ealing has. This Government have been courageous with things such as same sex-marriage and they should be so again. I commend the Bill to the House.

12.50 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I rise to oppose this Bill and urge colleagues to vote against it, whatever their views on abortion, on several key grounds: its potentially damaging impact on freedom of speech; the fact that we already have sufficient relevant and effective legislation—we do not need more—and because the Government looked into and rejected a Bill of this type less than two years ago

In 2018, the then Home Secretary conducted an in-depth review about protest activities outside abortion clinics. The outcome was clear. He said that

“introducing national buffer zones would not be a proportionate response.”

Why did he conclude this? One clear reason was, as he said, that

“legislation already exists to restrict protest activities that cause harm to others.”

Where a crime is committed, the police have the power to act so that people feel protected.

There are, by my reckoning, at least six pieces of legislation already available for authorities to tackle behaviour that might cause harassment, alarm or disorder: the Criminal Justice Act 2003; the Public Order Act 1986; the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005; the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and the Local Government Act 2000. We do not need more.

The Government’s review also found that anti-abortion activities take place outside a very small number of abortion facilities. Of the 363 hospitals and clinics in England and Wales that carry out abortions, just 36 had experienced anti-abortion activities. Evidence showed

[*Fiona Bruce*]

that these activities were—again I quote from the then Home Secretary’s conclusion—“passive in nature” predominantly. He went on to say:

“The main activities that were reported to us that take place during protests include: praying; displaying banners; and handing out leaflets. There were relatively few reports of the more aggressive activities”

of the type described by the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton. The type of behaviour that she described is simply not replicated widely across the country. In fact, for more than a quarter of a century, in places from Ealing to Edgbaston, people concerned about abortion have, in the main, gathered peaceably to pray near abortion clinics, and they have gently offered a leaflet or the opportunity of a conversation. Actually, colleagues, how different is that from our political campaigning—apart from the praying that is, though some of us do that, too. Little trouble was registered at these clinics until the last few years when opposing campaigners started to arrive in groups with a megaphone to deliberately stir up conflict—in my opinion—where none had existed previously.

Let me be clear: I do not condone aggressive protest activities outside abortion clinics, but those are in the minority and imposing national legislation where it is not required would be a drastic overreaction. It would be a drastic overreaction because of the potential damage that this Bill could do to the more widely held freedom of speech in this country. As the then Home Secretary wrote:

“In this country, it is a long-standing tradition that people are free to gather together and to demonstrate their views. This is something to be rightly proud of.”

Not only could freedom of speech be threatened, but also freedom of assembly, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, the right to peaceably protest, and the right to receive information. They are fundamental liberties, many hard-won, underpinning our democracy. This is a dangerous Bill with potentially far-reaching implications. Everyone has the right to free speech within the law. That includes the right to say things which, though lawful, others may find disturbing or upsetting. Of course free speech is not an absolute; there are limitations prohibiting speech that incites violence, or constitutes harassment or is defamatory, but there are laws to deal with that, as I have said. However, the law does not prohibit speech that others might find upsetting or offensive. I find it upsetting to hear that 9 million unborn children have been aborted since 1967—one every three minutes in Great Britain today; 600 every working day.

We must not allow a situation where minority groups holding unpopular or unfashionable opinions that are within the law are shut down by those seeking to prevent the free speech of people whose views they disagree with. What other points of view could be delegitimised next? We must safeguard free speech as precious. No wonder a host of prominent human rights groups and civil society campaigners, who I suspect do not share my views on abortion, have spoken against the proposed “buffer” or “censorship” zones proposed in the Bill. They include Peter Tatchell, the Manifesto Club, Big Brother Watch, Index on Censorship, the Freedom Association and Liberty, the last of which has

strongly criticised the public spaces protection orders, to which the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton referred, as powers that allow

“for the criminalisation of a very broad range of conduct”,

and has called on the Government

“to get rid of these over-broad and under-scrutinised powers.”

A PSPO can be created simply if a local authority is satisfied that two conditions are met: if activities in the area have a detrimental effect on quality of life—a hugely subjective test, especially when applied in such a sensitive area as abortion—and if the activities are likely to be continuing. Not only would such nationwide censorship zones set an illiberal precedent of Government censorship, but they would make people fearful of expressing views about abortion elsewhere, outside such zones, lest they be held to have broken the law, or to be guilty of some hate crime—the so-called chilling effect on free speech. That may well affect freedom of speech on other topics. How soon will it be before legal pro-life expression is unacceptable anywhere in the public sphere—or the expression of views on other issues that cause people to feel uncomfortable?

This House must safeguard freedom of speech and oppose a Bill that risks silencing in public life the views of countless people, including those of Alina, who described on the website *Be Here For Me* how she kept her daughter, now aged seven, after a quiet encounter outside an abortion clinic. When she went into the clinic, she was told only how to have an abortion, but she says that having had that encounter with a woman outside,

“I felt that I did have a choice. I can choose, yes or no.”

This is not a pro-choice Bill. It is a regressive Bill, and I urge colleagues to vote against it today.

Mr Speaker: I am about to put the Question, and I expect there to be a Division when I do. I remind hon. Members that we are using the new arrangements I announced last week, with the voting in the Lobbies being recorded by pass readers. I will not give the instruction to lock the doors earlier than 18 minutes after I call the Division, although I expect that time to be reduced as the new system beds down. I urge all hon. Members to be patient during this process and in particular to observe the requirements of social distancing.

Question put (Standing Order No. 23).

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 47.

Division No. 59]

[12.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Shaun
Baker, Duncan
Barker, Paula
Baynes, Simon
Begum, Apsana
Bell, Aaron
Betts, Mr Clive
Blake, Olivia
Blunt, Crispin
Brabin, Tracy
Brennan, Kevin

Britcliffe, Sara
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buchan, Felicity
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, Ian
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Clarke, Theo
Clarkson, Chris

Colburn, Elliot
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Crouch, Tracey
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Davison, Dehenna
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dromey, Jack
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Mark
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farry, Stephen
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Freeman, George
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Peter
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Graham, Richard
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hill, Mike
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Holmes, Paul
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Jardine, Christina

Jarvis, Dan
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Jupp, Simon
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Largan, Robert
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lloyd, Tony
 Loughton, Tim
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marson, Julie
 Matheson, Christian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Jason
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 Mearns, Ian
 Merriman, Huw
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norris, Alex
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Penrose, John
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Randall, Tom
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina

Reeves, Ellie
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell, Dean
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Saxby, Selaine
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Simmonds, David
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham

Sturdy, Julian
 Sultana, Zarah
 Sunderland, James
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Watling, Giles
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wragg, Mr William
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeff Smith and
Mark Tami

NOES

Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Bacon, Gareth
 Benton, Scott
 Blackman, Bob
 Bruce, Fiona
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Carter, Andy
 Cates, Miriam
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Cooper, Rosie
 Daly, James
 Davies, Gareth
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Nick
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Fuller, Richard
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Griffiths, Kate
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hunt, Tom

Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kruger, Danny
 Loder, Chris
 Longhi, Marco
 McCartney, Karl
 Menzies, Mark
 Millar, Robin
 Nici, Lia
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark
 Redwood, rh John
 Robinson, Mary
 Sambrook, Gary
 Selous, Andrew
 Smith, Greg
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stevenson, Jane
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Vickers, Martin
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Shannon and
Sammy Wilson

Question accordingly agreed to.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Ordered,

That Dr Rupa Huq, Dame Diana Johnson, Rosie Duffield, Jess Phillips, Sarah Olney, Sir Bernard Jenkin, Mr Andrew Mitchell, Laura Farris, Caroline Lucas, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, Huw Merriman and Liz Saville Roberts present the Bill.

Dr Rupa Huq accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September and to be printed (Bill 145).

Opposition Day

[9TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Westferry Printworks Development

1.21 pm

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, that she will be graciously pleased to give a direction to Her Ministers to provide all correspondence, including submissions and electronic communications, involving Ministers and Special Advisers pertaining to the Westferry Printworks Development and the subsequent decision by the Secretary of State to approve its planning application at appeal to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

The Westferry case, and the role of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government in it, has blown apart confidence in the planning system. The only way to put that right is for the Secretary of State to publish the evidence about what really happened. If he has done nothing wrong, he has nothing to fear. I hope that he will welcome this opportunity to restore trust in a sector that will be so critical in rebuilding Britain after the lockdown.

In November last year, the Secretary of State attended an exclusive Conservative party fundraising dinner. He was seated next to Richard Desmond, the owner of Northern & Shell, and three of his senior executives. I understand that Mr Desmond's lobbyists—a company called Thorncliffe—had been busy selling tickets to the event to people who wanted access to the Secretary of State.

Northern & Shell is the applicant behind the Westferry Printworks development in Tower Hamlets, a highly controversial live planning application on which the Secretary of State was due to take a final decision. Ministers are not allowed to take planning decisions if they have been lobbied by the applicant. Under the ministerial code, Ministers are required not to place themselves under an obligation by, for instance, helping to raise funds from a donor who stands to benefit from the decisions they make, because it raises questions about cash for favours, which would be a serious abuse of power.

Tower Hamlets Council was opposed to the Westferry scheme because it was oversized and lacked affordable housing, and the Secretary of State's own planning inspector agreed with the council. However, on 14 January, just weeks after he had dined with Mr Desmond, the Secretary of State overruled them and forced the scheme through. He claims that he had no idea he would be sitting next to Mr Desmond and his senior executives.

The Secretary of State has not yet told us whether Conservative party officials knew and whether they sold tickets on that basis, as Thorncliffe seems to believe they did; he has not explained why, since he admits that the meeting gives rise to apparent bias, he did not ask to be re-seated elsewhere as soon as he realised who he was sitting next to; and he has given no reason why he did not immediately recuse himself from any further involvement in the decision.

The Secretary of State assured the House only last week that he did not discuss the scheme with Mr Desmond. Unfortunately for him, Mr Desmond says that they did.

He has gone further and told us that the Secretary of State viewed a promotional video about the scheme on Mr Desmond's phone—something the Secretary of State failed to mention to the House.

It is very hard to imagine that the Westferry scheme did not crop up during the three hours or so that the Secretary of State must have been sitting next to the owner of Northern & Shell and three of his most senior executives. Viewing Mr Desmond's video is not cutting off the discussion, as the Secretary of State told the House; it is the developer lobbying the Secretary of State, and apparently with some considerable success.

The Secretary of State has still not confirmed when and how he notified officials in his Department about this encounter. Was it before he took the decision, or was it afterwards? What was their advice to him? It is hard to believe, if he was honest with them about viewing the video, that they did not advise him to recuse himself immediately—so did they, and did he overrule them so that he could do favours for a friend?

The Secretary of State took his decision to approve the Westferry scheme on 14 January. That was one day before a new community infrastructure levy came into force. The timing of the Secretary of State's decision saved Mr Desmond up to £50 million.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I think the hon. Gentleman may be unintentionally misleading the House on that point. It did not save the developers £50 million. If he reads the inspector's report on this, he will see that it quite clearly says that the schedule 15 viability assessment can be rerun in the event that the appeal scheme becomes liable for community infrastructure levy. The report states:

“The adjustment is likely to reduce the amount of affordable housing.”

What the Secretary of State did was to make sure that the right proportion of affordable housing was delivered on that scheme. The hon. Gentleman is saying, quite wrongly, that that was not the reason. If he repeats that, or anyone else does, in this debate, they will therefore be intentionally misleading this House.

Steve Reed: I am going to come on to the issue of the proportion of affordable housing that was included in the scheme. The timing of the decision is a further issue on which I am seeking clarification from the Secretary of State. He could easily provide that if he published the documents behind it. I hope that he will, and that Conservative Members will all be voting for that when this debate concludes.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Irrespective of the rights and wrongs of the Secretary of State's behaviour, viability assessments are used by developers around the country to frustrate the affordable housing targets of local councils and planning authorities. South Lakeland District Council, Lake District National Park and Yorkshire Dales National Park do their best to provide affordable housing in a place where average house prices can be well in excess of a quarter of a million pounds, but viability assessments are often used to frustrate that process. Would it not be better if the Secretary of State were to stand up in the interests of affordable housing and not in the interests of the developer?

Steve Reed: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, and I agree with him. Indeed, the Secretary of State allowed the applicant to reduce the proportion of affordable and social housing in the scheme from the 35% supported by his own advisers to the 21% preferred by Mr Desmond. According to Tower Hamlets Council, that decision saved Mr Desmond a further £106 million. That is a considerable amount of money in total that the Secretary of State saved Mr Desmond—money that would have gone to fund things like schools, libraries, youth clubs or clinics in one of the most deprived communities anywhere in this country.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I represent one of the two Tower Hamlets constituencies. We have the highest child poverty rate in the country and the most overcrowding in the country. Denying that borough a combined total of £150 million is a disgrace. The Secretary of State ought to publish the documents and come clean today.

Steve Reed: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. If the Secretary of State will agree today to publish the documents, we can all see, with full transparency, what really went on. That is all we are seeking in this debate.

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): Is it not also the case that Labour-run Tower Hamlets Council has £567 million in usable reserves and is losing £3 million to £4 million a year in inflation because it is not spending the money it has got in the bank, which is just sitting there?

Steve Reed: I am afraid I do not know Tower Hamlets Council's budget in sufficient detail, but I do know that councils across the country face a funding gap of around one fifth of their annual revenue budget because the Government have failed to deliver on their promise to fund councils to do whatever is necessary to get communities through this pandemic. That is another issue that I hope the Secretary of State will deal with.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Steve Reed: I would like to make a little progress, because an awful lot of Members—not just in the Chamber, but elsewhere—would like to contribute to the debate.

The Secretary of State admitted last week that he was fully aware that his decision helped Mr Desmond avoid these charges. Why was it so important that this decision was rushed through on 14 January rather than, say, a day later or a week later? He has given no compelling reason for that, so suspicion arises that he was trying to do favours for a Conservative party donor.

The Secretary of State's own advisers from his Department believed the scheme was viable with the higher level of affordable housing, so on what specific grounds did he overrule professionals with relevant experience that far outweighs his own? Without a credible answer, the suspicion arises once again that the Secretary of State was bending over backwards to do favours for his billionaire dinner date.

Barely two weeks after the Secretary of State forced the scheme through, in the teeth of opposition from his own advisers and the local council, the beneficiary, Mr Desmond, made a donation to the Conservative

party—what an astonishing coincidence! The Secretary of State can see, as we all can, how that looks: cash for favours—mates' rates on taxes for Tories that everyone else has to pay in full. Do this Government really believe that taxes are just for the little people? No one will believe a word they say on levelling up until the Secretary of State levels with the British people over why he helped a billionaire dodge millions of pounds in tax after they enjoyed dinner together at an exclusive Conservative party fundraising event.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Has the hon. Gentleman considered that the urgency partly arose from the fact that the period for determination of the application had expired in November 2018? The opportunity of these valuable homes had already been waiting more than a year for a decision in the hands of Labour Tower Hamlets Council.

Steve Reed: The issue in question is not that the Secretary of State called the planning decision in; it is what he did after he had called it in—[*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State will have a chance to respond. It is what happened when he took the determination, not the fact that he was taking it.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I understand that the Secretary of State has acknowledged the appearance of bias. My hon. Friend is making a compelling case. If, in fact, the Secretary of State is entirely innocent of everything that has been suggested, there is a simple way for this to be resolved, which is for him to provide complete transparency. If only he showed the documents, he could prove his own innocence, and we could all get on to other matters.

Steve Reed: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. There is, of course, a very simple way for the Secretary of State to show that he did absolutely nothing wrong—it really could not be more straightforward. Officials in his Department will have kept meticulous records of the entire process: how and when he notified them about his dinner with Mr Desmond, and whether he told them that he had viewed the video; whether they advised him to recuse himself, and whether he overruled them; why he needed to take the decision in a way that helped Mr Desmond cut his tax bill; and what advice he received about the viability of the scheme with a higher level of affordable housing. It is all there. If he has nothing to hide, he has nothing to fear. He can just publish it, and I urge him to do that.

Kevin Hollinrake: I think the hon. Gentleman is unintentionally risking the reputation of this House. Does he not accept the position that I stated earlier? It is not a question of saving the developer up to £50 million. As the inspector himself admitted, it is simply that a commensurate amount of money would have been reduced from the allocation of affordable housing. That is what would have happened. It was not going into the back pocket of the developer. The hon. Gentleman must accept that, or he risks the reputation of this House.

Steve Reed: The hon. Gentleman gives me the opportunity to repeat the same point: let us see the documentation from the Department and the advice that was given to the Secretary of State—openly, transparently, for everybody

[Steve Reed]

to see—and then we will know exactly whether what happened was in breach of the ministerial code of conduct and the planning code.

Instead of being open and transparent, the Secretary of State has gone to great lengths to keep the documentation secret. Tower Hamlets Council took out a judicial review of his decision and was rewarded with a high-handed and arrogant letter from the Department accusing it of going on a fishing expedition, until someone realised that a judicial review would require the Secretary of State to release all the documentation and correspondence about the decision in open court for everyone to see. He then took an extraordinary step. Suddenly that “fishing expedition” did not look quite so speculative, because he quashed his own decision and declared it to be unlawful because of apparent bias. That is explosive. A leading planning barrister says that it is without precedent and raises questions about the integrity of the entire planning system. That prompts the question of what in the documentation is so embarrassing and so bad that it is better to admit taking a biased and unlawful decision than to publish the documents in open court.

There is only one way to clear this up. Let us see the documents. Let us see that there was no breach of ministerial code. If the Secretary of State continues to refuse, let us have a full investigation by the Cabinet Secretary. Without it, there can be no trust in the Secretary of State or the planning system over which he presides. Without that trust, who on earth will believe that the Secretary of State has the credibility to take the numerous decisions that he makes every day, let alone reform the entire planning system, as he has said he wants to do?

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that we do not need a detailed chronology or to go over the books with a fine-toothed comb to realise that this is redolent of the stench of sleaze? It brought down the Major Government. The suggestion of unfair advantage to donors or supporters is sleaze writ large. The wheels are coming off this oven-ready Government.

Steve Reed: I very much hope that the Secretary of State will agree to publish the documentation, because if he is right, it will lay to rest the concerns that my hon. Friend has shared.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, in my experience, every letter that emanates from the Department goes with the consent of officials? Ministers cannot write in a personal capacity. My experience of those officials is that they are expert and meticulous. It is important to reflect that in the debate. Does he also accept that when an application is called in for non-determination, there is, for obvious reasons, pressure to move quickly to determine it? Does he accept that point at least?

Steve Reed: I respect the right hon. Gentleman's experience in those matters, and of course there may well have been a need to move at speed. It is not so much the speed I am concerned about as what happened during that timeframe.

Westferry is not the only example of that kind of behaviour by the Secretary of State. Similar allegations were reported yesterday in *The Times* about a case in Surrey. There are fresh allegations just today that when Westminster City Council's planning officers twice recommended refusal of the Secretary of State's plans to refurbish his London home, Conservative councillors called it in and overruled their own officials for him, but, to my knowledge, nothing about that relationship was disclosed in any register of interests.

Westferry is not a one-off. It is part of a pattern of behaviour, and the questions do not stop with the Secretary of State. They reach right into No. 10 Downing Street to the Prime Minister. In his final days as Mayor of London, the Prime Minister pushed through an earlier version of the same development. He was photographed at numerous convivial meetings with Mr Desmond, but No. 10 has refused to answer perfectly legitimate questions about whether and how often the Prime Minister has met Mr Desmond since he took office and whether they discussed the scheme. We need to know.

Will the Secretary of State tell us whether any other Ministers or their officials contacted him about the scheme before he took his unlawful decision? Did he disclose those contacts to his officials as he is required to do? Honesty is the best disinfectant for the very bad smell that hangs around this decision. Today, the credibility of the planning system and of this Secretary of State hangs in the balance. We cannot allow the planning system to be auctioned off at Conservative party fundraising dinners. There cannot be one rule for the Conservatives and their billionaire donors, and another rule for everyone else. So I say to the Secretary of State: it is time to come clean. Publish the documents. Let us see what he was really up to and let us see if we are staring into a new era of Tory sleaze.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before we continue this debate any further, let me say that hon. Members should be very careful about accusations made in this House. I am not suggesting that anything has been said that should not have been said—I would have stopped anyone saying anything that is not suitable for saying. I am just issuing a warning.

1.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): I welcome the opportunity to address the House today on this matter. I will write to the Chair of the Select Committee on Housing, Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts)—

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will give way in a moment to the hon. Gentleman, but he could let me even begin my remarks, if he is truly interested in what I have to say. I will write to the Chair of the Select Committee outlining the timeline of events and the rationale for my decision making pertaining to the Westferry Printworks planning decision. Alongside this letter, and after a comprehensive review of what documents might be in scope of this motion and of the letter he sent me on behalf of his Select Committee, I will be releasing, later today, all

relevant information relating to this planning matter, using the Freedom of Information Act as a benchmark. I recognise that there are higher standards of transparency expected in the quasi-judicial planning process, which is why I will also release discussions and correspondence that the Government would not normally release.

These documents show that, contrary to the wild accusations and baseless innuendo propagated by the hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) and restated today in a series of totally inaccurate statements and comments, this decision was taken with an open mind, on the merits of the case, after a thorough decision-making process. It was rooted in my long-standing and well documented view that we have a generational challenge as a country, which we need to meet and not shirk, to build more houses in all parts of this country and that whoever holds this office, whether it is me, another Member from my party or the hon. Gentleman, must make those tough decisions in order to build the homes that this country needs and to build a better future for the next generation.

Mr Perkins: The Secretary of State says that he is pleased to have this debate and started his speech by saying that he is going to release all of these documents. Why is he doing that today? He is releasing them because he has been forced to come here by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North. If the Secretary of State wanted some transparency, instead of having to have this dragged out of him, he would have done this weeks ago.

Robert Jenrick: The hon Gentleman is completely incorrect in that respect. First, a lot of documents are already in the public domain, and I will come on to discuss that. The reasons for my decision are set out clearly in the decision letter. From the comments that we have heard from the hon. Member for Croydon North, I suspect he has not taken the trouble to read it. The inspector's report is already in the public domain, with the representations made by the parties. Since my receipt of the letter from the Chair of the Select Committee, we have undertaken the process I have just described, which, as Members can imagine, is not one that one does in a day or two. It has taken us time. As Members will see when I publish the documents later today, and in the letter I have written to the Chair of the Select Committee, we have taken that process very seriously, because transparency matters, openness matters and settling this matter matters, because I certainly do not want to be the subject of the innuendo and false accusations that the Opposition are choosing to peddle.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for committing to publish that document and send it to the Select Committee, although it might have been helpful if we had had it before the debate today. The Committee will obviously want to look at it and may then want to enter into further communication or, indeed, even talk to the Secretary of State about it. I ask him one thing: will the documentation that he sends to the Select Committee include everything that he said to the Cabinet Secretary following his investigations into the matter?

Robert Jenrick: It will include most of that information, subject only to the benchmark of the Freedom of Information Act, which I have just described. I think

that is the right approach, and it is on the advice of my Department that I do that. If this debate truly is—I suspect it is not, because I suspect this debate is mainly motivated by party political considerations—concerned with the probity of the planning system, I am sure that the Chair of the Select Committee, for whom I have the greatest respect, would agree that it is absolutely right that we release documentation in accordance with the rules, bearing in mind that this is a live planning matter.

Nick Smith *rose*—

Robert Jenrick: I will come back to the hon. Gentleman, but first let me make some progress.

For the benefit of the House, I take this opportunity to outline the facts of the case. As Members will be aware, the Secretary of State's role in deciding called-in planning applications and recovered appeals is very long established. The vast majority of planning decisions are rightly determined at a local level by local planning authorities. However, Parliament has created provision whereby a small proportion of cases are determined by Ministers. The cases that fall to Ministers are by their nature highly contentious, frequently very complex and sometimes very subjective. There is no escaping that reality. It is not unusual for Ministers to come to a different conclusion from that of a local authority. Nor is it unusual, as has been said, for Ministers to disagree with the recommendations of planning inspectors, and I say that with no disrespect to the brilliant men and women who work in the Planning Inspectorate. My predecessors from both sides of the House have done so on multiple occasions.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will in just a moment, but I want to make a bit more progress, because it is important to set out the facts. In the past three years, 14 substantive decisions have been made by Ministers in disagreement with the recommendations of the inspector. Such applications cannot be easily compared and each case must be determined on its own merits, and that is what I have done in all cases since becoming Secretary of State, as the documents that I intend to publish will, I hope, demonstrate.

Nick Smith: Did the Secretary of State view the promotional video at the Conservative party fundraiser, and did he tell his officials in his Department the next day?

Robert Jenrick: I will come on to a description of those events in a moment, if I may, and answer the hon. Gentleman's question at that point.

Wera Hobhouse: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will just make some more progress, then I will come back to the hon. Lady.

In July 2018, Westferry Developments submitted a planning application for a large development comprising 1,500 homes, including affordable homes, shops and office space. The case was with Tower Hamlets Council for eight months, and over that period, despite having

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five determination meetings arranged, it failed to make a decision. It is disappointing that the council failed to meet its statutory requirements, but it is not surprising. In the past five years, 30 planning applications have been decided at appeal because of non-determination by the council.

The council had considerable time to process the application. Indeed, a meeting of the strategic development committee was cancelled in January 2019 due to lack of business. Is it fair to say that there is a lack of business when we are in a housing crisis and the council has applications such as this before it? Does the Labour party believe that is fair? In our system of law, justice delayed is justice denied, and that is what Tower Hamlets Council was trying to do here.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will in a moment.

This, I remind the House, is the council that has the highest housing deficit in England, according to the housing delivery test. Given Tower Hamlets' failure to determine the case within the prescribed period, on 26 March, the developer exercised their right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate and, after advice, my predecessor—not me, as has been said on many occasions by many individuals, including the hon. Member for Croydon North—took the decision to recover the appeal. All the parties were notified about this in a letter dated 10 April 2019.

So before I give way to hon. Members, let us be clear. I did not call in this application; I was not the Secretary of State. The application was not called in; it came to the Department because of the failure of Tower Hamlets Council. Here we have a council, described by one of my predecessors as a “rotten borough”, failing time and again to make decisions and get houses built and a Mayor of London with a dire record on housing leaving us to step in and take the tough decisions that they refuse to make.

Wes Streeting: I wondered how long it would be before we got on to the deflections on to Tower Hamlets Council and the Mayor of London, but it is a fact, is it not, that the leader of the Conservative group on the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Councillor Andrew Wood, resigned from the Conservative party, not citing the Mayor of London or Labour Tower Hamlets Council, but citing the actions of the Conservative party and this decision, which he described as

“so shocking I knew immediately that I had to resign.”

Is that not a fact?

Robert Jenrick: It is not a deflection to talk about Tower Hamlets Council because in all likelihood this decision would never have been made by the Secretary of State if Tower Hamlets Council had met its statutory obligations and taken the decision. With respect to the councillor the hon. Gentleman mentions, who I do not know but with whom I have no issue, he was standing up for the concerns of his local residents. I return to the point that I made earlier that in my job it is essential to make—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Stop shouting at the Minister. It is not how we do things here.

Robert Jenrick: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Rushanara Ali *rose*—

Robert Jenrick: I will give way to the hon. Lady, as she is one of the Tower Hamlets Members of Parliament, and then I will make some progress, if I may.

Rushanara Ali: What is rotten at the heart of this scandal is the Secretary of State's behaviour. It is wrong for him to attack Tower Hamlets Council, which was negotiating a better deal for residents and trying to get more social housing. He should get his facts straight before he starts deflecting blame on to a council that has built houses under the last Conservative mayoralty, as well as the current mayoralty. He should sort out the rottenness at the heart of his Department and his Government.

Robert Jenrick: There is nothing rotten in my Department. I have some of the best officials in Whitehall, with whom I am extremely proud to work. The hon. Lady cannot have it both ways. If she disagrees with my decision, she should go back to Tower Hamlets Council and tell it to start making decisions itself, not frustrating planning applications so that they come to me and I and my predecessors and successors have to make the tough decisions.

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will give way to the hon. Lady, and then I must make progress.

Apsana Begum: Given that the Prime Minister pushed through the original scheme for the same developer when he was Mayor of London, does the Secretary of State feel that the documents on any involvement of No. 10, or any conversation about the Secretary of State's decision to grant approval should also be published?

Robert Jenrick: I am publishing, as I have just said, in an almost unprecedented way, a very comprehensive set of documents, which I think Members on both sides of the House will be more than satisfied with.

I would just politely note to the hon. Lady that her name did come up in the correspondence and advice that I received from officials; the names of MPs do come up when I take these decisions. I asked my officials, “Did the local Member of Parliament make any representations with respect to this application because I want to take into account the views of Members on all sides of this House?” As she will see in the documents, they advised me that the Member of Parliament made no representations. The Member of Parliament—in their words, I think, but I stand to be corrected—took no interest in the application, and neither did her predecessor, so she may be outraged today, but I suggest that Members on both sides of the House who care about contentious planning applications should make representations to the Secretary of State, because I am not a mind reader.

Wera Hobhouse: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: Let me just make some progress, if I may.

It is on public record that in November 2019, during the general election campaign, I was invited to a Conservative party event. This is not unusual for a Government Minister. I was seated next to Mr Desmond at the Conservative dinner, although, as I have said, I did not know the seating plan prior to arrival. I was not familiar with the majority of the table, but I understand that it included the editor of the *Daily Mirror*, the editor of the *Express* newspaper, executives from Northern & Shell and a former Conservative Member of Parliament. I had not planned to have any contact with Mr Desmond prior to the event. That was the first time I had ever met him.

Wera Hobhouse: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: No.

He raised the development and invited me on a site visit. I informed him that it would not be appropriate to discuss the matter, and the conversation moved on to other topics. After the event, we exchanged messages. Again, as the record will show, I advised him that I was unable to discuss the application or to pass comment. I informed my officials of my contact with Mr Desmond, and I will publish these messages for transparency. On advice from my officials, I declined the site visit. All decision makers in the planning process receive unsolicited representations from time to time. It would be perverse if any decision maker was barred from taking a decision because of unsolicited representations. Indeed, section 25 of the Localism Act 2011 clarified the law to protect against the overzealous application of the planning rules.

Wera Hobhouse: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: Not at this time.

Housing Secretaries of all parties naturally come into contact with those involved in housing, by which I do not simply mean developers; I mean councils, housing associations, builders and contractors. The key point is that the final decision is always made with an open mind based on the material considerations of the case.

Wera Hobhouse: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will give way to the hon. Lady because she had been trying very hard.

Wera Hobhouse: I was a member of a local planning committee. There are strict rules and a code of conduct for councillors to declare either a private or a prejudicial interest, at which point they go out of the room and take no further part in the decision. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that a Secretary of State should live under different rules from local councillors?

Robert Jenrick: Of course not. It is extremely important that we maintain the probity of the planning system, and that is what I believe I have done in this case. The hon. Lady can be a judge of that, if she wishes, when she sees the documents.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP) *rose*—

Robert Jenrick: If I may, I will make some progress. I am conscious that a lot of time is passing.

In the same month, the planning inspector submitted his report to me recommending that the appeal be dismissed. As is usual, my officials reviewed the inspector's report and prepared advice for me to consider. I reviewed this, along with advice on six other urgent planning cases, upon my return to the Department in December following the general election.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: Not at this time. I need to make some progress.

Upon reviewing the advice on Westferry, including the inspector's recommendation, I requested further advice on key questions—for example, asking the Department to source images to understand the potential impact of the scheme on historic Greenwich. Having reviewed all the evidence and taken a further in-depth meeting with senior officials to discuss the case in the first week in January, I determined to allow the appeal and grant planning permission. As I have set out in the letter to the Select Committee Chair, in coming to the decision I considered the significant contribution of housing in a part of the country that is particularly unaffordable, including almost 300 affordable homes, as well as the significant economic benefits from the development, including the hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs that it would have created. The House should remember that we are talking about a large brownfield site in a part of London that already has a high number of tall buildings, so in many respects it is exactly the kind of location where we should be building homes if we are serious about tackling London's housing needs.

On 14 January, my full rationale was published in the usual way, through the decision letter, with the full inspector's report. In this case, Tower Hamlets and the Mayor of London challenged the decision in court, as happens in many cases. The irony, of course, is that, as we have already discussed, they could have made the decision themselves but chose not to do so.

On 21 May 2020, my Department proposed that the decision be quashed and redetermined by another Minister in the usual way. The other parties to the matter—Tower Hamlets Council, the Mayor of London and the developer—agreed and the court duly consented. My rationale was that although there was no actual bias whatsoever in the decision making for the application, inferences, even of the appearance of bias, could harm the integrity of the planning system. I did not want that to happen.

Nick Smith: Will the Secretary of State give way??

Robert Jenrick: I will give way one more time, but let me make this point first.

I cannot say at this point which Minister will take this matter forward. We will ensure that it is someone who has no previous connection to the case or its parties, as we do in other instances. I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Croydon North to the fact that there are several planning Ministers in my Department, and

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although all actions go out in the name of the Secretary of State, by no means does the Secretary of State take all the decisions in the Department. For example, in the Sandown Park racecourse case to which he referred earlier, the decision was taken by another planning Minister and was one about which I knew none of the facts until it was incorrectly reported by *The Times* newspaper and propagated once again by the hon. Gentleman.

Sarah Jones: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: No; I wish to make this point, because it is important. The hon. Member for Croydon North also propagated another inaccurate story that is more serious and disappointing, and that is the one in respect of the application to build a new holocaust memorial for the United Kingdom in the grounds of this building. There has been a suggestion that in that case I used my powers as Secretary of State to call in the application. That is incorrect. The Secretary of State is the applicant for the holocaust memorial, and there is a clear Chinese wall whereby another Minister in the Department who has no interest in that application takes the ultimate decision. That is exactly what we did in that case, so I strongly urge Members from all parties, as well as the media who have reported on that issue, to tread carefully. We should not bring something as important as our national holocaust memorial into this party political discussion.

Tim Farron: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way; he is being very decent with his time.

The Secretary of State has made the case that he felt the need to intervene in this case to deliver housing. Does he understand my frustration and the frustration of many other Members present? In my part of the world, we have London house prices without anything like London wages. We regularly look to his Department to intervene to help to deliver affordable houses, yet his Department allows developers to get away with viability assessments that get rid of affordable housing. I wish he was also tough in cases when it comes to the Lake district and other parts of the country.

Robert Jenrick: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has asked to call in applications; he certainly has not come to see me about any applications during the past 12 months of my tenure, but I would happily meet him in the appropriate way if he wishes to do so. My record as Secretary of State is clear for all to see in the range of applications that I have considered and the difficult decisions that I have consistently made, which affect Members from all parties and their constituencies. If one does this job properly, one gets homes built. One does not necessarily make friends, and I make no apologies for that. Each decision must be made on its merits, but if we want to tackle the housing crisis, we need to build homes.

Nick Smith: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sarah Jones: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: Let me let me make some progress, because many other speakers wish to participate in this debate.

Any accusation that my view on a highly complex and publicised development could have been swayed by an encounter with a developer is not just simply wrong, but actually outrageous.

Who the applicant was is immaterial to my decision, as it always is, and always should be. I knew nothing of the donation that was made and would never have allowed it to influence my decision, even if I had known about it. However, I am not blind to the fact that things could and should have been done differently. On reflection, I should have handled the communication differently—*[Interruption.]* Let me make this point, please.

It is unfortunate that some have sought partisan advantage in this, rather than having a serious discussion about Britain's housing shortage. I stand by the decision that I made.

I believe passionately that Britain needs to build houses and that is what we are doing. Indeed, the Government's track record on housing delivery stands in stark contrast to that of the Opposition. Last year, we delivered 240,000 homes, more new homes than at any point in the past 30 years, taking the total delivered since 2010 to 1.5 million. By comparison, under Labour, house building fell to levels not seen since the 1920s, with the number of first-time buyers down by 50% and the number of socially rented homes down by 420,000.

Nick Smith: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sarah Jones: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I have given way many times. I cannot be accused of not giving way—I have done it enough times. I need to make progress and I want to ensure others have their say.

The only thing that went up under Labour was social housing waiting lists, so I will not take lessons from Labour on housing, particularly on affordable housing. This development was going to build 282 affordable homes. That is actually more affordable homes than the Labour Welsh Government has built as council houses in the whole of Wales in five years. Last year in Wales the Labour party only built 57 council houses—

Sarah Jones: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I am not giving way to the hon. Lady. I think I have made that perfectly—

Sarah Jones *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Lady must sit down. She cannot be standing up in the Chamber. If the Secretary of State wants to give way, he will give way, and she must not heckle.

Robert Jenrick: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not think they actually want to hear an explanation.

We only have to look to London, which faces some of the most acute housing pressures in the whole country, to see examples of what a lack of leadership and ambition means on the ground. Under the current Mayor of London, housing delivery has averaged just 37,000 a year, falling short of the existing London plan and well below the Mayor's own assessment of housing need. The average price of a new build home in London

has gone up by 12 times average earnings. The need for bold action was clear earlier this year, when I was left with no option but to directly intervene in the Mayor's London plan. I do not apologise for doing that, for continuing to push for homes to be built in our capital city, as across the country, to meet our ambition as a Government to build 300,000 homes a year and to give young people, families and the most vulnerable people in our society the opportunity and security that previous generations enjoyed.

In that endeavour, it is right that we seek to make the most of existing sites, particularly in urban areas, with jobs, transport links and other amenities close by—brownfield sites such as the one we are discussing today. That is why we as a Government and I as Secretary of State have consistently taken pro-regeneration decisions, in order to turn those sites into homes and into employment opportunities. This development would have done that, but every time a do-nothing Labour council and a do-nothing Labour Mayor plays politics with homes and jobs it is ultimately people who miss out. They miss out on homes and they miss out on jobs. That matters, because as we come out of covid and we are trying to recover our economy, we should be thinking about the brickies and the plumbers, the van drivers, the labourers—the people whose jobs and livelihoods depend on these projects. We will get building. We will build ourselves out of this crisis and create the jobs that we need in this country.

I hope that the publication of these documents and my remarks today will go some way to putting an end to the innuendos and false accusations from the hon. Member for Croydon North. He might just address the big issues, upon which he has been conspicuously silent since taking office. His predecessor, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), used to raise rough sleeping, how we were responding to covid, and pressures on local council finances. He used to be constructive. He also used to probe and hold the Government to account. I cannot say the same for the hon. Member for Croydon North. He lives on his Twitter account, and he lives for smears and innuendos, not substance. He might speak to substance, not just party politics.

Wes Streeting: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Robert Jenrick: I will not; I am closing now.

This Government are determined to build the homes the country needs. We are determined to end rough sleeping, as the House will see today from the announcement of more than £100 million of funding to help local councils to provide better quality accommodation for the 15,000 rough sleepers that we have helped off the streets and protected from covid as a result of the pandemic. We will continue to help renters by reforming their rights and ensuring that they weather the economic storms to come as a result of the pandemic. We will promote beautiful, well-designed new communities, working with the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission to radically change the way in which we consider our planning system.

We will speed up and reform the planning system to get those homes built, to ensure that infrastructure is laid at pace and that developers, housing associations, councils and everyone who cares about the future of this country and the homes that people deserve to live

in can move forward with confidence and certainty. And we will invest in more affordable homes through the largest affordable homes programme this country has seen in a decade, building hundreds of thousands of new homes of all types and tenures in all parts of the country, so that families in Tower Hamlets, in London and elsewhere in this country can live with dignity and security and pursue their dreams and the opportunity, which many of us in the House enjoy, to have a high-quality home of their own. That is what the British people expect, and that is what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I intend to deliver.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I call the spokesman for the SNP, I should tell the House that we will have to have a time limit of four minutes on Back-Bench speeches, because, as is obvious in the Chamber, a great many people wish to speak and it might not be possible to fit in everyone who is on the speaking list. The time limit of course does not apply to Mr David Linden.

2.13 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not intend to speak for more than about five or six minutes, if that is of help to the House.

The seriousness of these allegations merits a high-profile and far-reaching investigation, so I thank the Opposition for tabling this motion on the Westferry scandal. In contrast, the Government appear to just hope that it will simply disappear. I am still not entirely clear from what the Secretary of State said whether the Government will oppose the motion in the Division Lobby tonight. The motion before us certainly has the full support of the SNP, and we will vote in favour of it if the Government are daft enough to push it to a Division, which I must suggest to them would not look good.

I must confess that I do not like the all-too-frequent fixture in our politics of calling for ministerial resignations left, right and centre. However, in this case the conduct of the Secretary of State is seriously called into question when he himself has acknowledged that this decision was made unlawfully. In any other circumstance, this would already be difficult territory for the Secretary of State to try to wriggle off the hook, but the fact that this £1 billion housing development is linked to a Tory donor means it stinks—and it stinks, frankly, to high heavens.

Put simply, this is a classic Tory sleaze scandal that involves money and the Conservatives scratching one another's backs. For a minute, let us put to one side the fact that the development's owner is Richard Desmond, a multimillionaire and former owner of the *Daily Express*, and look solely at the fact that the development was originally denied by the Planning Inspectorate for failing to deliver enough affordable housing. That should not be overlooked, because the Government's record on building affordable housing, let alone social housing, is absolutely woeful. We respect the fact that the impartial Planning Inspectorate rejected the application on reasonable grounds. Most of us can follow the logic on that.

Here is the nub of the matter, and why the Secretary of State's position is so weak. The decision of the impartial Planning Inspectorate was overruled by the Secretary of State on 14 January, less than 24 hours

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before the introduction of a community infrastructure levy that would have cost the developer £40 million. Soon after the decision to approve the project was made, Richard Desmond makes a new £12,000 donation to the Conservative party. In the eyes of the public, the Secretary of State steps in and saves the developer £40 million in the community infrastructure levy, and then miraculously, the developer later makes a donation to the Conservative party. Surely no self-respecting Member of the House, not even the keenest December-intake Member, cannot see that that absolutely stinks.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Linden: I am very happy to, if the hon. Gentleman wants to defend this one.

Kevin Hollinrake: I do not think any self-respecting Member of this House should twist an argument like that. It did not save the developer £40 million. That money would have been taken directly off the allocation for affordable homes. Has the hon. Gentleman read the document? Has he read the inspector's report? That is exactly what it says.

David Linden: I have, but part of the issue is that so few documents are in circulation. That is the whole point of the motion before the House and that is what we are calling for. If the hon. Gentleman wants people to read documents, he will be in the Lobby with us to make sure that those documents are published.

To make matters worse, we have also learned that Mr Desmond, who is, let us not forget, a property developer, and the Secretary of State, who has a quasi-judicial role in the planning process, were sat together at a Tory fundraiser in November. This is the point that I was trying to intervene on the Secretary of State about earlier, because he glossed over that.

"What I did was I showed him the video".

They are not my words but the words of Richard Desmond, who says that the Secretary of State watched a promotional video for the development of Westferry for three or four minutes and:

"It's quite long, so he got the gist."

In the course of the Secretary of State's remarks, hon. Members were trying to intervene to ask whether he had watched the video, but I do not think that he was clear. I am happy to give way to him now if he wants to come to the Dispatch Box and put it on record that he did watch the video.

Robert Jenrick: As I have said repeatedly, I confirm that I was seated next to Mr Desmond. I did not expect to be seated beside him. He raised the application, as I said the last time that I came to the House on this matter. He said that he showed me part of the video and I do not recall exactly what happened, but he did bring out his iPhone and show me some images of the development. I was very clear the last time I came to the House that I informed the developer that it was not appropriate to discuss the matter and I could not comment on it, and I believe that Mr Desmond has confirmed that.

David Linden: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the intervention. On that point, I give way to the shadow Secretary of State.

Steve Reed: I want to share a direct quote from Richard Desmond given to *The Sunday Times* about the video. These are his words: "What I did was I showed him the video because we've got a video of the site. He got the gist. He thanked me".

David Linden: This is the very point. The shadow Secretary of State has hit the nail on the head, because that was wrong. The Secretary of State should have run for the hills, never touched the issue ever again and flagged the conflict of interest to his departmental officials.

Wes Streeting: I wanted to put this question to the Secretary of State, who said he did not know that he would be seated next to Mr Desmond. He said that at the Dispatch Box and I will take him at his word. Are we seriously meant to believe, however, that Mr Desmond did not know that he was going to be sat next to the Secretary of State? Having talked to people I know who worked in professional fundraising and political fundraising, the question of cash for access is crucial. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Conservative party should publish all correspondence with Mr Desmond and his associates about the booking of the table at the dinner, and Mr Desmond's expectations as to whether he knew that he would be sat with the Secretary of State?

David Linden: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Many of us, for very understandable reasons because of what is in "Erskine May" and the Standing Orders of this House, are trying very hard to stick to the rules in here, but the reality is that members of the public watching this debate on TV or reading it in *Hansard* will find it rather strange that a Conservative party fundraiser was organised and that the Secretary of State, who has a quasi-judicial role in the planning process, happened to be sat next to Mr Desmond.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the point I made earlier? For a local councillor on a planning committee, all red lights would have gone on to say, "This looks bad. I cannot take part in a decision when I have sat next to somebody who is putting in a very big planning application."

David Linden: The hon. Lady is right. She refers to her experience in local government. It is clear that anybody in this House who has served as a councillor—I have not—would realise that this is something from which they must absolutely run for the hills and at least flag it to their departmental officials—and, presumably, their political advisers too.

At that stage, without any shadow of a doubt, the Secretary of State's position was compromised, but he ploughed on regardless. It was, I am afraid, a clear political decision that has directly enriched a Tory party donor and is worryingly close to being a textbook example of cash for favours.

The Conservative party, however, does not appear to care. Let's face it: why should we hold our breath? This, after all, is the party reportedly nominating Peter Cruddas,

a man who resigned from the Conservatives as co-treasurer in 2012 following a cash-for-access scandal, for a peerage. The Conservatives do not seem to see anything problematic about rewarding someone who donated £50,000 to the Prime Minister's leadership campaign and £3 million to the Tory party since 2007. Why on earth, then, would we expect them to hold the Housing Secretary to higher standards? I think, however, that Opposition Members will.

Transparency is now imperative. It is important that the papers called for in today's motion are released without delay and without obstruction. I am afraid I do not buy the point made by the Secretary of State that some papers would be published. If the Government want to publish the papers, they will not oppose the motion at four o'clock this afternoon. Anybody who hears Conservative Members yelling "No" tonight will find that there is something seriously to be hidden on their part and I do not think that that is a good look. If the documents released do reveal a direct link between the decision that the Secretary of State made and Mr Desmond's donation to the Conservatives, then the Secretary of State must demit office.

The Government need to accept that this scandal is not going to go away. We can all quite clearly see, without the need to take a day trip to Barnard Castle, that this episode further damages the credibility of a Government who are losing trust faster than Dominic Cummings can run out of Downing Street to escape for his Durham bolthole. A little over a decade ago, David Cameron said, "We're all in this together". Except we're not, are we? Whether it is rewarding party donors with life peerages, a different set of rules for the Prime Minister's special adviser or the Westferry Printworks scandal, time and again the Tories are proving that it is one rule for them and one rule for everybody else.

2.23 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Let me start by drawing the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

My purpose in speaking in this debate is because, like the Secretary of State, I share the view that the important thing here is the integrity of the planning system, and that context is all important for any planning application, since an application is decided on the basis of its own merits. I want to start by looking at the behaviour of Tower Hamlets Council.

In 2016, the original application was referred to the Mayor's office because Tower Hamlets Council had not determined it within the time set out. In 2018, the revised scheme was referred on that same grounds—that Tower Hamlets had not determined the application in time. We can all have sympathy with councils when they are faced with massive and complex developments. In this case, however, we are told that having been forced, somewhat late in the day, to make a decision, it decided it would have refused it. Why could it not have done so earlier? That does not show the planning system in a good light and it does not show Tower Hamlets in a good light either.

Tom Randall: Will my hon. Friend give way?

John Howell: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will not give way.

We are all aware of councils who seek to hold up an application by delaying the hearing, but here the reasons given for dismissing the application by the inspector were not complicated: the impact on heritage sites, the unacceptable level of affordable housing and conflict with existing policies.

The next element in this debate is the intervention of the Secretary of State. He has the powers to make a decision and I do not think anyone has questioned that. In this case, he decided to do so largely, as he has explained, on the basis of the housing benefits that come from the scheme. This means setting aside the character and appearance of the area. We can disagree with the Secretary of State over this, but it is his job to make these decisions in a system that is all about achieving a balanced opinion.

The timing of the decision immediately before a community infrastructure levy regulation came into force has created another issue. The Secretary of State has agreed that his decision should be quashed and he has agreed to release the papers. The new inquiry and a decision by a planning Minister will be brought forward. This is because the perception of bias was there, not because any bias actually took place. The trade press got it right. It said:

"Following an agreement between all parties"—
that included

"the secretary of state, the developer, the GLA and Tower Hamlets"—
they have agreed to quash the decision. Therefore we see nothing but the preservation of the integrity of the planning system in this debate. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has already been quoted as saying that it rejects the accusation that there was any actual bias.

I will raise two other points. On affordable housing, if we have a rigid system of quotas for affordable housing, we get less affordable housing, and if regeneration is stalled, no one gets any affordable housing. Why was no appeal made the second time to the Mayor of London? It was because of the London plan. The previous Secretary of State threatened to take the London plan to an inquiry because it did not comply with the national planning policy. The Mayor cannot stand outside the national planning policy framework. It is part of the planning system of this country that applies to him as much as to anyone else.

2.27 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State is obviously going to respond to the letter I sent to him from the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee. We may well come back to some of the issues, depending on what he says to the Committee in that regard. I said previously in the House that these matters are dealt with best when we have the facts in front of us, rather than supposition and conjecture, because that leads us into very difficult territory. I have also said that I am not accusing the Secretary of State or anybody of wrongdoing. I want to see the facts and look at the situation, along with the Committee, and then come back to any further questions we may have.

In the absence of the documentation—even if it has been sent to the Committee by now, I have not had a chance to read it before the debate—I say to the Secretary

[Mr Clive Betts]

of State that there will probably be some questions about the precise nature of conversations at the dinner. Whether someone sees a video or not, I would have thought, would have been fairly well stuck in the Secretary of State's mind. However, when he had been to the dinner, did he immediately inform his officials that he had been present at the dinner, that he had sat next to Mr Desmond, that the matter of the application had been raised with him and that he had refused to discuss it? If so, when was that confirmed with officials? Did he put that in writing to officials, and, if so, did they then advise him whether it was appropriate for him to carry on considering the application and making a judgment about it? If so, was that put in writing to him? If officials had reservations, was that put in writing to him as well?

Did officials and the Secretary of State at any point, therefore, consider whether in the light of the conversations at the dinner and a pretty well documented and considered attempt by the applicant to influence the Secretary of State at the dinner, it might have been appropriate for him to withdraw from the decision made at that time? When the case was going to court and the Secretary of State decided to withdraw his decision, because of the appearance of bias with regard to the financial liability on the developer that would be removed, was any part of his decision to withdraw also based on the possibility of an appearance of bias in relation to the events at the dinner that he or officials concluded might be an issue that came up in court at the time?

In planning, perception can be just as important as the facts. Even if the Secretary of State refused to discuss the matter at the dinner—I completely accept his word on that—should not the fact that the developer with an interest had sat next to him at the dinner and raised the matter with him have alerted him to the possibility of an appearance of bias and of accusations following if he made the decision in favour of the developer? Again, appearances are really important.

Kevin Hollinrake: It was a pleasure to serve for four years on the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee under the hon. Gentleman's chairmanship. When he was interviewed recently by the BBC—it might have been Sky—did he not say that there was no information that the Secretary of State was guilty of any wrongdoing? Will he confirm that that was his position then, and is his position now?

Mr Betts: We talked about that yesterday. Yes, of course I said there was no evidence. I have not seen any evidence, and I repeated just now that I am not accusing anyone of wrongdoing. What I am saying is that perception and appearances in these matters are almost as important as the facts themselves.

Although the Secretary of State recognises that an informed and fair-minded person might come to the view that there was bias on his part in terms of the liability to the developer that was removed by his decision, did he at any point consider that an informed and fair-minded person might conclude that the events of the dinner could also lead to bias on his part? That seems crucial. If that is the case, when he reflects on the matter now, does he think that he might have done

better had he decided not to take part in the decision-making process, once the developer had, quite wrongly—I repeat, the developer had, quite wrongly—tried to influence him at the dinner?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am now delighted to call, to make his maiden speech, Mr Mark Eastwood.

2.32 pm

Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con): It is an immense honour to be elected as the Member of Parliament for Dewsbury, Mirfield, Kirkburton and Denby Dale. I thank my brilliant campaign team and my wife and children for sticking with me after losing six elections, to finally see me delivered as a Member of Parliament. A local newspaper once dubbed me “the perennial loser”, much to the amusement of my campaign team, my friends and my family. It is a huge relief for me, and hopefully for them, to have lost that tag at last.

Before I talk about my remarkable constituency, I want to mention the most wonderful person in my life: my mother. At the age of three, I was abandoned by my father, forcing my mother to move with me to a council estate in Thornhill Lees in Dewsbury, and then the Wilton estate in Batley. At first, it was a real struggle for my mother to raise a child as a lone parent while working shifts at Batley hospital and eventually at the newly opened Dewsbury hospital. There are significant challenges facing any single mother when raising a child, let alone one as difficult as me. Despite the heavy burdens, my mother forged a career, going on to become senior sister at the Dewsbury casualty department.

My mother made monumental sacrifices to provide for me and to see that I wanted for nothing. As she rose through the nursing profession, we began to enjoy some of the good things in life. I was even fortunate enough to go on caravan holidays and day trips to fantastic places like Scarborough and Skegness, leaving me with fond, albeit slightly scarring, memories of being ill after staying in the sun too long and overindulging in candy floss—although you can never have too much candy floss. Witnessing the dedication, hard work and sacrifice of my mother has ensured that I take nothing for granted. She showed me the value of hard work and compassion, which she put into action every day on the hospital ward.

She showed me the value of hard work and compassion, which she put into action every single day on the hospital wards. My mother instilled in me the values that I have now and which I am putting into action as the Member of Parliament for Dewsbury, Mirfield, Kirkburton and Denby Dale. Ultimately, she demonstrated that even in the most difficult circumstances you can progress to where you want to be in this country. If it was not for my mother, I would not be here today. She is my hero.

If this were a normal maiden speech, made during normal times, I would be elaborating on my constituency's rich history and its landmarks, including the towering figure of the Emley Moor mast, which, by the way, is taller than the Shard and the Eiffel Tower and twice as tall as Blackpool Tower in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton). I would have been able to turn to him and say, “Mine is truly bigger than yours.”

However, these are not normal times. Coronavirus has meant that we have all had to adapt to a new way of doing things. I would have liked my mother to be here today, the rest of my family and my amazing team as well, but this inconvenience pales in comparison to the enormous sacrifices that all our constituents have been asked to make to keep the nation safe and the country ticking. It has been a truly heroic effort.

Growing up, I had a number of heroes who I looked up to. One of them was Leeds United centre back, Lucas Radebe. Lucas had a tough upbringing, growing up under the despicable Apartheid in South Africa, surrounded by violence and racism, but he battled against the odds to reach the top, inspiring young footballers to overcome the barriers in front of them. Lucas Radebe was, and still is, my hero.

After our experience with coronavirus, the definition of “hero” has grown. We have seen heroes emerge all over the country. Alongside our NHS and emergency staff, there are the people who have kept us fed, cared for us, operated our public transport and those who have ensured we can still access the goods and services we rely on. I would like to pay tribute to some of those heroes in my constituency, people who have made great sacrifices and gone above and beyond throughout this emergency. I think of groups such as Elim church, the Moonlight Trust, the Zakaria Education Centre, Darul-Ilm mosque, Shelley community association and many more who have been working tirelessly for the benefit of others.

Across my constituency, there have been countless individuals carrying out potentially unnoticed acts of kindness to help out their neighbours. These people are heroes. I have been proud to work alongside some of these wonderful volunteers and community groups who continue to help the vulnerable through this difficult time. There are those I have not yet had the privilege of working alongside, but I am immensely grateful and thankful for all they have done.

I also pay tribute to my predecessor, Paula Sherriff, who worked hard for her constituents and campaigned tirelessly on issues, including women’s right. I understand that Paula is now facing her own heroic battle, and I send her my best wishes at this difficult time.

On the topic of housing and planning, I have often been called a nimby, among other things—[*Laughter.*] We won’t go into that—but I think it is unfair. I simply believe that we ought to protect our landscapes and take advantage of the scores of brownfield sites waiting to have life brought back to them. I have a proud record of working to protect our countryside from inappropriate developments on green belt and farmland, working closely with groups across my constituency—groups such as my own, Chidswell action group, Cumberworth Road action group in Skelmanthorpe, Save Mirfield and Upper Dearne Valley Environmental Trust, among others. They do great work standing up for their communities and I look forward to working closely with them in the future.

I finish by thanking the people of Dewsbury, Mirfield, Kirkburton and Denby Dale for giving me this opportunity. I will not let them down.

2.39 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood) on his excellent maiden speech. He will understand when I

say I dearly wish he had not been here to deliver it; Paula was a great friend and colleague to so many of us on the Labour Benches, remains a great friend, and we hope will be a colleague again in the future. The hon. Gentleman made a wonderful and personal maiden speech which was enjoyed by Members on both sides of the House.

Turning to the matter at hand, let us begin with the facts. The Secretary of State has accepted that his decision to approve the Westferry Printworks plan was unlawful due to apparent bias. That in itself is a serious issue. The second fact is that the Secretary of State’s decision went against the advice of his own Department’s planning inspector, who had recommended permission be refused; that is a fact, and it is not in dispute. During the process, the developer reduced the percentage of affordable housing in the proposed development; again, that is a fact. The timing of the Secretary of State’s decision was such that it was made the day before a new community infrastructure charging schedule was introduced in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets; again, that is a fact.

It is also a fact, and not disputed, that the Secretary of State attended a Conservative party fundraising dinner where he was seated next to Richard Desmond, the developer behind the scheme. It seems that we are expected to believe that that was a coincidence. I find it hard to believe that the fundraising department of the Conservative party—which is far too successful in my opinion—is so unprofessional that table plans were not prepared in advance, that briefing was not prepared for attendees about who was on their table, and that factors such as the political sensibility of the guests and the Ministers they were dining with would not have been taken into account. As I have said, I perfectly accept the Secretary of State’s account that he did not know Mr Desmond would be at the table until he arrived. What I would like to know, though, is whether Mr Desmond knew he would be sitting with the Secretary of State; whether he was given any expectation that he would be seated there; and whether he made any request to be seated there. Furthermore, on the matter of the Secretary of State’s judgment, why, when he saw Mr Desmond there, did he not run a million miles?

The second thing we are expected to believe is that the Secretary of State could not discuss the development and did not discuss it. In fact, the Secretary of State is quoted as saying:

“I advised the applicant that I was not able to discuss it.”

It has since transpired, as the facts have been dragged out of the Secretary of State, that he was shown a promotional video, and that Mr Desmond’s account, as we have already heard from the shadow Secretary of State, is rather different:

“What I did was I showed him the video”,

Mr Desmond said. He had a video of the site. He said the Secretary of State “got the gist” and thanked him with no protestations. That was what was relayed to *The Sunday Times* by Mr Desmond.

We are also expected to believe that the Secretary of State is committed to transparency, which is why he is producing almost all the documents—doing so, conveniently, following this debate, so that we cannot scrutinise and debate and ask him further questions now.

[Wes Streeting]

We are also led to believe that this is all about the Mayor of London and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, when the fact is that the only resignation we have seen on this matter so far has been that of the leader of the Conservative group in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, who says that the police should be called in to investigate the judgments applied in this case. [Interruption.] I did not say the police should be called in; he did.

The reason why this issue is so serious is twofold. First, it is about the integrity of the planning system. Secondly, in December, for the first time in 32 years, the people of this country gave the Conservative party a significant majority and, looking at this, they will be concerned that straight away the Conservatives are back to their old tricks: one rule for them and one rule for someone else—scrap the Department for International Development and do not pay public sector workers fairly. On this particular issue, the question of cash for access and the influence of donations is a reminder of the Tory sleaze of the 1990s. I deeply hope we have not gone back to those days.

2.44 pm

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): They say that an Englishman's home is his castle, and the vision of owning one's own home inspires the dreams of many. My family came from a large council estate, where many took the opportunity to buy their own home from the local authority when the Conservative Governments of the day created that opportunity to get on the ladder. As I grew up, the ladder appeared to be moving out of reach and houses had become unaffordable under Labour.

Between 1997 and 2010, the ratio of median incomes to median house prices rose from 3.54 to 6.85. At the same time, house prices rose by 214% between 1997 and 2007, before Labour's great recession. Coupled with that, the number of first-time buyers fell by 61% between 1997 and 2009. In 1997, there were more than 500,000 first-time buyers, which fell to only 196,000 by 2009. That is scandalous. Under the Labour Administration, we also saw a drop of 420,000 in our social housing stock, which has only been reversed since 2010, with 79,000 more now. Why did that happen? The truth is that Labour simply did not build enough houses. The fact of the matter is that the Secretary of State should not even need to intervene, because local authorities have a responsibility to provide homes, and Tower Hamlets failed to make a decision on this application on six occasions. That is a neglect of its duties and responsibilities.

Tom Randall: My hon. Friend talks about Tower Hamlets, and is not what is missing from this debate knowledge? That borough is so rotten that commissioners were brought in by the Secretary of State's Department to run it for a period of time. If it is still not capable of taking decisions, perhaps it is time to bring back those commissioners to take over the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Brendan Clarke-Smith: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The attitude towards developers in Tower Hamlets could be summed up well using the term from a local football club that "No one likes us, we don't

care". Thankfully, this Government care. The Secretary of State says that we need to be building more homes and I agree. Yes, they must be the right sort of development in keeping with the area and of a reasonable size, but they need building and failure to do that is to fail all those people who need a home.

Today's approach is scandalous. It is a smokescreen to deflect from Labour's poor record and the public will not fall for it. This is a storm in a teacup. It is a matter of public record that Mr Desmond gave £100,000 to the Labour party in 2002 and, at the time, the Prime Minister said that there was no reason why Labour should not accept it. Mr Desmond has also had dinner with the Mayor of London and Members from the Opposition Benches.

The Secretary of State was absolutely correct in his assertion that, while fairness and due process were followed at all stages, it is important that there must be no perception of bias, and he was right to follow the ministerial code on this matter. This is a transparent and open Government who are not afraid to make decisions and to justify them. This development would provide 1,500 new homes and 282 affordable homes. It will also provide jobs at a time when our economy is looking to bounce back from the coronavirus.

This Government can be proud of their record on housing. Indeed, the Prime Minister built more affordable homes in two years as Mayor than the current Mayor managed in his whole first term. In Wales, just 12—yes, 12—council houses were built in the whole of 2019. That may be enough to house the entire Liberal Democrat group in this House, but it is woeful for the people of Wales. The hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) presided over the forced evictions of long-standing residents from housing co-operatives in Lambeth, but if we are not going to build any houses, where are these people going to live?

Last year, we built 241,000 homes, the highest level for 30 years. That is 1.5 million since 2010. The affordable homes programme has also delivered nearly half a million homes since 2010. I commend the Housing Minister for his recent work on this. This Government are really building for Britain and we stand by our record. If local authorities will not do their duty, then we will.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. As an hon. Member from the Opposition Benches has withdrawn from the debate, we will go straight to Simon Jupp.

2.48 pm

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate, but, alas, I fear the Opposition have misjudged the mood of this House and the country by using parliamentary time for their own political flare-up and indignation. Last December, the Labour party lost vast swathes of support across the country because it came across as completely disconnected from the people and communities that traditionally turned out en masse to support it. Far be it from me to offer political advice to the Opposition, but this debate's very existence demonstrates that that disconnection is terminal. The Labour party has completely forgone the opportunity to scrutinise the Government's economic plans to recover from coronavirus.

It is a pleasure to follow Opposition Members, but I fear that they all have a foggy memory and a worrying lack of understanding about the planning process. It is not unusual for Housing Secretaries to call in planning decisions, just as the last Labour Government regularly did, nor is it new or unusual to overrule the Planning Inspectorate on careful and balanced consideration. As for the decision under scrutiny today, the only reason why this issue required a ministerial decision at all was that Tower Hamlets Council repeatedly failed to make a determination in the first place, cancelling five meetings to ensure that they did not make a decision. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the planning system has robust protections and safeguards in place to ensure the rule of law and the absence of bias.

Mr Betts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Jupp: I am not going to give way.

Ministers involved in the planning process take advice from officials with full disclosure. The insistence from Opposition Members that a ministerial decision was taken after a circumstantial meeting is without basis and totally absurd. Above all, is not today's debate a missed opportunity for the Opposition to discuss policy, not politics, and delivery in the housing system—something they failed to do time and time again? Should not the planning system be reformed to ensure that planned development for new homes, such as in Tower Hamlets, is encouraged rather than discouraged and not fudged around like it is by Opposition Members? Should we not modernise the planning system to make it easier for councils and developers to deliver more of the homes we need?

I am acutely aware that the Opposition have tried to hold this debate in a narrow political vacuum, but they would be wise to consider their own record when in power—although it was quite a while ago—and the real concerns of the country at large. The country expects us in this House to debate how to tackle the greatest economic and fiscal challenges of our lifetime, including how we are getting the economy going again, how we are safely relaxing restrictions and how we are protecting lives and livelihoods. Yet here the Opposition are trying to weaponise planning decisions to score petty political points—nul points.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am not used to Members finishing early. I call Apsana Begum.

2.52 pm

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Thank you for calling me to speak in this important debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that many in my constituency, where the Westferry Printworks site is located, will be watching this debate closely. In May, it became clear that there are serious questions as to whether the Secretary of State is the right person to continue to oversee planning applications and the housing portfolio. Events have continued to unfold, and the picture painted keeps getting worse, as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) laid out.

Having lived in the area all my life, I am acutely aware of the strong local feeling that developers should be accountable to residents and that local communities must be empowered and centrally involved in decision-making processes around local planning and building

regulation. The Secretary of State is supposed to be making homes safe and holding developers to account, not simply socialising with them. For example, I am alarmed that the Government's monthly building safety statistics reveal that hundreds of high-rise buildings covered in Grenfell-style ACM cladding still have not had it removed and replaced, including many in my constituency.

The Secretary of State should be delivering truly affordable and secure long-term housing, including council housing, not undermining local efforts to address the complex needs of an area with the highest rate of child poverty in the entire country. In the real world beyond dinners with billionaires, many of my constituents struggle with the near impossible situation of having soaring monthly rents, which all too often mean that people—particularly those on low incomes—face an increased risk of homelessness.

Transparency is not only critical in providing confidence in the integrity of major decisions; it is about making sure that the right decisions are made. The debate thus far has been vital in highlighting the need for full openness on communications concerning the Westferry Printworks development. The circumstances that gave rise to the Housing Secretary's decision, including a meeting between him and the developer at a party fundraising event, point to serious weaknesses in the rules governing lobbying, access and influence in the UK. It is therefore only right and proper that all documents—and I emphasise, all documents—relating to the approval of the application in January 2020 are made public and that our constituents are empowered to hold those in power accountable, as should be their right.

2.54 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): First, I thank the Opposition for using one of their days to give Conservative Members a chance to talk about the Government's excellent work on housing in the past 10 years.

Since 2010, 1.5 million new homes have been built across the country. Last year, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith) mentioned, 241,000 homes were built—the highest level for 30 years. It is a fundamental tenet of good and responsible aspirational Government to give people the opportunity to own their own homes. Home ownership is not only good for the individuals concerned but good for the economy more broadly—it creates jobs and stimulates economic growth. This principle must continue to be at the heart of any Government policy.

I must turn, however, to the political motivations for calling this debate today—namely, the Westferry Printworks development. In recent years, Tower Hamlets has become synonymous with inefficiency, poor governance, corruption and financial mismanagement. The direct intervention of the Secretary of State in the affairs of this council is not isolated to this incident. I must therefore put it to the Opposition that the only reason this permission was put to the Secretary of State in the first place was that Labour-run Tower Hamlets refused to make a decision. In 2018, Tower Hamlets Council cancelled five meetings of the strategic development committee—in March, April, May, June and August—and a further meeting in January 2019. This is the committee that should have considered the development. With the necessary levels

[Chris Clarkson]

of accountability, scrutiny and oversight, decisions about housing rightly reside with local authorities and, where they exist, combined authorities. Considerable powers have been devolved to those bodies, and it is the responsibility of local leaders to ensure that where developments are approved, not only do they reflect the wishes of local communities but there is a proper infrastructure to support them.

We should be united across this House in welcoming the largest investment in affordable housing in a decade.

Abena Oppong-Asare: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Clarkson: No.

This year, a record £12.2 billion in grants will support the creation of affordable homes. I welcome the extension of the affordable homes programme, which has delivered 464,500 new affordable homes since 2010. The recent announcement of a boost in funding by £9.5 billion over five years will help to unlock billions more in public and private investment.

Despite the excellent efforts of the Government, not only in increasing the supply of affordable housing but in truly trying to enshrine the best traditions of localism into the planning system, communities can still be at the mercy of local leaders who ignore the wishes of the people they serve. Nothing illustrates this better than a story—one I like to refer to as “A Tale of Two Andys”. Since Andy Burnham became Mayor of Greater Manchester Combined Authority, just 1,715 affordable homes were completed in 2017-18 and 1,619 in 2018-19. That represents a 19% and 24% reduction, respectively, compared with figures for 2014-15, showing that the supply of affordable housing has gone backwards in Greater Manchester. Yet in the smaller West Midlands Combined Authority area, 3,801 affordable homes were built in 2018-19 alone, under the watch of Andy Street.

I believe it is entirely possible to support the building of affordable homes and garner the support of local communities at the same time. Therefore, I cannot fathom the Mayor of Greater Manchester’s strategy to seemingly jettison the sensible policy of “brownfield first”, whereby permissions are more likely to carry the support of local communities and to support important regeneration products in our towns and cities, and warrant the destruction of our green belt instead.

I have been working with local campaign groups in Heywood and Middleton such as Save our Slattocks, Save Bamford Green Belt and campaigners at Crimble Mill to resist the disastrous Greater Manchester spatial framework. I will continue to do so. Andy Burnham’s plan, at present, demonstrates a woeful lack of community engagement. I will use my privilege as a Member of this House to urge him to reconsider. Dickens himself would have described the approach taken in the west midlands as “the age of wisdom”. I am afraid that in Greater Manchester, with Labour’s Mayor, we are witnessing “the age of foolishness”.

2.58 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): There seems to be to be a bit of a theme developing here. The Government seem to think that the rules that apply to everyone else do not apply to them. First, we had the

Prime Minister’s chief adviser flouting the lockdown rules that he himself helped to create, and now we have the Housing Secretary seemingly deciding that planning regulations are flexible—as long as it is your friend asking and he has a spare £12,000.

I welcome the fact that we are having this debate, because, as they say and as we have heard, sunlight is the best disinfectant. Accountability should be at the heart of this place, but, sadly, it is often lacking. With that in mind, it was a shame that the Secretary of State refused to submit himself to parliamentary scrutiny the other week. Whether a Government have a majority of eight—[*Interruption.*] It is a shame that he did not present himself for scrutiny the other week when it was an issue—the issue was raised. Whether the Government have a majority of eight or 80, the same scrutiny should apply.

To me, and in the minds of many of my constituents, it is clear what has happened here. Two influential figures in the Conservative party have gone out of their way to approve a development project, headed by a Conservative party donor, that blatantly broke regulation and was strongly opposed by the local authority. Following that, the same developer made a £12,000 cash donation to the Conservative party, before the Secretary of State admitted an apparent bias and that he knew he was saving the developer millions. Whatever else we call that, it is clearly morally wrong.

The legalities are one thing, but this is also about local democracy, and I want to talk about who the Secretary of State was really short-changing: the people of Tower Hamlets. As someone who has served as a councillor for 14 years and who knows the hard work that the desperately underfunded county council does in Durham, I know the importance of that money to local authorities. I also know the importance and value of social housing.

Sarah Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, as I have been trying to get in for a very long time. Does she agree that what is shocking about what we have heard today is that the Secretary of State watched the promotional video on the night of the Conservative fundraiser? The rules on a Secretary of State’s decision making on planning state:

“Privately made representations should not be entertained unless other parties have been given the chance to consider them and comment.”

It is clear from what we have heard so far that that has not happened. We need answers on that exact point from the Secretary of State.

Mary Kelly Foy: I thank my hon. Friend for that and totally agree with what she says. The fact that the Secretary of State knowingly made a decision that reduced affordable housing, and deprived a local council and its communities of much-needed funding, is a disgrace. It is deeply worrying, if not surprising, that the Secretary of State appeared more concerned with the interests of the wealthy property developers than the Tower Hamlets community. As Members of Parliament, we serve the public, not the powerful—at least we do on our side of the House. This is not just about leadership; it is about honesty, integrity and transparency. The public must be able to trust that the Government are making decisions in the people’s interest, not in their own personal interests or those of their wealthy friends.

It is going to be difficult for the Secretary of State to regain the trust of the public. He has promised to immediately publish all documentation and correspondence that relates to this matter—that really should have already happened. I hope that that clears up why he decided to overrule his own inspectors and provides the justification as to why, despite having a bias by his own admission, he actively brought the decision under his own control. The Secretary of State still has serious questions to answer, and I hope that we get the answers, because the voting public deserve better than this.

3.4 pm

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): As I look across the Chamber, I am struck by the sheer desperation on the Opposition Benches. This is clearly the age of trial by Twitter and conviction in the court of public opinion. Rather than using their time to discuss things that really matter to people in this country, such as building more homes and greener communities, the Opposition seek to score political points.

In the Opposition's view, it is outrageous for Ministers involved in housing to meet housing developers such as Mr Desmond. Presumably the Health Secretary will soon be raked over the coals for daring to sit with a doctor, or the Home Secretary for meeting a senior police officer. It is a scruple that they do not apply to themselves. They have nothing to say about the fact that the shadow Justice Secretary has met Mr Desmond or that Mr Desmond has dined with the Labour Mayor of London.

Steve Reed: They can't do favours for him.

Ruth Edwards: Actually, Mr Desmond says it was the Labour Mayor of London who lobbied him to reduce the affordable housing target connected with the development. Such facts do not matter to the Opposition, as they clearly have not even read the planning inspector's documentation that is in the public domain. Instead, we are setting sail for the island of political point scoring, a tiresome voyage that we seem to go on regularly.

Perhaps the Opposition want to avoid talking about their record on affordable housing because it is not good. Under the last Labour Government, the number of first-time buyers fell by 61%. The current Labour Mayor of London has built fewer affordable homes in the whole of his first term than the previous Mayor—our Prime Minister—did in two years. Under the shadow Secretary of State's leadership, Lambeth Council's affordable housing completions plummeted by 68%. What a total shambles.

Conservative Members are proud of our record on housing. In the past 10 years, we have built 1.5 million homes, 460,000 of which are affordable. In this Parliament, we have pledged to build 1 million more homes.

Wera Hobhouse: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ruth Edwards: I will not; I am closing. We are making the decisions that will help many more people on to the housing ladder. The Opposition seem to have nothing sensible to say on the issue. How disappointing.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. After the next speaker, I will have to reduce the time limit to three minutes to try to allow as many people as possible to speak, but on four minutes, I call Nick Smith.

3.6 pm

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am glad to hear that the Secretary of State will release some of the papers related to the case, but in short, the rigmarole has become a farce. If, as the Secretary of State claims, he acted in good faith, we must get answers to the following questions. Did he, as Mr Desmond says, watch the promotional video at the Conservative fundraising dinner and then thank him? Did the Secretary of State inform his officials of that the next day? If so, what advice did they give him on receipt of that information? Those three questions lie at the heart of the rights and wrongs of the matter. They tease out whether, to use the Secretary of State's words, the bias was apparent or real.

In the Secretary of State's introduction, he was silent, then ambiguous about whether he watched the video. I invite Mr Desmond's team, who surrounded the Secretary of State that night at the Conservative party fundraising dinner, to corroborate what Mr Desmond has said. If the Government really want to put the case to rest, the public deserve answers to those questions.

3.8 pm

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood) on an exceptionally good maiden speech.

Mr Desmond has had business dinners with lots of people and lots of parties on different occasions and made donations to many political parties over the years. I simply say that I have always found my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State one of the most professional Ministers I have worked with. I wholeheartedly support him today.

My reading of the application is that the council delayed time and again, increased community infrastructure levies and did not make a decision. Ultimately, decisions need to be taken. Although I acknowledge today's debate, I would like to focus attention on what really matters for families around the country.

In the light of covid-19, we need comprehensive and far-reaching changes to our planning laws. Radical planning reform needs to increase supply across our countries to support our working people. On general principles, the current system is broken. The principles enshrined in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 are no longer fit for purpose. Even recent changes to the national planning policy framework and neighbourhood development plans, while absolutely laudable, do not deliver the housing that this country needs. We need a much more liberal approach to development, and we need to get planning into the economic development arm of local authorities as soon as possible.

I would like the team on our Front Bench to focus on two priorities: the reform of town centres and the right to build. On town centres, we need to drop the change of use rule that currently exists in high streets to free up potentially 3 million or 4 million properties that people could move into. As high streets change in the light of covid-19, we must change our policies too. High streets are social hubs. We need to prioritise converting shops into older people's flats, helping with loneliness, access and more high street viability. The Government should

[Scott Mann]

allow private pension funds to invest in new build residential properties. In fact, I am on a call with the mayors in my patch tonight, and I hope we will be able to discuss how we might make some changes in North Cornwall to facilitate some of this. I urge those on our Front Bench to be bold with our planning reforms for town centres.

Secondly, and lastly, I would like to touch on the right to build. We have had a plan-led approach, but it is not delivering. Although we have done well, it is not delivering the homes that people require. Town planning needs to sit with the economic development arm of local authorities, rather than with the planners. My surgeries have been full up, as have those of other Members, with local people who have spent thousands of pounds getting an application ready for committee in order for it to be determined, only to have it turned down by the local authority. The authorities view planning as a problem to be resolved, rather than an opportunity for a home for a person or a local opportunity for employment, and we need to change that. In conclusion, it is my view that we need to facilitate smaller developments. We need to be much more supportive, and we need to invest in our high streets and ensure that we can change those properties to make those high streets more viable.

3.11 pm

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): Like many who have spoken in the debate today, I arrived at this place as a councillor, having served for six years. I am glad we are having this debate, because the issue cuts to the heart of what is wrong with some aspects of our democracy and the way that some decisions are made. It is probably fair to say that very few of my constituents would have found out about the Westferry Printworks development if it had not been for the Secretary of State's intervention in the planning process and the fact that it was then splashed all over the headlines. It is true that this is about a site in London, and my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum) has expressed eloquently the impact on her community, but it is also a familiar story to us all. It is a story about the power and influence of big property developers, the struggle to build affordable housing and address the housing crisis, and the needs of communities being ignored.

It is already well established that there is a housing crisis in the UK today. Recent research conducted on behalf of the National Housing Federation has estimated that 3.6 million people are living in overcrowded housing, that 2.5 million people cannot afford their rent or mortgage—

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Olivia Blake: I will not give way.

The research also found that 2.5 million people are in hidden households that they cannot afford to move out of; 1.7 million people are living in unsuitable accommodation; 1.4 million people live in poor-quality housing; and 400,000 people are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Conservatives talk about the Labour party's record, but we went on to fix poor-quality housing. Thousands of homes were upgraded under the

Labour Government, and there was a low level of homelessness. We should be doing all we can to create better-quality, environmentally sustainable, affordable homes, given the dire situation.

It was more than reasonable for the planning inspector to say that 21% affordable housing in this scheme could be improved, as the Secretary of State agreed in his letter of approval. He admitted that the planning inspector was right:

“He agrees with the Inspector that, on the balance of the available evidence, it is likely that the scheme could provide more affordable housing and that 21% does not therefore represent the maximum reasonable amount of affordable housing within the terms of”

the London plan. The letter goes on to say that

“for the purpose of his assessment of the proposal...the Secretary of State proceeds on the basis that the maximum amount of affordable housing that could be reasonably delivered is uncertain, but may be up to 35%”.

Yet he still thought it was appropriate to approve the application. To make matters worse, he rushed it through 24 hours before the increase in the community infrastructure levy. The decision meant the council was losing £40 million towards affordable homes, at a time when local authorities up and down the country are already struggling to do this.

I want to mention briefly, if I may, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. No, the hon. Lady may not. She has exceeded her time, I am afraid.

3.15 pm

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): It was a pleasure to hear the much anticipated maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood). He has made his mum proud, and I am sure he will make his constituents proud and serve them well in this place.

A safe habitable home is not a want; it is a need—one of the most basic needs that we have as human beings—and all of us in public life have a duty to work towards the goal of making that a reality for everyone in the communities we live in. The sensationalist allegations that have been made over the last few weeks in order to deflect from a political failure of delivery at a local level serve no one well, least of all those who need housing. Those of us in public life also have a duty to uphold our code of conduct at all levels of government and to abide by the Nolan principles of public life, including integrity, honesty and openness. In releasing the correspondence later today, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing has also displayed accountability, another of these fundamental principles.

Before I became a Member of Parliament, I was a local councillor in the thriving village of Cranleigh, and sat on the neighbourhood planning committee and the planning committee, where we heard applications large and small. Deciding the best way to use our space is an important role and one that impacts on everyone. Hand in hand with planning and building new homes, be they large or small developments, this needs careful and joined-up thinking as to how to mitigate impact, protect our environment and have the necessary infrastructure in place in utilities, schools, medical facilities, green spaces, allotments, green technology and so on.

Even though our principles instruct us to always be open and transparent, which is fundamentally right, as someone who ventured into public life with no knowledge of planning, I found and still find that the language of planning can be opaque and obscure. It is littered with acronyms such as SHLAA—strategic housing land availability assessment—or, if you like your BAPs, biodiversity action plans. Those who inhabit the world of local councils speak in this language, which, rather than being inclusive, can leave residents feeling excluded.

Our role as public servants should be to demystify the process all the way from the application for planning permission through to and including how, why and when an application makes its way from where it sits with the local authority to determine, in accordance with its local plan, all the way up to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, including understanding that the Secretary of State has no fear of stepping in when a local authority puts off determining an application, as in this case, and runs out of time.

This Conservative Government are determined to maintain public confidence in our planning process and, most crucially, deliver on the housing we need. I stood on a manifesto commitment to deliver on housing, and I stood locally on a pledge to make sure we could have the right homes in the right place at the right price for local people, and to tackle homelessness. I welcome the announcement today of an additional £105 million to help with rough sleeping, and I am determined to help build bounce-back Britain and see us thrive once again.

3.18 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I am having difficulty believing that we are having the debate, as the story of the Secretary of State and Mr Desmond reads like something straight out of a Frederick Forsyth or John le Carré novel. A fabulously wealthy former pornographer and major Conservative party donor happens to sit next to the Secretary of State at a £900-a-head Conservative party dinner just weeks before that Secretary of State makes a decision on a £1 billion property deal of Mr Desmond's.

At the dinner, Mr Desmond leans over to the Secretary of State to show him a video. I bet the Secretary of State now wishes it was from one of Mr Desmond's former television channels, but as we now know, it was a promotional video of the luxury development. Mr Desmond openly admitted this, saying:

“What I did was I showed him the video”.

Mr Desmond revealed that the Secretary of State watched it for three to four minutes.

Miriam Cates: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Sobel: No, I will not give way. We have very limited time in this debate.

Mr Desmond added:

“It's quite long, so he got the gist.”

It is somewhat ironic that Mr Desmond's autobiography is called “The Real Deal”, as he certainly tried to get the real deal from the Secretary of State.

The advertised prizes on the night of the dinner included a dinner with the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) and Sarah Vine; a flight

in a Lancaster bomber with the Secretary of State for Transport; a trip to a Tory donor's house, with shooting opportunities; and a night out with a former Prime Minister—although whether or not she would be wearing kitten heels was not revealed. The prize of a planning decision from the Secretary of State was not advertised.

Mr Desmond challenged the Secretary of State's claim just two days ago that he did not discuss the decision in any way at the £900 dinner. Just two days ago, the Secretary of State was saying that he did not discuss it, and he has now admitted that he did and that he watched the video. He has backtracked on all his claims.

At the time of the decision, on 14 January, the Secretary of State overruled his officials to approve the scheme. We now know that two weeks later Mr Desmond deposited a £12,000 donation to the Conservative party. That is a bit cheap for a man reportedly worth between £1 billion and £2 billion. The Conservative party fundraising team should try a little harder in future. Tony Blair managed to get £100,000 from Mr Desmond 20 years ago, and six years ago UKIP got £300,000 from Mr Desmond, so Conservative Members might be ruing lost income.

Of course, the real saving for Mr Desmond was the fact that the decision was approved just a day before the council approved the CIL. I take on board the Secretary of State's view on that, but that CIL still would have bought three high schools, 10 new libraries, 50 new pocket parks or 200 new pedestrian bridges for one of the poorest authorities in the country. That is the cost of such decisions.

I was a councillor for six years. If the chair of my council's planning committee had done what the Secretary did, he or she would have been referred to standards for a serious breach. That is what we are now facing, and the Secretary of State knows it. He knows that he has not acted with propriety or honour. He should recuse himself and there should be a full investigation on standards, because it is clear that there is a question as to whether he broke the ministerial code.

3.21 pm

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con): I was going to say, “Isn't it interesting that the Opposition do not want to talk about the donations from Mr Desmond to the Labour party?”, but I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) on having the courage to bring that up. Although I am far too young to remember it, some Members may remember the former Prime Minister's slightly farcical 2002 interview with Jeremy Paxman on “Newsnight”, in which he defended the donation to his party from Mr Desmond and said it was perfectly reasonable.

It is clear that the Opposition want to use this debate as a distraction from their own embarrassing record on house building. Is it not true that the only reason the application was referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was that Tower Hamlets Council refused to make the decision itself? That is shameful, given the lack of affordable housing in the borough and in London as a whole.

By contrast, the Conservative party and this Government are overseeing the highest levels of house building in the past 30 years. Home building in the West Midlands has doubled over the past decade, guided by the wisdom of the combined authority and our fantastic Mayor. We are delivering affordable homes with a brownfield-first

[Nicola Richards]

policy. At the same time, we are training local people in the skills needed to build new homes. Now, is that not important at this time?

Tom Randall: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Nicola Richards: No—sorry.

My constituents in West Bromwich East want to see us building affordable homes. I am not sure that the Opposition do. We are taking action and getting on with delivering for people, not dragging good Ministers through the mud during a global pandemic. The Secretary of State has already answered questions on this issue in the House and will publish further papers today. Let the matter rest and let us get back to serving the people we represent.

3.23 pm

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): Westferry has all the hallmarks of some of the murkiest cash-for-favours scandals we have sadly borne witness to over the years. Despite the Secretary of State's denials, the facts remain that he approved the Westferry printworks scheme just 12 days before the developer donated £12,000 to the Conservative party, and the approval came just two weeks after the Secretary of State sat next to Mr Desmond at a party fundraiser at which—the developer subsequently admitted—he had raised the scheme with the Secretary of State.

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Navendu Mishra: In a moment, perhaps.

There then followed a private screening of a promotional video for the development—that completely undermines the Secretary of State's claim that he and Mr Desmond did not discuss the screening prior to his decision. The favours do not stop there.

As we know, the decision was made just 24 hours before the new community infrastructure levy came into force, saving Mr Desmond's Northern & Shell company up to £50 million. All of that was compounded by the Secretary of State overruling his advisers—including his own Department's planning inspector, who recommended that permission be refused in what was reported at the time as a “damning” 141-page report—to reduce the amount of affordable housing required in the development, saving Mr Desmond a further £106 million.

It is not the first time that Mr Desmond has had the development approved. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) made reference to how in the final days in office of the then Mayor of London, now Prime Minister, the then Mayor approved a 30-storey scheme on the same site, despite objections from the local council and just months after sharing drinks with Mr Desmond in a five-star hotel. Sadly, it all has a very familiar ring to it.

Given that the Prime Minister pushed the original scheme for the same developer when he was Mayor of London, did No. 10 have any involvement in the events or conversation leading to the Secretary of State's unlawful decision to grant approval? It is completely immoral and, furthermore, illegal for a Government Minister to show such bias on such a matter. In this instance, it

appears that the Secretary of State's price was a £12,000 donation to the Conservative party just weeks after the decision was made.

On 14 June, *The Mail on Sunday* reported strong links between lobbyists for the development, Thorncliffe Communications, and the Secretary of State, whom it described as a “great friend of Thorncliffe”. The Secretary of State even spoke at a private briefing on Government policy for Thorncliffe and its client on 29 January. The Labour party has written twice to the Cabinet Secretary calling for an investigation into whether the ministerial code has been broken, but without reply.

A lack of affordable housing remains a significant challenge in Greater Manchester. To overcome the situation, the planning system needs a complete overhaul, and that starts with ensuring that developers meet the needs of their communities, not the Government meeting the needs of developers.

3.26 pm

Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con): At the outset, some points that have emerged during the debate need to be reiterated. First, it is not unusual for politicians in senior positions to overrule local authorities. My old friend Sadiq Khan has done so repeatedly as the Mayor of London. The second point, which needs to be emphasised, is the role of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in this particular application. We would not be here at all if it had exercised the duty it was legally obliged to exercise in the timeframe in which it was obliged to do so. Twice it failed to discharge that duty, and twice the decision had to be referred to higher authorities.

The hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) referred in his opening remarks to the fact that Tower Hamlets opposed the application. Why did it not decide it? It had the opportunity to do so. The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) referred to the fact that the affordable housing element was reduced after the matter was referred to the Secretary of State. The council had the power to approve the development when that element was set at 35%. There could have been 35% affordable housing on that development if the council had simply exercised the powers it legally had.

The third point is that much has been made of Richard Desmond's donations. In common with my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Nicola Richards), I am almost speechless at the bravery of the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) in referring to Tony Blair. I know that Tony Blair's name is one that the Labour party do not like to hark back to. Richard Desmond is on record as having donated substantial sums of money—way more sums of money than this—to multiple political parties. He is also known for socialising with senior politicians, including Sadiq Khan and leading members of the Opposition.

Nor is it unheard of, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his speech, for Ministers to take decisions that contradict the advice of planning inspectors. John Prescott did so in 2005 when he approved the new stadium for Brighton and Hove Albion football club. Hazel Blears did so in 2008 when she approved a 43-storey tower block on London's south bank. Nor is it unheard of for those decisions to be overturned by the High Court, as that decision by Hazel Blears was and a recent decision by Sadiq Khan was when the High Court ruled in March that permission he had given to a housing developer should be overturned.

This is a desperate attempt by the Opposition to blow enough smoke to make people believe that there is a real fire.

Tom Randall: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Gareth Bacon: I do not have time, I am afraid. The Opposition are doing this simply to deflect from their own woeful lack of delivery on affordable housing. If they really care about this issue, perhaps their next Opposition day debate will be on the woeful record of Sadiq Khan in delivering only 12,000 affordable units in exchange for a £4.82 billion grant from this Government.

3.29 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Zoe McKendree, 33, told the BBC that she spends more than a third of her pay on rent for her shared flat. She dreams of having the keys to a home of her own, but for her and most people of her generation, let alone my generation, that remains a distant prospect. Instead, Zoe has to contend with what she describes as “callous” landlords and escalating costs. She has also experienced numerous no-fault evictions, where private landlords evict tenants at short notice without good reason.

This country is deep in a housing crisis of the Government’s own making. Not only are people spending more than a third of their income on rent, but the number of rough sleepers in England has, shockingly—shamefully—increased by more than 250% since the Conservative party was elected in 2010. It was in that context that the Secretary of State overruled his advisers to reduce the amount of affordable housing required in the Westferry development.

Let us take this slowly, because this point cannot be laboured enough. With an increase in street homelessness of more than 250% since 2010—

Robert Jenrick *indicated dissent.*

Nadia Whittome: The Secretary of State is shaking his head, but those are the facts. With that increase, and with a generation of people trapped in precarious and poorly regulated rented housing, we have a Secretary of State in charge of housing fighting to reduce the number of affordable housing units in a development. How on earth do the Government justify that move?

It seems baffling to me, considering that fact alone, that the Secretary of State should be deemed fit to represent the wider public interest as part of his brief. Reducing the ratio of affordable dwellings from one in three to one in five saved billionaire developer and Tory donor Richard Desmond another £40 million by enabling him to sell those units on the premium property market instead.

Transparency International defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.”

It has said of corruption in the UK:

“Although corruption is not endemic in the UK, it is correct to say that in some areas of UK society and institutions, corruption is a much greater problem than recognised and that there is an inadequate response”—

Robert Jenrick: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Nadia Whittome: I am afraid there is no time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I am afraid we have to move on.

3.33 pm

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): Those on the Opposition Benches have a long track record of trying to create issues where none exists, and the rest of the country can see it. Just as last December, they continue to be out of touch with the general public with their faux outrage. The idea that the Secretary of State for Housing does not receive correspondence from housing developers is farcical. If that were the case, nothing would get done—but that seems to be the operating model for Labour Administrations.

My parents bought their first house in their early 20s. That is what people did then, but why could I not do that? Why did I find myself part of generation rent, unable to get on the housing ladder? Because the Labour Government between 1997 and 2010 did not build enough homes. They abandoned people with aspiration. The shadow Chancellor has admitted that herself. In 2018, she said:

“Labour didn’t get a grip on the issue. We didn’t build enough homes”.

They dithered, they delayed and they abdicated responsibility.

In 2010, the Conservative-led Government did get a grip on the issue. We have delivered more than 465,000 affordable homes. Schemes such as Help to Buy have allowed young families to buy their first home, which they would have been unable to do otherwise. Let me translate that locally.

Between 2001 and 2010 in Burnley, the number of homes increased by 300. Between 2010 and 2019, that number was 1,000.

Dealing with that Labour failure, then and now, means calling applications in, finding the schemes that will deliver the homes of the future and getting them going. This scheme, which Tower Hamlets council sat on for month after month after month, was one such scheme.

Let us not forget that the area of London we are talking about has been transformed, thanks to people on this side of the House. In 1982, it was a Conservative Government who created the urban enterprise zone on the Isle of Dogs, pulling in private investment and turning it into the international financial centre that it is today. We on these Benches will not shy away, as Labour does, from the need to build more homes and we will continue to hold Labour administrations to account where we need to—calling in applications that they sit on, because sitting on them is depriving our young working families of homes. As with most things from Labour, this debate is all about smoke-screens and diversion, because it consistently fails on policy.

3.36 pm

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I gently remind Conservative Members that in the past 10 years of Tory austerity rough sleeping has seen extraordinary increases. Fewer social homes were built last year than at any time since the second world war, and the Grenfell fire atrocity revealed a huge issue with bad buildings. Numerous blocks with Grenfell-style cladding are still in place three years

[Sarah Jones]

after the Grenfell fire. I just ask Conservative Members to take care with the attacks that they make, because they do not have a record to stand on.

Last week I asked the Secretary of State if he knew, when he signed the planning consent for Westferry, that the very next day the new levy would come into effect, which would have cost the developers tens of millions of pounds. The Secretary of State said that that was a matter of public record.

In the ministerial code published last year, the Prime Minister said that to

“win back the trust of the British people, we must uphold the very highest standards of propriety...no actual or perceived conflicts of interest.”

The code goes on to say that it

“should be read against the background of the overarching duty on Ministers to comply with the law”.

The Secretary of State has admitted that his decision was unlawful.

The code says:

“It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity.”

The Secretary of State told us that he advised the applicant that he was not able to discuss the issue. He now implies that he watched a video about it, and he has not qualified the facts.

The code says:

“Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament and the public, refusing to provide information only when disclosure would not be in the public interest”.

The Secretary of State has only today, after several weeks, said he will publish some papers after the debate.

The code says:

“Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.”

The Secretary of State has admitted that a fair-minded person would conclude that his decision was biased in favour of the developer.

The code says:

“Ministers must not use government resources for Party political purposes”.

Richard Desmond gave the Conservatives a large donation shortly after the Secretary of State made his decision. We think that the Secretary of State has admitted that he watched the promotional video, although he was unclear, and the rules on the Secretary of State’s decision making in planning state:

“Privately made representations should not be entertained unless other parties have been given the chance to consider them and comment.”

We cannot legislate for integrity, but surely we can ask the Secretary of State to tell us whether he watched the video, did he tell his officials the next day, and does he now think—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order.

3.39 pm

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): I will keep my comments short.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The hon. Gentleman should be seated by 3.42 pm.

Shaun Bailey: In that case, I reiterate that I will keep my comments short—I have no choice. This is a personal one for me because, as I have said before, I know what it is like to be in social housing and need it. I know what it is like to fear for your life, when you think that you are going to die, because your dad is going to come and kill you. I know what it is like to languish on Labour’s housing list for 12 months and have to live off sofas—sofa surfing at five years old—and watch your mother cry her heart out because she cannot get a home because there are not enough of them. They have the gall to lecture and pander about housing lists. How dare they?

The reality is that we could have talked today about how we revolutionise our planning system, how we ensure that kids like that do not have to fear for the future and how we truly level up, but instead all that seems to have happened is a smear on my right hon. Friend the Secretary for State. It is an absolute disgrace.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Shaun Bailey: No, I will not give way. I will show the same courtesy that Opposition Members showed to Members on this side of the House.

We could go back through the figures that my hon. Friends have gone through today and the arguments that have been repeated time and again, but Tower Hamlets did not do its job. It seems to be a habit with Labour councillors that they do not do their job for some reason; if hon. Members saw my case bag, they would probably see why.

We need to make sure that we have a planning process that works; that we build affordable homes that people can aspire to and buy; that we ensure that kids in places such as Tipton, who fear for their lives and do not have a stable home can have that; and that we invest in social rent housing, which I am afraid the Mayor of London in particular has an abysmal record on. He was given £4.82 billion by the Government. He failed to build social housing in nine London boroughs. The facts and figures speak for themselves.

I want to ensure that we have a planning system that truly works so that we can level up. I want to be able to turn to kids in my constituency, in Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton, who have gone through the same circumstances as me, and say that with the right housing, the right home and a roof over their head, just like me, they can be the council house lad that got to Westminster.

3.41 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): In this afternoon’s debate, we have heard strong and powerful interventions from parliamentarians, particularly from the Opposition Benches, that were centrally about restoring faith and trust in our planning system. In fact, it is about the integrity and honour of our Ministers and the moral authority of the Government—an authority that has been undermined by the actions of some, which imply that the rules, and in some cases even the laws, do not apply to them. From Dominic Cummings to, seemingly, the Secretary of State, it is a case of do as I say, not as I do.

I thank many of the MPs who have spoken today in defence of the standards required in the ministerial code and an accountable transparent planning system. I thank the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed), for opening the debate. I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), the Chair of the Select Committee, who spoke eloquently as always, and the new hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood), who gave a personal and touching maiden speech on which I congratulate him. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum), for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy), for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith), for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake), for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), for Stockport (Navendu Mishra), for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) and for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones).

I also thank Government Members for their creative attempt to defend the indefensible. At the heart of their argument, the defence of the Secretary of State is that he was merely caught in a timeline of an extraordinary set of coincidences. There was the coincidental seating arrangement at a dinner, with Richard Desmond as well as four senior executives from Northern & Shell and Mace; the coincidence that the Minister was shown a four-minute promotional video for the £1 billion development by the said guests on the table; the planning approval that coincidentally occurred the day before a £50 million levy—I stress: levy—would be charged; and the coincidence that a £12,000 donation was paid into Tory coffers just two weeks later. Just coincidences.

What is not a coincidence—Tory Members skated over this one—but is a fact of the matter is that the Secretary of State overruled the planning inspectorate, was taken to the High Court by Tower Hamlets Council, and has admitted acting unlawfully, with apparent bias. I stress in big bold capital letters: unlawfully, with apparent bias. Fact. What is also a fact is that the Secretary of State has resisted every request and every attempt to disclose all correspondence leading up to this unlawful planning direction, up until this debate today. I know that, as we have been speaking in this debate, the media have been well briefed about what is going their way. If the Minister had nothing to hide, he knew what to do, and he has had weeks to do it, so why wait until now and go through all this pain and grief and claim that these are cheap political points? Unlawful. Broke the law.

At least we know now, unlike when I first called for an investigation by the Cabinet Secretary, that Mr Desmond donated to the Minister's party after his application was approved. We know that the Minister watched a video all about the development at a fundraising dinner. In fact, Richard Desmond has been quoted by Opposition Members as saying, "He got the gist after three or four minutes." Those were his words, not those of Labour or Scottish National party Members. The Secretary of State not only saved Mr Desmond £50 million in money that would have gone into community development by approving the application when he did—

Kevin Hollinrake: A levy.

Mike Amesbury: Yes, it was a levy, as the hon. Member is right to point out, so it would not have been his personal money out of his pocket, but it was undoubtedly

a saving. After the development was given a direction—I will not say called in, but given a direction, given after the decision was overruled as unlawful—Mr Desmond saved another £106 million or so by including fewer affordable houses. Those are the very homes that many of our key workers require. We have all clapped for them every Thursday. Every Thursday, we hear "Homes for the new heroes!" Surely they need and deserve those homes.

The Housing Minister, at a recent meeting of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, was pressed and pressed again on social housing. How many social houses? What is the target for social housing? How many are going to be built? He was asked four, five or six times, but when we check *Hansard* to see if there was an answer, we find there was no answer at all—he said there were no targets for social housing, none at all. Under Labour, an average of just under 28,000 social houses to rent were built per year; last year, under this Government, the number was 6,600, although I might be being a little bit generous there. *[Interruption.]* Don't talk to me about the definition of affordable housing—the vandalised version, which is no real definition at all. It is not true.

To conclude, the Prime Minister, outlining his expectations in the ministerial code, is very clear that there must not be any misuse of taxpayers' money and no "actual or perceived" conflicts of interest, as pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central. If the Prime Minister is so confident that the Secretary of State has abided by the code and has nothing to hide, we would expect that he and Government Members will support this Humble Address and publish in full—I stress, in full—all documentation and emails associated with this application. That includes correspondence from the advisers, the lobbyists and the Prime Minister himself—in full. It will be interesting to see what has been spun to the media while we have been having this debate.

3.50 pm

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I think there is one thing in this debate upon which we can all agree: that my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood) made a fantastic, powerful and personal maiden speech. He is right to say that, when we are first elected to this place, we sit in the Tea Room and talk to each other about the relative merits of our constituencies. He will know that, regrettably, when we turn to talking about majorities, size really does matter.

I should also like to congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Henley (John Howell), for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith), for East Devon (Simon Jupp), for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards), for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), for Guildford (Angela Richardson), for West Bromwich East (Nicola Richards), for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), for Orpington (Gareth Bacon) and for Burnley (Antony Higginbotham) on their powerful contributions to the debate.

Let me be clear: we reject any allegations of impropriety either in relation to the appeal at Westferry Printworks or more widely. Today, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, our Department has published the documents on the record regarding the Westferry decision. They are now in the public domain for the full

[Christopher Pincher]

scrutiny of Members and the wider public. Those documents show what we knew from the outset: that no improper action was undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

As my right hon. Friend made clear in his remarks, it is far from uncommon for Ministers to disagree with a planning inspector's recommendation. The involvement of Ministers in the planning system is clearly guided by both the ministerial code and the guidance set out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. That guidance details the duty to behave fairly and to approach matters before us with an open mind. As my right hon. Friend has made clear abundantly again and again, the reason for granting planning permission for the proposed development at the Westferry Printworks are detailed in his letter of 14 January.

Mr Betts: The Minister is quite right: it is not unusual for the Secretary of State or another Minister to make a planning decision, even in contradiction of a planning inspector's recommendations. Can he think of another example where a Secretary of State has made a planning decision and then ruled his own decision to be unlawful?

Christopher Pincher: There are such examples. Indeed, I remember that the former Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Prescott, overruled his own Planning Inspectorate in order to build a tower like the one proposed at Westferry. The reasons for the granting of permission are fully set out in the sealed order of 21 May. As my right hon. Friend has stated, and as I will reiterate, there was absolutely no impropriety in this case. It is a fundamental legal right that planning decisions may be challenged, and it is by no means unusual for that to happen.

David Linden: Will the Minister give way?

Christopher Pincher: I will answer the question that I think the hon. Gentleman is about to ask and save him the trouble. In the last three years, there have been 26 challenges made to Ministers. Of those, 16 were withdrawn or successfully defended, eight were conceded or lost, and two are yet to be concluded.

On the question that many Members have raised regarding the meetings between my right hon. Friend and Mr Desmond, it is a matter of public record that the Secretary of State met the scheme's proposer, the chairman of Northern & Shell, in November 2019. Ministers meet many people in the course of their duties—it has even been known for shadow Ministers occasionally to get out of the bubble and meet people—and my right hon. Friend has made it clear that that meeting was not planned. He did not discuss the case; Mr Desmond himself has said that. Indeed, my right hon. Friend advised his officials of Mr Desmond's approach and of his own response, and at no time were his officials advising him that he should recuse himself from this matter.

I am sure that Mr Desmond is a very effective businessman, and I am sure that he is honestly and sincerely determined to see more homes built. I do not know Mr Desmond. I have not met him, but the Mayor of London has met him; he has been to dinner with Mr Desmond, yet has Sadiq Khan being arraigned before the north Croydon magistrate to answer his case?

The Mayor of London took money from a Manchester tycoon who was prosecuted for putting people's lives at risk—putting people's lives at risk! Is the Mayor at risk of the wrath of the people's tribunal sitting on the Opposition Front Bench? It does not appear so.

What about the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), who enjoyed, apparently, a cosy Christmas chez Desmond? Will he be dragged before the Starmer "star chamber" to answer for any potential indiscretions he may have had over the turkey and the trimmings? The Leader of the Opposition, the former Director of Public Prosecutions, is remarkably silent on this matter: not a jot or tittle do we hear from him. There they sit, po-faced and prim, as if butter would not melt in their mouths, yet on housing their crimes are such that they should be blushing to the core; they should be as red in their face as they are in tooth and claw.

This House, the Gallery and the public, in so far as they are watching, can see this for what it really is: a tawdry charade to distract attention from their own party's lamentable failure to decide the Westferry case themselves when they could have done so, and the dismal failure of the Mayor of London to build the homes that Londoners want and need. The crime, if there is one, is the failure of Sadiq Khan to build in four years what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister built in two years—his failure to deliver more than 322 homes on TfL land when he promised to deliver 10,000, a risible 3% success rate on his pledge. The truth is that they do not like the truth; they cannot handle the truth, and it is because of that failure that they have tabled this spurious motion today.

We make no apology for our bold ambition to build the homes that this country needs. My right hon. Friend and this Government were elected on a mandate to build a million new homes in this Parliament, and that is what we are going to do. We will build more affordable homes and boost the housing supply so that it comfortably meets and beats growing demand. We were elected on a mandate to champion and take up brownfield sites, so that neglected and abandoned land can be transformed into homes for people.

Let us be in no doubt that the Westferry Printworks development would have created hundreds of new, affordable homes, which would have helped our nation's capital. We will build and build, and build again, to back the people who need homes in this country and in London. We will build for Britain as we emerge from this pandemic. The Secretary of State stands four-square behind that commitment, and we stand four-square behind him.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, that she will be graciously pleased to give a direction to Her Ministers to provide all correspondence, including submissions and electronic communications, involving Ministers and Special Advisers pertaining to the Westferry Printworks Development and the subsequent decision by the Secretary of State to approve its planning application at appeal to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The House is suspended for three minutes

3.59 pm

Sitting suspended.

Testing of NHS and Social Care Staff

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.4 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House expresses thanks to the heroic work of frontline NHS staff who have saved lives throughout the Covid-19 pandemic; pays tribute to the at least 312 NHS and Social Care staff who have died of coronavirus in the United Kingdom; recognises the impact that coronavirus will have upon the NHS to deliver routine care including mental health care without additional Government support; notes that NHS waiting lists are projected to reach 10 million by the end of 2020, that cancer referrals fell 60 per cent during the peak of the coronavirus lockdown and that four out of five children have reported their mental health has got worse during the pandemic; further notes that there is a backlog of NHS care that needs to be tackled and that it is vital to prepare NHS services to deliver safe care alongside care for coronavirus, including preparing for winter and ensuring necessary supplies of PPE and medicine; is concerned that routine testing of NHS and Social Care staff is not currently in place; and calls on the Government to implement a routine weekly testing programme for all NHS and Social Care staff to enable NHS services to safely resume and ensure the continuity of services throughout the winter alongside a functional, national, public test, trace and isolate system.

We have brought this motion to the House today to provide an opportunity for the House to reflect on the Government's response in handling the pandemic, to thank our brave, hard-working NHS and social care staff for their extraordinary efforts—including, if I may say so, our student nurses who do a tremendous job on the frontline; I hope the Minister praises them and recognises their worth when she gets up to make her remarks—and to pay tribute to and remember over 300 health and social care staff who gave their lives during the pandemic. We have also tabled the motion to put to the Government a constructive, practical suggestion that we now consider necessary to prepare our national health service to meet the monumental growing burden of unmet clinical need and set out what we think is necessary to prepare us in case of a second wave of the virus.

The key to resetting the NHS and the safe easing of lockdown measures announced yesterday is a fully effective system that finds cases, tests cases, traces contacts, isolates, and then properly financially supports those who have been asked to isolate. We believe a key element of that must now be the regular testing, weekly if necessary, of all NHS and social care staff. This is what we are suggesting to the Government today, and we hope they will accept our constructive suggestion and find a way to make it work.

Throughout the pandemic, our concern as an Opposition has been to save lives and minimise harm. We have always thought that that means suppressing the virus, not simply managing its spread, and measures to crunch the virus down, as nations like New Zealand and Iceland have done, and not merely squashing the sombrero. It is why we on the Labour Benches called for a lockdown. Indeed, when I called for a lockdown in March not everybody in my party supported me at the time—many on our side were concerned about the extraordinary restrictions to civil liberties—but we supported the

Government when they announced a lockdown and we co-operated with the Government in ensuring that the necessary legislation passed this House.

I also said, however, that a lockdown was a blunt tool. I said it would buy us time while transmission in the community reduced. We always recognised that we could not stay in lockdown forever. Lockdown has huge social repercussions, especially for children. This is not a debate about schools, but I was struck by the words of UNICEF, which warned:

“Children are not the face of this pandemic. But they risk being among its biggest victims.”

We have always understood that there would come a moment when we need to ease out of lockdown, but it has to be done safely.

Of course, nothing is risk-free. We can never entirely eradicate risk, as the chief scientific adviser reminded us yesterday. We cannot be complacent. This virus exploits ambivalence, and the reality is that there are many hundreds of infections every day. Globally, we have passed 9 million cases. The virus is accelerating across the world. There are outbreaks in South Korea and Germany, countries that have been far more successful than we have. The chief medical officer yesterday warned us to expect to continue to be in this situation way through the winter and way into next spring. We all know from our history books that about 100 years ago there was a deadly second wave of Spanish flu. A second wave must surely be a possibility with this virus.

We are tracking towards one of the worst death tallies in the world: over 65,000 excess deaths, with 26,000 excess deaths in care homes. Ministers cannot run away from the realities, no matter how uncomfortable they are. Today, we call on Ministers to outline a plan for the next stage and to prepare us in case of a deadly second wave. Let me deal with the points in the motion about the NHS.

Ministers boast that the NHS was not overwhelmed, that it coped and that 119,000 people were admitted to hospital for covid and they received exceptional care. They are right to make those claims. Thankfully, the desperate scenes in Lombardy hospitals that we witnessed on our TV screens were never repeated here. Naturally, I pay tribute to all our NHS staff involved in that and all the staff who ensured the building of Nightingale hospitals, developed new care pathways, and moved to digital care or returned to the frontline. But let us be absolutely clear: that surge capacity in the NHS, and the wider protection of the lockdown, has come at a cost, because millions are waiting for care. For those millions, this has not been a cosy hibernation, as the Prime Minister told us yesterday. It has been a time of struggle, of suffering and of distress.

Protecting the NHS has been on the back of cancelled operations, delayed treatment, and, arguably, the biggest rationing of services in the 72-year history of the national health service. It has been on the back of shielding some of the most vulnerable in society, who remain anxious and scared today for their personal health and safety as lockdown eases. Let us remember that, when we went into this crisis, we had 4.5 million on the waiting list. We had A&E targets routinely missed. Every winter, we saw the crisis in our hospitals of trolleys lined up in corridors. We have had some of the worst cancer waiting times in history, and now the NHS Confederation is warning

[Jonathan Ashworth]

that elective waiting lists could hit 10 million by Christmas. Yes, referrals are down, as the Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), recognised yesterday, but that is because of unmet need in the wider community. Indeed, experts are predicting that about 1.6 million are being added to the waiting list every month. That means ever lengthening queues in our constituencies of people in pain waiting for care. The Minister will know that at the end of January, there were 521,000 people waiting for trauma and orthopaedic surgery, including hip and knee replacements, and probably another 42,000 added to the waiting list each week. That means that thousands of our constituents are waiting in discomfort and pain, often when pain-relieving drugs are inadequate.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is making a very important and well-presented case. In my constituency, at Westmorland General Hospital, the trust closed down the Kentmere ward, which is the adult mental health ward. It is fairly obvious that most Members will have had in their inboxes a lot of people presenting with higher degrees of mental health need than during normal times. That ward was closed down temporarily to take account of the crisis. Does he agree that now is the time, particularly with mental health issues, to look again at those temporary closures and to bring the Kentmere ward and other such wards back into service, to meet the needs of those struggling with mental health conditions?

Jonathan Ashworth: The hon. Gentleman puts his case persuasively. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan), who will be winding up the debate for the Opposition, will, I am sure, want to touch more on the mental health impact of the lockdown. It is undeniable that the lockdown has led to unquantifiable mental health problems festering in society, and statistics show an increase in anxiety and depression. There are particular issues around young people not being able to access child and adolescent mental health services. If services have closed, as happened in his constituency, then, yes, we need a plan to ensure that those services are reopened as quickly as possible.

Another area where we have had access to services restricted is in cancer, and cancer touches everybody. It touches every family. It has touched many Members in this House very individually and personally as well.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. What is happening to our cancer services is very important, as he said. Some of the figures are incredible. There are 2.1 million people waiting for breast or cervical screening tests, which is 60% higher than in April 2019. Treatment rates for chemotherapy have fallen by 70%, surgery by 60%, and radiotherapy by 90%. That underlines very critically the severe problems for those with cancer and for those needing treatment right now.

Jonathan Ashworth: The hon. Gentleman is ahead of me in making the points that I was hoping to go on to make. I am not surprised that he has made those points given that he is a Leicester City fan. I am very proud to have Leicester City football club in my constituency—

hopefully we will do better next season. He is absolutely right in what he says, because the statistics on cancer are absolutely terrible.

Around 2 million people in England are currently waiting for cancer screening tests or cancer treatment, including chemotherapy. Today, we have a published analysis, which shows that those waiting more than six weeks for diagnostic tests—some of these will be for cancer of course—have increased from 30,000 to 469,000 as a result of the lockdown. Cancer referrals are down 60%, and 1 million people are missing out on breast, bowel and cervical cancer screening. That means that about 1,400 cases of cancer are going undiagnosed every month. In March and April alone, there were at least 500 more deaths from cancer than average, and research from University College London predicts that an estimated 17,915 additional deaths of existing and newly diagnosed cancer patients could occur in England in the next 12 months. That is why resetting our NHS and getting it started again is so vital.

We also know that covid attacks the lungs, so this is an especially frightening time for those with serious asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and emphysema. One in four people with COPD have had a regular GP or hospital appointment cancelled, or both. Some 24% of people on pulmonary rehab programmes have had their classes cancelled, and 600,000 people with asthma or COPD have missed their annual review. The more we know about coronavirus, the more we know it is also a cardiovascular issue. Those with cardiovascular problems are the second biggest group of those with an underlying condition dying from covid now, yet about 30,000 elective procedures for heart disease have been deferred. Referrals to stroke units have declined, and excess stroke deaths in care homes are 39% higher than the five-year average. We are making these points not in a spirit of blame, but to re-emphasise the point that lockdown has come with huge costs and will inevitably mean that people will die or develop long-term illnesses unless there is now a plan to get the NHS up, running and working again.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): It is important that we are clear as to exactly what the Opposition are calling for today. The motion asks for “routine weekly testing”, with no ifs, ands, buts or qualifications. Yet the hon. Gentleman said in his opening remarks that he is seeking routine testing weekly if it is necessary. So are the Opposition calling for weekly testing, no matter what? Or are they calling for what he said in his opening remarks, which is the possibility of weekly testing?

Jonathan Ashworth: We are calling for weekly routine testing, as have many organisations and the Chair of the Select Committee on Health and Social Care. He penned an excellent article in *The Daily Telegraph* today, and I hope the hon. Gentleman has had time to study it, because it is superb. May I also take this moment to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, because I know he has returned to the frontline? I am sure all of us, from across the House, are grateful for everything he is doing on the frontline.

The other point I wish to make on this growing burden of unmet clinical need is that there is a social gradient in this, as always; there is a higher mortality

rate among those who are poorer and more deprived. Through all these different conditions, the poorer someone is, the more likely they are to become ill quicker and die sooner. So we need urgent action from the Government to tackle this, and we believe that regular testing of NHS staff is a key part of that.

We also need a broader plan to tackle the growing burden of sickness and unmet need. Our NHS will need more resources. We have had years of financial starvation in the NHS. The Government's funding plan of two years ago fell short of the annual 4% increase that experts said was needed before the pandemic, and the settlement of that long-term plan is surely inadequate post pandemic. We must remember that we entered this crisis after 17,000 bed cuts and years of budget cuts to capital settlements, which have left hospitals crumbling, reliant on out-of-date equipment and grappling with a £6.5 billion repair bill. NHS land and buildings have been sold off. Last year, more than 890 hectares of NHS land was put up for sale. So we will need large-scale investment in the real estate of the NHS to allow health services to reconfigure to treat covid and non-covid patients alike.

Ministers will say that the NHS will get what it needs, but the reality on the ground is very different. I am sure the Minister for Care will have studied today's *Health Service Journal* ahead of the debate and will have seen trust chief executives complaining that the cash that they were promised has not been delivered. They need this cash now if they are to restructure any of their services ahead of the winter. I hope that she will update the House on when those chief executives are going to get the cash they were promised by her Department.

We will also need real investment in rehabilitation services for those suffering from covid. The more we know about this disease, the more we know that those coming out of hospital are probably doing so with significant long-term chronic conditions. They are going to need support, be it respiratory, neuromuscular or psychological. Community health services are going to see a huge peak in demand now that many have moved out of the community health sector.

Crucially, to reset services—this comes to the point that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich put to us—we need to ensure that care can be delivered safely, which is why we believe that a mass-testing infrastructure for staff is now so important. We know that around a fifth of covid infections in hospitals are caught in hospital settings. Given the levels of significant asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission, we need a proper targeted testing strategy as well. All healthcare workers should be tested regularly—weekly—because a study from Imperial suggested that that would reduce transmission in healthcare settings by up to a third.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is eloquently outlining the challenges faced by the NHS in the wake of covid-19. Does he join me in welcoming the movement by the Scottish Government to ensure that social care workers who contract covid-19 are given additional funds on top of statutory sick pay, which is completely inadequate, in order to make sure that they do not lose out for testing positively as a result of their job?

Jonathan Ashworth: The hon. Lady makes a very important point, which affects the debate more broadly: those who test positive or are asked to isolate need to be

given the financial support to do it, and statutory sick pay in many circumstances will not be enough. There are millions of workers—2 million in this country—who do not qualify for statutory sick pay, and just saying that they can apply online for universal credit is not going to be enough.

We need more radical thinking from the Government. Other countries offer greater financial support to those who are asked to isolate. Other countries even offer hotel rooms to those who are asked to isolate if it is not appropriate for them to isolate at home because of the nature of their housing situation. The Government should be looking into those sorts of things, and I hope the Minister can respond to that.

The point I was making is that regular testing of staff, whether asymptomatic or not, is so important not only for the safety of those staff and patients, but for building confidence in the NHS more generally. The study from Imperial suggested that it would reduce transmission of covid in healthcare settings by up to a third. We believe that this is a constructive suggestion that we are putting to the Government, which they should take on board and explore. It is disappointing that they are seeking to amend the motion to completely strip that out. They are not even prepared to take it away and look into it. They just want to pass a motion congratulating themselves on their handling of the pandemic.

A testing strategy for staff and patients, as we are proposing today, is a demand supported by many across the NHS as key to restarting that NHS work.

“A clear testing strategy is now more important than ever”—says Chris Hopson from NHS Providers.

We

“need rapid testing available for all staff and patients, whether showing symptoms of COVID-19 or not”—

says Cancer Research UK.

“It's absolutely essential to regain public confidence that we are able to test our staff regularly”—says Derek Alderson of the Royal College of Surgeons. And, of course—the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) will not be surprised that I am going to quote him in this debate—it is a position shared by the former Health Secretary, now the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, who in today's *Telegraph* makes the case with far greater eloquence than I could ever muster:

“Until we minimise the risk of asymptomatic transmission by introducing weekly testing for all NHS and care staff, we are failing in a basic duty of care to the people most likely to die if they get the virus.”

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): May I put on record my thanks to the hon. Gentleman for praising me in this House for the very first time that I can remember on record?

Jonathan Ashworth: I praised him plenty of times from this Dispatch Box. The point is that this is a constructive proposal, which is not a party political point. There are clearly many people across the House who support this proposal. The right hon. Member, the former Health Secretary, also prays in aid in his article—I have it here for Members, if they have not had chance to peruse it—both Tony Blair and William Hague. So we now have a Front Bencher praising Tony Blair from the Dispatch Box—that is probably the first time it has happened on the Labour Front Bench for about 10 years.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I am delighted to see that the hon. Gentleman has improved his reading material. I congratulate him on securing the debate, and on his constructive tone. In that vein, in addition to the proposals that he is setting out, will he recognise that we are able to start unlocking the economy today because of the herculean efforts made in areas such as PPE, and the contribution made by the private healthcare sector, which has a valuable role to play as we move towards more of the elective care that we now need?

Jonathan Ashworth: I know that the hon. Gentleman is always keen to support those on his Front Bench. Indeed, he was one of the few Tory Members who actually supported Mr Cummings, tweeting:

“Another media non-story when there are so many important ‘real’ stories of this crisis”.

The Government were slow in getting PPE to the frontline, slow in ramping up testing, slow in going into lockdown, slow in getting tracing going and slow in protecting care homes. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman recognises my constructive tone, but it does not mean that I will not highlight the failing of this Government in their mishandling of many aspects of the pandemic.

I must now move on, having spent some time in this mutual love-in with the former Health Secretary. I do not want to damage his career any further, although he is probably not on the Prime Minister’s Christmas card list at the moment.

I hope that the Government will engage seriously with our suggestion of regular testing for all NHS staff, because we believe that is a crucial part of an effective test, trace and isolate strategy. The problem is that the testing and tracing is still not as effective as it should be. Of course, we recall that testing and tracing was abandoned on 12 March, and the Government have been playing catch-up ever since. At Health questions yesterday the Secretary of State could not even tell us how many people were being tested on a daily basis. I hope that the Minister will now get us that information.

Local authorities are still not receiving localised data, which is very serious. At Thursday’s press conference—the Prime Minister has now got rid of the press conferences—the Health Secretary casually announced, in response to a question, that Leicester is experiencing one of the highest spikes in the country. Nearly a week later, the local authority still does not have specific postcode data on where the people who have tested positive are. The Secretary of State announced that last Thursday, and today is Wednesday. We do not have that data because the data protection protocols have still not been agreed. This is shambolic. The Government cannot announce that there is an outbreak in a particular part of the country but then not provide the local authority with the data it needs to put in place the necessary measures.

Jim Shannon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jonathan Ashworth: Given that the hon. Gentleman is a Leicester City fan, I will.

Jim Shannon: I am always pleased to intervene on anyone, but especially a Leicester City supporter.

On systematic testing, the figures from Cancer Research UK are critical, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware. Between 21,000 and 37,000 tests would be required

every day across UK cancer services just to catch up. That underlines how important the testing is, and that is just for those who have cancer.

Jonathan Ashworth: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and that is why we have brought forward this debate. I think that we all understand why a lot of elective surgery and treatment had to be paused, but now that the lockdown is being eased, Government Ministers need to tell us how they are going to start treatment again, and how people who have been waiting for treatment, whether for cancer or for heart disease, or for a hip replacement, are going to get that important care.

We have a situation in which GPs cannot carry out tests, book tests or refer patients for tests. If someone goes to one of the Deloitte drive-through testing centres, or one of the centres where that role has been subcontracted to someone else, there is no requirement for the results to be sent back to their GP. GPs do not know who in their local area has been tested positive, because that is not going on their health records. This is shambolic. At the same time, the Government have given a £100 million contract to call centres run by Serco and Sitel, where tracers are complaining that it is chaotic and they have nothing to do. I do not know whether the Minister read the testimony, published in the *British Medical Journal*, of a clinician working in one of the call centres. They wrote:

“NHS Professionals employed us as clinical tracers, but we were recruited by Capita... Sitel provided access to the tracing applications and systems, and these all required different usernames and passwords. Synergy CRM assigned cases...CTAS captured contact tracing information, RingCentral was used for voice calls, and MaxConnect was used for storing knowledge about contacts. All of these systems were accessed through Amazon Workspace.”

This sounds a complete mess. At the same time, the chief executive of Serco is saying that this is an opportunity for it to “cement” its role in the NHS. Serco should not be an excuse for more NHS outsourcing and privatisation. Serco should be kicked out of our NHS, and local public health officials and GPs should be leading the tracing response.

And, of course, the Secretary of State has failed to deliver on his app, with months wasted and £11.8 million confirmed as down the drain by the Minister in the Lords yesterday. We are now in the dismal situation where there is an app for the Secretary of State himself, but there is not even an app for covid. You really could not make it up, Mr Deputy Speaker.

We believe that it is time for the Government to invest in public health services, to put GPs in the driving seat of testing, to give local authorities the localised data that they need and to begin a programme of routine testing of all NHS staff, whether symptomatic or not. We accept and understand that Ministers will have made mistakes throughout this crisis. It was an unprecedented pandemic, but Ministers have been slow, their response has been disorganised and the scale and nature of the pandemic, even though it was at the top of the risk register, at times underestimated.

However, Ministers can learn from their mistakes. They can take the advice of the former Health Secretary and they can take the advice of their former leader and former Foreign Secretary. They can start putting in place a programme for mass testing, starting with NHS

staff, because we need it for our national health service. Our constituents are waiting in pain, agony and distress for treatment. It is time to deliver the care they deserve, and I commend our motion, constructively, to the House.

4.31 pm

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): I beg to move amendment (a), to leave out from “medicine” to the end and add:

“and recognises the unprecedented action the Government has taken in its tireless efforts against Coronavirus to protect the NHS and save lives.”

The coronavirus pandemic is the most serious public health emergency that our nation has faced for a generation and our NHS and social care system has been well and truly on the frontline. Today, I would like to outline the work we have done to protect our NHS and social care from the threat of this invisible killer, as well as our work to safely ramp up services now that this virus is in retreat.

On protecting the NHS and social care, we have worked hard to boost the resilience of our health and care system, so it would not be overwhelmed, as we have sadly seen elsewhere across the world. A major part of this mission was our Nightingale hospitals. This was one of the most ambitious projects this country has ever seen in peacetime, building hospitals in just a matter of weeks in exhibition centres and conference venues. That hard work from so many meant that, even at the peak of the pandemic, there was more critical care capacity than there was when coronavirus first hit our shores, so our NHS was able to give outstanding critical care to everyone who needed it.

Our social care system has also been at the heart of the pandemic, and we have worked hard to give it the support it needs. In March, we announced £1.6 billion of funding for local government and £1.3 billion of funding via the NHS. In April, we announced a further £1.6 billion, as well as our comprehensive adult social care action plan. In May, we announced a £600 million infection control fund for care providers in England, which includes funding so that social care staff can be on full pay if they have to isolate due to covid. That work is bearing fruit, thanks to the dedication, expertise and compassion of care workers throughout the country.

Fifty-eight per cent. of care homes have had no reported cases of coronavirus. Every life lost in our care homes fills me with sorrow, whether it is from coronavirus or not. However, we are seeing a sustained reduction in the number of coronavirus deaths. This week’s Office for National Statistics figures for England and Wales show that the number of deaths in care homes has fallen once again—down from 536 to 360 in the last week.

This has been hard, but through this crisis we have strengthened our health and care system, and we are looking to see what lessons we can take forward as we look ahead to the winter.

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): Will the Minister let me know what steps the Government are taking to protect black, Asian and minority ethnic health and care staff?

Helen Whately: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. She makes a really important point. One of the things that I have put much thought into over recent weeks is making sure that our staff of black and

Asian minority ethnicities have the protection that they need. Both for the NHS and for the social care system, we have supported the development of risk assessment frameworks to identify the risks, with recommendations on what steps can be taken. I am working with the system to make sure that those are put into practice.

Coming back to the lessons that we are taking forward, one of the things that has been a great success has been the adoption of new technologies such as, for instance, online GP consultations. Some 99% of GP practices now have video consultation capability, while hospitals and care homes have been using tablets—the digital kind of tablet!—to keep people in touch with their families. We are also seeing new ways of working to help those on the frontline to make quicker decisions and cut red tape. We will keep driving these important reforms so that we can give everyone a better experience of health and social care.

As the Prime Minister set out yesterday in the House, we have succeeded in slowing the spread of the virus. On 11 May, 1,073 people were admitted to hospital in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with coronavirus, and by 20 June this had fallen by 74% to 283. This has reduced the pressure on the NHS so it has been able to carefully ramp up important services. Hon. Members have raised questions about two specific services in the motion, and I will address them both.

First, coronavirus has had a real impact on many people’s mental health, so there is a lot of concern about mental health services remaining open and available. Our NHS mental health services have remained open for business throughout the pandemic, using digital tools to connect people and provide ongoing support. This has proved especially effective for young people. Throughout the pandemic, we have provided £9.2 million of additional funding for mental health charities. We understand that we may see an increased demand for mental health services in the months ahead, and we are preparing for this, together with the NHS, Public Health England and other partners.

Secondly, hon. Members have raised questions about cancer services—another area where we are working hard to maintain care. For example, we have been operating surgical hubs where providers work together across local cancer services to maintain access to surgery. Although some cancer diagnostics and treatments have been rescheduled to protect vulnerable patients from having to attend hospitals, urgent and essential cancer treatments have continued. The latest data suggests that referrals are back to over 60% of the pre-pandemic levels, partly due to the NHS Help Us Help You campaign. This campaign has an important message that I am keen to repeat today. Anyone who is worried about chest pains, fears that they might be having a heart attack or a stroke, feels a lump and is worried about cancer, or is a parent concerned about their child should please come forward and seek help, as they always would. The NHS will always be there for us if we need it, just as it has been there for all of us throughout this crisis.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): On that note, will the Minister also encourage people suffering from vascular disease to seek appropriate treatment as quickly as possible?

Helen Whately: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), says to me that the hon. Lady is a very powerful campaigner on this subject. For that and for other conditions, people must absolutely come forward and get the help that they need. The NHS is there for that reason.

My third and final point is on testing. Testing for the virus and tracing how it spreads is critical to containing it as we ramp up services and ease the national lockdown. This is especially important for our NHS and social care system so that we can protect our colleagues and the people they look after. We have already built an immense national infrastructure for testing. Back in March, we had the capacity across all our testing channels to conduct fewer than 2,000 tests a day, whereas yesterday we saw more than 237,000 tests carried out. As we have built capacity, we have prioritised those in need. We started with the patients who needed a test, then expanded to NHS and social care workers and their families, then to other critical key workers, before we expanded to the wider community.

Today NHS England and NHS Improvement have written to NHS trusts and foundation trusts to outline further steps that must be taken in the NHS, including continuing to prioritise testing for all NHS staff with symptoms; extra testing of non-symptomatic staff when there is an incident, outbreak or high prevalence; and regular surveillance testing of staff which, on the advice of our chief medical officer, will be fortnightly or more frequently, depending on local or national epidemiology.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): On the testing figures that we get every day, after we take out studies that are being done through testing, along with double testing and those tests that are sent out through the post, are we not down to just about a third of the numbers that the Government claim are taking place? How can we have any confidence in what the Government say about what they are going to be doing about testing going forwards?

Helen Whately: The hon. Gentleman has talked about taking out large numbers of testing; as the Minister for Care, I have seen a huge demand from the social care sector for testing through those channels, so I would not take out other forms of testing. For example, testing through tests sent to people's homes very much counts and should be considered as part of our testing programme.

We have put a rigorous focus on testing in care homes, too. We met our target of offering tests to all staff and all residents of care homes for over-65s and those with dementia in England by 6 June. We then announced that we were able to extend the testing programme to all adult care homes. Since the launch of whole care home testing, we have provided over a million test kits to more than 9,000 care homes, and we are now able to send out more than 50,000 test kits a day. We are also running a prevalence study to get a detailed picture of coronavirus infection in care homes. Phase 2 of that study has just gone live, meaning that 10,000 residents and staff across 100 care homes will have repeat swab and antibody tests.

Tim Farron: The Minister is being generous in taking interventions. Does she agree that to keep care homes safe from the coronavirus, the testing needs to happen

regularly, not just once or even twice, and it needs to include people displaying no symptoms whatsoever? Does she also agree that, particularly for those NHS sites that are deemed to be clean and that are attempting to be covid-free, which are often the places where surgery will take place, the regular testing of staff even on a weekly basis, whether or not they display symptoms, is essential, not only, for example, to bringing back the mental health and maternity services that are currently lost to Westmorland General Hospital, but to making sure that the whole of our health service can operate as normal?

Helen Whately: I absolutely recognise the importance of repeat testing, both in the NHS and in social care. Our policies, and the testing programmes that we have in place and are launching and taking forward, are based on the clinical advice as to what the right programme to have in place is. I have set out the programme for the NHS, which is based on the advice of the chief medical officer, and we have sought advice from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies on what the repeat testing programme should be for the social care sector.

Jonathan Ashworth: I am genuinely grateful to the Minister for giving way. We are trying to engage with the Government on what we think is a constructive proposal, and not to do the usual political knockabout. I did a bit of that yesterday at Health questions, as she knows, but today I am trying to adopt a different tone—

Helen Whately: Trying.

Jonathan Ashworth: Trying, yes. Just so that we can understand this, is the Minister saying that the Government's position on weekly testing of all NHS staff, whether symptomatic or not, is that that is not an appropriate clinical intervention—as distinct from saying, “We simply do not have the testing capacity at this stage, but it is something we would like to do in future”?

Helen Whately: I am sure the hon. Gentleman was listening when I outlined the policy for the national health service. That is based on the chief medical officer's advice. I think that is pretty clear. The Opposition's position is not entirely clear, given that the hon. Gentleman started out saying “Weekly testing when necessary”, but said in his speech that it was weekly testing, whatever. On the other hand, we have been clear and the hon. Gentleman can look at the letter from NHS England and NHS Improvement to NHS trusts for further information.

I should move to the conclusion of my remarks—*[Interruption.]* Hold on, I thought we were not having any more political knockabout. We have established a national testing programme on a scale and at a pace that has never been seen before in this country. We will keep expanding that so that we can use high-quality testing to give confidence and certainty to anyone who needs it.

As I have set out today, there has been incredible action across our NHS and social care as we respond to this invisible killer. Thanks to the efforts of so many, crucial services have not been overwhelmed and all coronavirus patients who were admitted to hospital were able to receive urgent care. Because we have made such progress on slowing the spread of the virus, we

have been able to ramp up other important services as part of our plan to get Britain back on her feet. However, we cannot be complacent and we must be ready for any increase in the rate of coronavirus infection and also for the winter, when, as hon. Members know, there is a greater risk of seasonal flu. As we keep ramping up services, we will ensure that we have the surge capacity to act quickly if necessary.

I want to finish by thanking the incredible NHS and social care staff who have been on the frontline of the pandemic. There has been a collective effort from so many, including healthcare professionals who have volunteered to return, and medical students, allied healthcare profession students and nursing students who have stepped up at this important time for our country. The whole House and the whole nation are grateful to them for their heroic work.

4.46 pm

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): I record my thanks on behalf of the Scottish National party group of MPs for the work that NHS staff and care staff have done throughout these islands during the course of the pandemic to date. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that theirs has been a superhuman effort, for which some have given everything they could, including, sadly, their lives. We remember the 312 staff UK-wide who have lost their lives in the service of others, including the seven healthcare workers and the 12 social care workers in Scotland. There are no words of mine, or, I suspect, anyone else that can thank them enough for their work. We should not underestimate the toll it has taken and will continue to take in the months ahead.

Throughout this time, we have clearly seen the value of public service and our public services. The weekly clap for carers showed people's genuine gratitude and thanks to those who work to care for us and restore us to health. However, clapping is not enough. As we move towards what we generally term the new normal, I think the public would expect that new normal to be much better than the old normal that we came to take for granted.

My party is committed to the principle of fair working and does everything it can to ensure the safety and welfare of Scotland's health and social care workforce. Work is taking place to provide a range of staff wellbeing services and to share that with people working in the health and social care sector. I will give some brief examples. On 11 May, the Scottish Government launched the national wellbeing hub, PRoMIS, which was created in partnership with key agencies, professional bodies and trade unions and will support all health and social care staff in Scotland.

My party has long advocated a real living wage, and since 2011 the Scottish Government have paid the real living wage to all their staff, including NHS workers, and that has recently been extended to all adult social care workers. Scotland was the first country in the UK to announce a death-in-service provision for NHS staff for covid-19-related deaths, including for frontline permanent and fixed-term staff, NHS locums, GP locums and NHS bank staff who are not included in the coverage provided by the pension scheme. Last month, the Health Secretary in Scotland also announced a scheme for care workers in respect of sick pay and

death-in-service benefits, whereby a one-off lump sum of £60,000 will be payable to a named survivor, and that will be retrospective.

We are seeing infection rates reduce because of the way that people have heeded the strong message to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. That message has, at times, seemed to be under threat—not least when the Prime Minister, given a choice between protecting his chief adviser and the integrity of the public health messaging, inexplicably came down on the side of his chief adviser. I see the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) in his place. I am certain that he will have quite a bit to say later with which I will struggle to agree, but I want to record my respect for him saying publicly what many of his colleagues must have been saying in private, which he left the Government in order to do.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): As this debate is largely about testing, could the hon. Member perhaps get back to how the Scottish Government are doing on testing, given that they are only meeting a third of the capacity for daily testing?

Richard Thomson: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention, and I will come to that, if he is patient.

I am not privy to the scientific advice that the Prime Minister has access to, but the apparent ease with which some have been prepared to prioritise short-term economic considerations or individual liberty ahead of the need for collective wellbeing and avoiding a potentially disastrous second wave makes me glad that the rules being followed in Scotland are being decided in Scotland. I very much hope to be wrong, but the potential for a second wave of infection in parts of England seems very real right now, and I get the growing impression that if that is to be avoided, it may be more by luck than by judgment.

It is precisely because of the dedication of NHS and care staff, clear advice and the selflessness and self-discipline of millions of people that progress has been made. In Scotland, Test and Protect is fully in place, and without the boastfulness of saying that it is world-beating, it works and is in place. That has allowed Scotland to enter phase 2 of the route out of lockdown, which will allow NHS boards to begin moving out of a crisis response into the recovery phase, in line with the framework. That means that health boards will be able to start prioritising cancer surgery for those most in need of that treatment and to restart wherever possible urgent elective surgery that had previously been paused, as well as IVF treatment, following the necessary approvals. It means implementing the remobilisation plans for health boards and integrated joint boards, which deal with social care, to increase the provision in order to address the backlog of demands, to handle urgent referrals and to triage routine services. It will also see the reintroduction of some chronic disease management, including pain and diabetes services.

Inevitably, there will be a backlog to be dealt with, but due to the professionalism of the staff, I think we can have confidence that it will be dealt with as we begin the process of recovery. I know how difficult it has been for people who have had procedures or treatments postponed due to the pandemic, but the message is clear: Scotland's NHS is open, as it always has been, for

[Richard Thomson]

those who need it. Anyone with medical concerns should not hesitate to contact their GP or NHS 24 or attend hospital if their illness merits it.

Patient and staff welfare must be at the heart of the plan, as it has been through the emergency stage, and testing will be at the heart of that. The routine testing of the NHS workforce in Scotland will be extended from 8 July, as more services resume. That means that staff who work in specialist cancer services, provide long-term care for the elderly or work in residential mental health care will be offered weekly testing from 8 July. That builds on the routine testing, which is already offered to care home staff and aims to protect staff and patients by reducing the spread of the virus in hospitals and other healthcare settings. In addition, Healthcare Improvement Scotland will be resuming its inspection programmes.

We have seen the value of the public services and the ethos of public service. We have seen it in those who have helped to keep our NHS and care settings open, saving lives and providing care for those who have needed it. Many of those who have made the greatest sacrifice are those who have come here from other countries to work in our NHS and our care services. Because of economic and social circumstances, many have been at far greater risk from the virus than it was reasonable for anyone to expect, and we have particularly seen the worrying outcomes of coronavirus in the black, Asian and minority ethnic community. There is likely to be a number of intersecting factors in that, but it is important that they are properly understood and that the measures that come out of that are acted on. I am pleased to say that the Scottish Social Justice Commission will look at the figures that have come out in that respect to look at how we can change to address those issues.

In conclusion, there are things that it would be valuable for us to do. First, we need to value our public servants. It is nowhere near enough to clap: we need to care for our carers and families in life, as well as, sadly, sometimes in death. We should pay them what they are worth, provide them with the equipment that they need, show them that they are valued and give them reasons, whether financially or just in terms of plain decency, to believe that they have respect and that they are valued in what they do.

We need to value the contribution that many from our immigrant communities make to our health and care services. Getting rid of the immigration health surcharge is a very welcome step. The commitment of those workers to the NHS in the country that they now call home is not in doubt, and it is time that the Government considered in what other ways they could work to remove any doubt that there might be about our commitment to them.

Secondly, lest there be any doubt, for all the massive contribution of the private sector in overcoming supply chain challenges, it was a publicly owned, publicly operated, free-at-the-point-of-need health service and public services that rose to the challenge of caring for us in these times, often acting as the carer of last resort. That lesson has never been forgotten in Scotland. I wonder if it is time for this Government to remember that.

Thirdly, the virus has not gone away. There is no vaccine in immediate prospect. If we go too quickly, too far and too fast with easing restrictions, we risk very much undoing the good work that has been done. We need to honour the sacrifices that have been made by so many people by not rushing back to normal too soon. It would be a very bitter pill indeed if we were to do that, if we were to see a second wave and if the work done to date counted for less than it ought to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): As Members can see from the call list, this is a well subscribed debate. We will start with the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee with a six-minute limit, and every other contribution will be four minutes.

4.57 pm

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson). It is the first time I have heard him speak from the Front Bench and it was a very thoughtful contribution. I hope we hear more from him.

I thank the shadow Health Secretary for having this debate and, indeed, for mentioning my article in *The Daily Telegraph*. If I ever was on the Prime Minister's Christmas card list, that mention will be sure to get me taken off it—[Laughter.]

I particularly want to congratulate the Minister of State on leading this debate for the Government. As a veteran of many Opposition day health debates, I can say that she elicited a much calmer response from the Opposition than I ever did, and she deserves many congratulations for that.

We need to start this important debate by recognising that, as a country, we are in a transformed position because of recent changes to our response to the pandemic. We are now contacting around three quarters of the people we identify as testing positive for coronavirus and 90% of their contacts are being asked to isolate. That is the basis of South Korean test and trace, and it is incredibly important that we are in that position. I am sad in this respect that the Health Secretary is not here himself, because that would not have been possible if he had not taken the courageous decision to set the target of 100,000 tests a day at the start of April. Indeed, yesterday's announcement about the gradual easing of our national hibernation would itself not have been possible if that had not been in place, and we need to recognise that.

The challenge we now have is that we do not know where about two thirds of new infections are happening, so we cannot feed them into the test and trace process. That is a challenge, because SAGE's advice is that we ask about 80% of potential coronavirus contacts to isolate, and we are still some way off that. In fact, we are contacting about 700 people a day to get their contacts and there are about 2,500 daily new infections. If we do the maths, assuming that each person with coronavirus has about nine contacts, which is the current figure, that is up to a quarter of million people since the process started whom we would have liked to have asked to isolate but we have not been able to do so.

How do we meet that challenge? Well, the answer is to do something that the Government have already shown they are very good at, which is a dramatic

expansion of testing capacity. The city of Beijing has about a third of the population of the United Kingdom, but its daily testing capacity is nearly double ours at around 400,000 a day, and many of those tests come back within 24 hours. We look forward to the triumphant announcement next week that we are meeting the Prime Minister's target for all non-postal tests to come back within 24 hours by the end of this month, because speed matters.

If we expand our testing capacity dramatically, we can use it, for example, to deal with localised outbreaks, such as the one we have had in Ynys Môn, where my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) is doing such a fantastic job in supporting her affected constituents. We can use it at airports instead of the quarantine policy, by testing people on arrival. We can use it for high-risk groups such as taxi drivers, who are particularly at risk. Most of all, we can use it for our frontline health and care staff. If we had Beijing levels of testing in this country, we would, in addition to the testing we are currently doing, be able to test every NHS frontline worker once a week. If we got it up another 200,000, we would be able to test every frontline care worker once a week as well.

Why does that matter? It matters because, according to the evidence submitted to SAGE on 20 April, up to 25% of the coronavirus patients in our hospitals caught coronavirus in the hospital. When we add on the people who catch their infection in care homes, what we end up with is that about a third of new infections are likely to be in healthcare settings—so-called nosocomial infections, which is one of the many new words we have learned over the course of this crisis.

Jonathan Ashworth: The right hon. Gentleman is making a superb speech, and I agree with every word. I was struck by the Minister's response to me when she made the point that the Government's position is based on the advice of the chief medical officer. I would entirely understand if the Government said, "The resources are not quite there yet. We have not quite got capacity there. We need to build up capacity before we can test all the millions of NHS staff." I think everyone would have thought that a reasonable position, and we would be urging the Government to go further. However, if the advice to the Government from the CMO is not the correct clinical approach, will the right hon. Gentleman, perhaps through his chairmanship of the Health and Social Care Committee, ask the CMO whether they will provide the Committee with that advice, and could that advice be shared across the House?

Jeremy Hunt: That is a reasonable question. I will certainly take that away. In fact, the CMO is coming before the Health and Social Care Committee in a few weeks' time, and I am sure we will ask that question. My understanding is that the concern in the clinical advice is the question of false positives—people who get told that they have coronavirus when they have not. Those people might be in a very important frontline clinical role and be asked to isolate, and that might take them off very important work. To me the obvious answer is to give them a second, confirmatory test to establish whether they really do have the virus.

Weekly testing matters and is so important not only because, with around a third of new infections happening in healthcare settings, it will save a lot of patients' lives

and save the lives of frontline healthcare workers, but because it is the critical thing stopping the NHS getting back to its normal levels of activity.

Last week, the president of the Royal College of Surgeons, whom the shadow Secretary of State quoted, talked about the mountainous backlog we face in, for example, orthopaedic surgery. He said that the thing holding the NHS back is the time it is taking to set up what he calls "covid-lite" facilities, where there is a low risk of people having coronavirus. That is why testing is essential.

I do not want to take up any more time than I need to, but I want to make this point. Korea, Taiwan and Germany are all held up as examples of places that have been particularly effective in tackling coronavirus. All of them introduced test and trace, but they all did it when the virus was at an earlier stage with much lower levels of community transmission. If we want test and trace to be effective here, we need to introduce mass testing, starting with health and care staff, and we must not delay.

5.5 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, who spoke incredibly powerfully.

I would like to begin by placing on the record my thanks to the doctors, nurses and staff at Barnsley Hospital, who have been working tirelessly to keep our community safe. These have been very difficult times, and my thoughts are with families who have lost loved ones, with NHS and care staff who risk their lives every day to look after patients, and with key workers who are making huge sacrifices to keep our country running.

As a community, we have come together in the face of huge adversity. Like my neighbours in Barnsley, I have clapped for our carers. As a community and a country, we have expressed our gratitude to our NHS heroes and all our key workers, and I hope that the Government have been listening. Our applause must be translated into action.

When I met representatives of Barnsley Hospital and Public Health England, they told me that coronavirus has changed how people see care. Fewer people are going to A&E and attending regular check-ups for existing illnesses. At the same time, millions of routine operations, screening tests and treatments have been cancelled or suspended. We need a strategy to deal with the backlog in non-coronavirus care. The motion calls for a fully functioning test and trace system for NHS staff. Without it, the NHS cannot return to offering non-urgent and routine care appointments for everyone, and existing health inequalities in the UK will only get worse.

In Barnsley, winter death rates from flu and respiratory diseases are higher than the national average. I represent a former mining community with a large ageing population of ex-miners. Underlying health conditions brought on by their time down the pits have made them more vulnerable to this deadly disease. A recent survey by the British Lung Foundation, which has already been highlighted, showed that one in four people suffering from COPD has had a regular GP or hospital appointment cancelled.

[Stephanie Peacock]

Last month, 20 coalfield Labour MPs wrote to the Secretary of State, voicing the concerns of former miners who fear that if they die during this outbreak, their death certificates will make no mention of the industrial diseases that have caused them decades of ill health. We are still waiting for the Government to reply. I have heard of former miners who tested negative for covid-19 but had it recorded on their death certificate, purely because that is policy for anyone who dies in a hospital. If a death certificate does not mention a miner's underlying health condition, their grieving family will be denied the compensation they are entitled to.

Industrial diseases have cut short the lives of far too many miners over the years, so I ask one very simple thing of the Government: please change the advice to medical practitioners so that poor health prior to this outbreak is recorded on death certificates. Covid-19 is not some great leveller. It feeds off existing inequalities and it hits communities with vulnerable people hardest. That needs to change.

5.8 pm

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): Our NHS has done a remarkable job of looking after us during the covid-19 pandemic. It is entirely right that, in turn, we protect NHS staff and patients by maximising the effective use of PPE and, of course, through testing. In fact, that is a key part of getting the NHS back to tackling the many operations and treatments delayed by lockdown. I consider dealing with that backlog an even greater challenge.

The Prime Minister introduced the lockdown to protect our NHS. The Government were rightly concerned that our hospitals would be overwhelmed, as we saw happen in Italy and elsewhere at the start of the pandemic. It did not happen here. For that success, not just our NHS staff, but the Minister for Care and other Ministers deserve credit. We ramped up capacity, with former NHS workers coming back to serve. New hospitals were opened, and appropriate agreements were reached with the independent sector. This drive for increased capacity must continue.

Now that we are keeping the virus under control, we need a new national effort to clear the backlog. Led by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and spurred on by the galvanising optimism of the Prime Minister, we should back our NHS to deliver again. It is essential to act. Most of us have heard about patients who have missed treatments or had operations cancelled. Even routine and delayable elective procedures such as hip and knee replacements are crucial for patients. Cataract operations restore sight for our grandfathers and grandmothers, and cardiac operations prevent heart attacks and extend lives.

The message should be loud and clear that the NHS is open for business, but it is also important to stress that official figures have been paused. We must treat the projection that there will be 10 million people on waiting lists as just that—a projection, not fact. Too many hon. Members on the Opposition Benches are eager to hear bad news. Yet there is a challenge ahead of us. The Royal College of Surgeons is absolutely right to call for a five-year strategy to tackle the waiting list situation. There is no blame in that. Although we need swift action, there is no quick fix.

We need to look urgently at long-term recruitment. Those who have joined the NHS during this covid pandemic must be encouraged to stay. Coronavirus is also affecting the capacity of operating theatres. Diagnostics underpin the clinical activity in hospitals and the capacity for MRI and CT scans, endoscopy and laboratory tests are limiting factors on everything that follows.

Back in March, the Secretary of State was right to negotiate a deal with the independent sector, and I hope that coronavirus has ended the lazy assumption that the independent sector and the NHS cannot work in partnership, because that has been a good thing and has helped our NHS to get through this period.

Finally, the NHS needs to become more productive. The people who tell me that are NHS staff themselves. We have already seen GPs switch to virtual appointments and consultations, and this has worked. Technology is crucial, but it is only a start: the NHS can change many care pathways to become more productive; and we can accelerate the uptake of existing treatments that keep patients out of hospitals.

We can and must be ambitious for the future of our national health service, precisely because there is so much good will and its staff are more valued than ever. We must not let the public down. We must not let NHS staff down. This is an opportunity for change, and I am confident that this Government will deliver.

5.12 pm

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): The coronavirus crisis has reaffirmed what Labour has always stated: that the NHS is the jewel of our country's public services. We are beyond fortunate to have such brilliant and dedicated doctors, nurses and support staff, including cleaners, from around the world who are working for us in the health service—such as the student nurses from the University of Chester's Warrington campus who have stepped up as part of the national effort and should be commended.

I begin by paying tribute to two of those staff whose lives were tragically cut short during the pandemic, and whose loss is keenly felt by their colleagues and across our community: Andy Collier, a nurse practitioner at Hollins Park Hospital in Warrington, and Joselito Habab, known as Jo to his colleagues, a nurse at Warrington Hospital. May their memories forever be a blessing.

We have been fortunate that heroic efforts have so far ensured that the critical care bed capacity has not been overwhelmed, and I hope we are now better prepared for the threat of an additional wave this winter. Critical care capacity at Warrington Hospital is now five times the normal capacity—an extraordinary undertaking by everyone involved—but we know that routine care has suffered, as well as admissions and treatment for stroke, cancer and heart attacks. The patient transfer list for planned procedures in Warrington has grown massively, and it is estimated that it could take up to 18 months to get completely back to normal. I would like the Government to support hospital trusts and CCGs to work collaboratively on regional patient transfer lists to better manage elective care capacity and ensure that we do not keep patients waiting any longer than necessary.

We face a huge cancer diagnostic backlog of 2.4 million people waiting for cancer screening, further tests or cancer treatment, and 93% of histopathology departments are understaffed. We know that early intervention in

cancer care has a dramatic impact on health outcomes. Research by University College London and DATA-CAN, a health research hub for cancer diagnosis and treatment, suggests that there will be almost 18,000 excess cancer deaths next year.

Before the pandemic, the NHS and the social care system had significant staffing shortages. Stress levels for NHS staff were at a five-year high and only a third of staff felt that staffing levels were sufficient. Social care has one of the highest turnovers of any sector and a quarter of staff are on zero-hours contracts. A lasting consequence of covid must be more than memories of clapping; we must improve the pay and working conditions of NHS and care staff.

The mental health challenge will be an enduring problem of this covid period. In spite of Government promises, mental health is still underfunded in the UK. The King's Fund estimates that mental health problems account for 23% of the burden of disease in the United Kingdom, but addressing that still makes up only about 10% of Department of Health and Social Care spend. Alarming, Mind says that almost a quarter of people who tried to access mental health support in early June failed to get any help.

I praise the efforts of mental health staff at North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and in the voluntary sector in Warrington at an extraordinarily difficult time, but it is clear that more investment and focus is needed. Covid has affected, and will continue to affect, every part of our lives. It has forced us to change our entire way of living. Coming out of it will give us the opportunity to make changes to our society for the better. That must start with our health service.

5.16 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): At the beginning of the motion before the House, there is something with which we can all agree. As this is the first chance that I have had to speak, I put on record that the constituents of Wimbledon are served by three outstanding hospitals: St George's, St Helier and Kingston. The heroic efforts of frontline staff, and indeed all NHS staff during this period, had been extraordinary. I also thank primary care and social care staff, who have helped many in my constituency.

I read the motion carefully and listened carefully to the shadow Secretary of State. In essence, the motion seems to be about three things: first, the backlog of operations and care that need to be provided; secondly, winter preparations; and, thirdly, testing. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), the former Secretary of State and now Chair of the Select Committee, that the decision to stop track and trace at the beginning and the advice to centralise testing were wrong.

It takes courage for anyone to admit that they were wrong and to put it right, and that is what the Health Secretary did. Although we are here to talk about the need for mass testing, we should acknowledge the amount of capacity that has been put in place. Having listened to my hon. Friend the Minister for Care, I ask her to make sure that the symptomatic and asymptomatic testing initially of health and care workers, and beyond, is in place. There is obviously more to do, but her confirmation that the chief medical officer has said that we should see that on at least a fortnightly basis, if not

more regularly, is a good start. That should be welcomed across the House, because it is a huge step in the right direction.

I could talk a lot more about winter preparations, as for a little while I was in charge of trying to ensure that that happened and that it happens every year. The motion fails to recognise not only that preparations have to be made, but that, if we are to reduce the number of operations and care that people need and have not received due to covid, medium-term preparations also need to be made.

We should recognise that part of that is the building of new hospitals and the providing of new care. That should happen for local constituents across the country, but I want to talk particularly about south-west London. I find it extraordinary that part of my local political scene is the "save our hospital" campaign that comes out year after year. I have a Government I am proud to support putting £500 million of investment into a development scheme to increase the quantity and quality of care and improve access to great care, some of which would have helped during the covid crisis because there would have been a larger acute care hospital, yet my local Labour opponents are rejecting this. It seems extraordinary that we have a motion today that asks the Government to do exactly what they are doing, while at local level that preparation is being put in place for the medium term. Not only is Labour denying access to care now, but it is denying the quantity and quality of care we need for the future and increasing health inequalities by not supporting that investment.

5.20 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I start by paying tribute to all the health and social care workers, right across my constituency. They have my deeply felt thanks and gratitude.

I will concentrate on my role as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on vascular and venous disease, because I am deeply concerned by the impact covid-19 has had on people who suffer from vascular disease. I have spoken about vascular disease before. It is a killer disease that few seem to know about, despite the devastation it causes to so many lives. Between 15% and 20% of British people over 70 are affected by peripheral artery disease, which can cause painful chronic leg ulcers and is the main cause of amputations in England. As I have said previously, every hour in England someone has part of their foot removed; every two hours in England someone loses their leg.

As chair of the APPG, I have heard evidence from NHS frontline workers and patient representatives deeply concerned by the burden borne by people with vascular disease because vascular services have experienced reductions in their capacity to deliver care during the crisis. Some people with vascular disease are too frightened to seek treatment. As Mr Naseer Ahmad, the Manchester amputation reduction strategy director, says, "One of the biggest problems we face is fear." I believe the lack of a comprehensive and universal covid testing regime, combined with stories of patients who enter hospital covid-free only to contract the disease while in hospital, is driving that fear. That has inevitably led to people who otherwise would take themselves to hospital staying at home while their condition worsens. To make matters

[*Emma Hardy*]

worse, clinicians have expressed fears that many people who have had their non-urgent operations cancelled may have deteriorated since that decision was made.

Paul Bristow: Does the hon. Lady agree that for people with peripheral artery disease, it is often urgent referral that makes the difference between saving a limb and losing it? Unfortunately, during the crisis, that urgent referral to secondary care and multidisciplinary teams may not have happened. We must guard against that as we try to save limbs.

Emma Hardy: I absolutely agree. As Dr Dan Carradice, a leading consultant on this condition at Hull Royal Infirmary, says, time is ticking, and the more quickly we can deal with this, the more urgently we can save limbs. Because of the delay, we have seen over the past few months a growing wait for lower limb amputations, many of which could have been avoided with timely diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

We cannot allow this situation to continue. Patients must be confident that they can visit their hospital safely. One vital way the Government could restore trust is to have a routine weekly testing programme for NHS and social care staff, so that patients know when they enter hospital that they are not likely to contract covid-19. Every day, the number of people seeking treatment is growing. Dr Una Adderley, programme director of the national wound care strategy, has described a “tsunami of unmet need” on the horizon as certain vascular services have been deprioritised.

Of course I recognise the huge pressure the NHS is under, but I believe that more can be achieved for people with vascular disease if they are given the focus they need. We need to create safe, covid-19-negative pathways and services for vascular disease in the community and in hospitals. I recognise that these are not straight-forward tasks, and as chair of the all-party group I will be writing to the Secretary of State for further details on exactly how this could be achieved. We also need a comprehensive approach to vascular disease in the NHS long-term plan, because there are huge regional inequalities, with patients in Hull being 46% more likely to need a major amputation than the England average. As I said before, time is tissue, so I look forward to getting a date in the diary for the Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), to visit Hull, as he promised in a previous debate—but of course, only when it is safe to do so.

I note that the Government wish to change the wording of the motion away from the need for a weekly testing programme to instead celebrating and recognising their own efforts. With the greatest of respect to the Government, the highest and most well regarded praise tends not to be written by oneself. I would encourage them to seek to earn that praise rather than pen their own, and one way in which they could do that would be to prioritise the hundreds of thousands of patients suffering from vascular disease in the UK.

5.25 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate. Because the motion mentions cancer referrals, I hope that it is in order to put on record the best wishes—and, I am sure, the love—of

everyone in the House for our hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), who has bravely announced on Twitter today that she has been diagnosed with breast cancer. It has been caught early, and she is getting excellent treatment from her local health board, and I think all Members on both sides of the House know what a fighter she is. I know that she will be back in her place very soon. Tracey was my proxy when I was on paternity leave, and I know that, because she has a proxy under the current system, she will continue to represent her constituents to the absolute best of her ability. We wish her, and her partner and young son, the best in these difficult times.

I also want to use this debate as an opportunity to put on record my thanks for the outstanding work done by the nurses, doctors and staff at Dr Gray’s Hospital in Moray, in our GP surgeries across the area and also in our care homes. For a large part of this pandemic, our care home staff have been the unsung heroes. Yes, there was a focus on the NHS at the outset of the pandemic, but right from the off, our care home staff were looking after residents who, very early on, had stopped seeing friends and relatives. Going above their own caring duties, the staff also had to replicate a lot of the contact that the residents had with the outside world, and I really want to pay tribute to all the care home staff in Moray and across the country.

Sticking with Moray for one more moment, I am grateful to use the opportunity of today’s debate to confirm that the update on Moray’s health and social care today once again gave us the positive news that, in the past seven days since the last update, there had been no covid-related deaths in Moray and that the total remained at 86. We are making positive progress. That progress is possible because of the Government support that has been given at UK and Scottish level, but ultimately it is because of the way in which the public have responded to this crisis, and we should never forget what they have done.

I want to focus briefly on the remarks made by the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson). He made a very good speech, but he danced around the edge of some of the issues that I was hoping he would mention. I noted that, in *The Herald* in Scotland yesterday, there was an opinion piece that said that there was no basis for the argument that Scotland had handled this crisis any better. Anyone listening to the hon. Gentleman—or indeed any SNP representative in this place or at Holyrood—would think that the crisis had been handled so much better there than in any other part of the United Kingdom. However, as that opinion piece in *The Herald* said, there is no real evidence to support that.

When I intervened and asked the hon. Gentleman what he felt about his Government’s record on testing, he did not really answer my question. Given that we have the capacity for 15,500 tests every day in Scotland, why are the Scottish Government overseeing only about a third of those tests? By the end of this month, if the Scottish Government had matched testing to capacity, they would have done 500,000 more tests. Testing is an important element as we come out of the pandemic and open up our businesses, our communities and our hospitality sector, which is seriously concerned about the announcements from the Scottish Government that it is not able to reopen as quickly as in other parts the United Kingdom. The fact is that we have that capacity

at our fingertips but it is not being used. I think the Scottish Government should go away and reconsider, and try to use as many tests as they can to help us to get out of this.

In the last few seconds remaining, I want to put on record my thanks for what is being done by UK Government Ministers and Ministers across every devolved nation. This is a time when we all have to pull together, and I think we are seeing that. We need to continue to do that and I think today's debate has allowed us a further opportunity to do so.

5.29 pm

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): I, too, would like to thank and praise the efforts of all frontline workers, in particular from the NHS and local government, on test and trace, and throughout the coronavirus epidemic.

It has now become clear that the Government were quite slow to implement testing for everyone, including NHS workers. Thankfully, the teaching hospitals in Sheffield were a lot quicker to provide tests for their staff—nearly 10 days before it was recommended. They used their in-house expertise to provide tests early to keep health workers on the frontline before the spike in the pandemic. It is not enough for the Government to leave that to individual hospitals. We need Ministers to properly resource a national routine testing regime for all NHS workers that can keep staff safe, keep patients safe, prevent the spread of infection, keep health workers and support staff at work, and get the NHS back on track.

There is a stark difference between how my teaching hospital in Sheffield approached its use of in-house expertise and the Government's wider approach to testing and tracking. We have heard about the complicated system involving multiple private companies. It is still unclear to me why Serco was given the track and trace contract. It has no expertise in this area, has already had to apologise for breaching data protection rules and was previously fined £1 million for failures to deliver on other contracts.

Rather than private companies with little or no medical and testing experience, we should learn from the healthcare professionals and public health experts who are working hard to respond to local public health emergencies. That means ensuring realtime testing data is shared with public health directors—a frustration that I know is felt up and down the country—or whoever, whether GPs or local authorities, is responsible for dealing with local outbreak responses. It means supporting local campaigns, charities and mutual aid groups to provide soft intelligence to help to monitor outbreaks.

That also means thinking through the needs of individual communities, such as those that do not have English as their first language. The testing and tracking system is vital and a huge part of our national response to the covid-19 crisis, but we also need clearly communicated social distancing measures, workplace health and safety audits, and robust supply lines of PPE. The Government have been slow to act and we now need to ensure that the tracking system we put in place is informed by expert opinion, properly integrated with response teams on the ground and sensitive to the needs of communities.

On care homes, we have seen outbreaks in one in three, which is shocking. When we found out that earlier on in the crisis that there was a cap on tests in

care homes, we could see that managers may have been placed in the difficult position of choosing between testing residents and staff. Testing of patients discharged to care homes must not be forgotten. We must make sure that that remains in place for the long term.

We need to make sure that we encourage those who are about to become parents to access maternity services if they have any concerns about a reduction in movement. We have seen a sad and desperately tragic increase in stillborn births and in complications in births, so that is really very important. Finally, we need to make sure there is not a bottleneck in diagnosis and that the longer-term implications of covid-19, such as fibrosis, are in the horizon planning too.

5.34 pm

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to put on record my thanks to everyone who works in the NHS and the social care sector in Worcestershire, as well as all those involved in gold command who have been able to bring together the work of the county councils and the district council, and all the critical workers who have kept the county going over the past three months. It is remarkable how well prepared they were and how able they were to cope with the peak without ever running anywhere near being overwhelmed in the system.

This debate allows me to put on record my condolences to the family of Julie Omar, a very well regarded nurse who lived in Malvern. In April she very sadly passed away at home with symptoms of covid-19. From the outpouring from the community and those with whom she worked at Redditch Hospital, it was clear that she was an absolutely remarkable woman. I did not know her personally, but clearly no words will ever be able to make up for the loss of such a remarkable individual. I hope that, by paying tribute to her work here in Parliament, it will help her family to come to terms with their loss.

This afternoon, I want to speak about innovation in three key areas: innovation in organisation; innovation in treatment; and innovation in testing. Clearly, there has been massive innovation in all three areas throughout this crisis.

First, on the organisational side, it has been amazing to see not only the new Nightingale hospitals being built, but so many GPs—I think almost all of them now—able to deliver tele-medicine. The innovation has allowed us to ramp up the ability to deal with such high volumes. There was also the appointment of Lord Deighton, who has been able to make such a remarkable difference through innovation in terms of the PPE supply chain. It is really exceptional how that has been dealt with. I would like to request that we put someone of that calibre in charge of planning how we ramp up and innovate organisationally to deal with the backlog of more routine treatments that are needed for so many of my constituents now.

Secondly, on innovation in treatment, I am very proud that it has been UK scientists who have discovered the important role that dexamethasone can play in treatment. It is such a cheap treatment and will, I think, be a help all around the world where the infection still runs rampant. May I also suggest an improvement in terms of treatment here? For those who have been asked through NHS 111 to stay at home with symptoms

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

of covid-19, would it be possible to start to send oxygen saturation monitors to their home to ensure that they do not present at hospital far too late, when they are beyond treatment?

Finally, on innovation in testing, which is the subject of today's debate, can we have an update from the Minister on testing, which has risen remarkably from five a day to 200,000 a day, but which needs to find other innovations in terms of speed and methods. The saliva testing pilot in Southampton, for example, would enable our airline industry to get going again.

5.37 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I join Members from across the House in paying tribute to our NHS and care workers, who have made immense sacrifices and put themselves at great risk on behalf of all of us. We owe them a huge debt of thanks. I mean all the staff in health and social care, including clinical staff, allied healthcare professionals, cleaners, porters, administrators and managers. Whatever their role, we salute them and thank them. However, time and again, they have said to us, "Don't clap for us every week. Give us the PPE and the testing that we need to stay safe on the frontline." Sadly, I do not have time today to talk about PPE, and the thrust of the motion is on testing. I would just say that I was surprised to hear the Minister's comments about care homes and all the testing that has been made available in care homes. The National Audit Office report, published earlier this month, said that 25,000 patients were discharged from hospitals into care homes at the height of the pandemic. We know that since the start of the pandemic close to 14,000 people have died in care homes in England from covid-related causes, yet it took until 8 June to offer tests to care home staff and residents, and even then that did not include learning disability care homes. The case for a full independent public inquiry is, frankly, unquestionable.

There remain issues with testing. I fully agree with the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), who is no longer in his place, that we need a huge further scale-up of testing, including weekly or regular testing of health and social care staff. That needs to be part of a robust test, trace and isolate regime, which, sadly, as health leaders and the World Health Organisation have said, is still lacking. We have seen the app in disarray and we know that local authorities still do not have the data and the resources they need to trace effectively. Health leaders have called today for a "lessons learned" exercise so that we are ready for a second surge; I urge the Government to heed their advice and do that exercise quickly so that we are ready.

I wish to use the time I have remaining to talk about mental health, which is referred to specifically in the motion, with regard to two groups: frontline workers and children and young people, who are also referred to in the motion. From talking to trust leaders and leaders in the social care sector, we know that staff are exhausted and traumatised. There is concern about the potential for post-traumatic stress disorder further down the line. We need to see a big package of measures to support our frontline workers. I welcome the fact that a helpline has been put in place. It needs to be available 24/7 to health and social care staff. We also need to look at

some of the measures that the military have in place to support staff, with fast-track access to mental health services and standardised access to mental health services up and down the country. That does not currently exist for our frontline health and careworkers.

As children and young people have been out of formal education for many months and away from their friends, there is likely to be an explosion in the need for mental health services for children and young people. Waiting times were already huge—in some cases six months for my constituents. We need a detailed, cross-departmental Government plan that goes well beyond what the NHS long-term plan has in place, to support our children and young people. They are our future, the recovery will be built on their backs and they need to flourish.

5.41 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): We now know that coronavirus is not the great leveller. We know that it exacerbates social difference and the problems of health and social inequality. If someone is a black doctor, a black nurse, a black cleaner, a black paramedic or a black person in social care, they are more likely to contract and die of coronavirus than their white counterparts. We also know that if someone is a black man not in the health service, they are more likely to die from coronavirus. If someone is a black woman, they are more likely to die than their white counterparts. If they are taken to hospital, they are more likely to enter intensive care.

We know that it is not fair—it is not a balanced foundation. The Government have pledged to look into the issue with an inquiry, yet in nine days' time, the NHS in my area intends to agree a plan that will move services away from black and ethnic minority areas to those that are whiter and more wealthy. When asked, "How can you do this without looking at coronavirus and its impact on the NHS?", they said, "Okay, we'll do the research, but we are not telling you about it." Under pressure and embarrassment, they have produced their research: four pages, and not one word about the impact of coronavirus on black or ethnic minorities. There is no defence of their decision to take services away and no acknowledgement of the problem that exists. That is without even considering the fact that the black community in my constituency and around me in south-west London are more likely to have diabetes and hypertension, and black women are five times more likely to die in childbirth.

Do black lives matter? Perhaps we have to prove that they do. I ask the Minister directly: will she intervene to say that, yes, black lives matter, and that we need more than four pages that do not even give any acknowledgement of the problem that exists for black and ethnic minority people in our country and in my bit of south-west London?

5.44 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I want to begin by thanking all the staff at Leighton Hospital, which serves my constituents in Crewe and Nantwich, who were so welcoming to me during my time on the wards recently. Because I am an MP and because I have a public profile, I have received a lot of thanks for going back, when actually the real thanks and gratitude should go to those staff who are there day in, day out full-time.

I know coronavirus presented a very real risk that was not an ordinary part of the job, but one of my key aims in this place is to get across to all Members of this House that the day-to-day stresses many face working in public services are there all the time. NHS staff often go above and beyond, and take decisions and carry a weight of responsibility that would be quite alien to most people. I want to use the recognition of the incredible work of NHS staff at this time to highlight the need to continue with this recognition going forward. We are at risk of finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff, as the rest of our modern workforce sees shifts towards a better work-life balance and flexibility in their employment.

We know that testing and tracing is key to the battle against coronavirus. We also know that health and social care settings are going to be the area that will need particular attention. In fact, I saw during my brief time back treating patients that, as services begin to look more like they did before coronavirus, the challenge for health and social care providers will increase in some ways. For a period, the task was clear and focused. Almost everything being done was geared towards treating coronavirus patients and keeping as many people as possible safe. Now, individual staff and managers need to weave steps to contain coronavirus throughout the increasing return of normal services. Organising wards into covid and non-covid is actually a simpler way of managing the flow of patients when that is the primary and overriding concern. When we reach the point of needing to be vigilant and to isolate individual patients among the delivery of normal services, that presents unique challenges of its own.

It is important that, wherever possible, normal services do return, because we know there is increasing evidence that diagnoses have been missed or delayed. This was an unfortunate inevitability of the clear and necessary message to the public about being careful in making use of the NHS at the height of the pandemic. So we must see how we can target messages. There is an increasing tendency to rely on social media online advertising for our public health messaging, and we need to use media that are going to best reach the at-risk groups for not seeking health advice.

On delivering rapid and ongoing testing, I feel compelled to challenge the narrative that the Secretary of State in Whitehall can click his fingers and instigate a flawless testing regime across the many thousands of individual wards, units, GP practices, treatment centres, care homes and in-home care providers that make up our health and social care sector. Clearly, the long time in opposition and the loss of so many previous Labour Secretaries of State for Health from their Benches have led to amnesia among the Opposition about the reality of instituting national approaches uniformly in the NHS. Any guidance is sent to hundreds of thousands of staff and is interpreted by them individually and locally by their managers.

Weekly testing is not a magic bullet. We must not let there be any distraction from the key and overriding concern that keeping outbreaks contained is most importantly about individual NHS staff and patients maintaining social distancing as much as possible within healthcare settings, because without that, even with regular testing, we will lose groups of staff from frontline services at times when we cannot afford to do so. We must not underestimate the enormous task a weekly testing regime would place on the NHS. There needs to

be clear evidence for its benefits over other approaches. I note that the British Medical Association and others have said the same thing—that actually the evidence base for a mandatory weekly approach is not necessarily there. I hope, when responding, the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan), will spell out exactly what evidence they feel they have that means weekly testing is the one and only way to do it.

5.48 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): This virus has cruelly taken so many lives, and so many of us have lost friends, relatives, neighbours and loved ones across our country. We pay tribute to all those NHS workers and careworkers and others in our country who have paid the ultimate price to protect people.

That is why it is so important that we focus on the areas where we can act to protect our NHS and key workers and that we ensure there are proper, effective and efficient ways of providing them with the testing that is required, so that they do not have to continue with some of the failures that they had to work within: there was a lack of PPE at the beginning of this crisis and they had to make incredibly difficult decisions and work under incredible pressure during the beginning of the crisis. One senior Asian doctor said to me at the beginning of the crisis in my constituency, “We are going to be collateral damage because of some of the things this Government are doing.” We have to make sure we learn quickly and protect people. I hope that Ministers will look at where the mistakes have been made and make sure we learn fast and provide the testing, so that NHS and careworkers do not have to put themselves, and their colleagues, patients and families, at risk by not knowing the results of tests quickly.

We also know about the high death toll among BAME NHS and care workers, and the Government’s own inquiry has highlighted the wider inequalities that my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) talked about. We know about the different kinds of family structures—intergenerational families—among BAME health staff, those with higher health inequalities and health risks, which means they face additional challenges. The risk assessments are therefore crucial, and testing falls within that framework. It is vital that we take action and the Government heed the advice about testing. Since the end of March, excess deaths have increased by 44% nationally, but the figure for care homes is much higher, at 93%. That means 27,000 more people have died in care homes than would normally be the case at this time of the year, and that is a scandalously high number. If there is one thing we can do, it is make sure that care workers, who are there to protect those in care homes, are given the testing kits and that the testing is done for them quickly, because they faced considerable neglect at the beginning of this crisis.

A few weeks ago, I asked the Health Secretary, in the Chamber, about providing testing in acute settings. He did not have an answer, but he said he would write to me. Despite numerous reminders, via social media and in writing, I still have not been given an answer, and I hope that the Minister here today can respond to that point about acute settings in hospitals, because it really concerns people in the NHS.

[*Rushanara Ali*]

In conclusion, we need to make sure that we learn the lessons quickly, because the risk of a second wave is grave and real. We have to work together to act, and I hope that the Government will therefore heed the advice and ensure that the testing is provided within the timeframe necessary to protect people in the NHS and the care service.

5.52 pm

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): First, I wish to pay tribute to the work of all our NHS and care staff in Runnymede and Weybridge—thank you. The pandemic has affected us all and the response to it has been from all quarters. NHS leaders such as the NHS Confederation have said that we need “Reset, not just recovery”. The response to this pandemic gives us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build back better.

This motion invites us to look to at the future, but in doing so we need to look at the big picture. The lockdown has had a huge impact on lives and livelihoods; it has damaged our economy. The health of our nation is its economy. People often speak about health and the economy as separate issues, but they are not. Be in no doubt: poverty is just as deadly as any coronavirus, but its effects can be slow and silent. Almost every disease is highly associated with poverty and socioeconomic deprivation—I am talking about diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, strokes, mental illness, and drug and alcohol addiction—with early childhood experiences laying down health risks that play out over a lifetime. As the economy suffers with lack of opportunities and jobs, poverty and socioeconomic deprivation worsen, and, as a result, so does the health of the nation—it just takes much longer to see the effect.

However, that future is by no means inevitable and to avoid it we must reset, not merely recover. Today we need an immense public health response to prevent the illnesses that are caused by this crisis but which will be detected only in years to come. Our response must come from all quarters of government, impacting all society. A few examples are cutting air pollution from our aeroplanes and motorways such as the M25, preventing lung diseases and protecting our planet; protecting green space so that people can exercise, and reduce and prevent childhood and adult obesity; and early interventions in schools preventing adult mental illness. The best example I can give of joined-up working is meals on wheels—a lifeline to many but also preventing malnutrition and illness in older people. You see, adult social care and related support is a public health measure. This is an area that we must take forward and fix.

None of the areas I have mentioned fall directly under the NHS, but all have a profound public health impact on disease, and ultimately a profound impact on the care the NHS needs to offer. We cannot look at the issue of healthcare as we do today and limit it to the NHS. We have to see healthcare as embedded in all our communities and linked to all our other policies as diverse as infrastructure, education and local planning. Only through this can we meet the challenges that healthcare faces, and not purely the challenges that we face from covid. As we reset and restart the NHS, now is the time to unleash it—to unleash healthcare—from its silo.

5.55 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I start by paying tribute to all the amazing NHS and social care staff who have continued working throughout this crisis, putting themselves and their loved ones at risk. Sadly, we know that at least 300 NHS and social care staff have died from covid-19. Although we have stopped clapping every Thursday, we should not forget the sacrifice and the contribution that they have made to protect us all throughout this crisis. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my constituent Esther Akinsanya, a nurse who died from covid.

Covid-19 has put the NHS under unprecedented strain at a time when demand for health and care services was already at an all-time high. Millions of operations, treatments and appointments have been cancelled. One constituent, a member of the Association of Disabled People, told me that they had had 17 appointments postponed until 2021 and that the impacts on their long-term health would be detrimental. Another constituent, from Bexley, contacted me concerned that their routine cancer check-up had been cancelled and they had not been informed of when it would be rescheduled. The Government’s slow response on testing and PPE has put at risk not just thousands of NHS and social care staff but members of the public who have had to have their appointments cancelled.

It is essential that our NHS services can resume safely, but for this to happen we need regional testing for NHS and social care staff. We need a plan to test, trace and isolate people with suspected covid-19, and access to adequate PPE, including preparation for the potential for a second spike in the virus.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech and I thank her for the points that she makes. I would like particularly to highlight the issue that my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition pointed out so eloquently at PMQs today—that we simply do not have a robust enough system at the moment and we really do need to advance this rapidly if we are to avoid the risk of a second spike.

Abena Oppong-Asare: My hon. Friend makes a very strong point with which I completely agree.

The organisation EveryDoctor, which has been representing doctors throughout the crisis, has reported that between mid-April and the end of May, 42% of the UK doctors it surveyed did not have access to adequate PPE. The Government have failed NHS and social care staff by failing to implement PPE guidelines in line with those from the World Health Organisation. Over a month into the crisis, NHS staff were failing to be provided with long-sleeved gowns, which were deemed essential by the World Health Organisation. We have heard these concerns from multiple organisations and from NHS and social care staff at first hand. We cannot allow a lack of PPE and testing to be a contributing factor in the cancellation of any more appointments going forward. With the risk of a second spike in the virus, we must put practical measures in place to urgently protect staff and patients.

NHS trust leaders have asked the Government to provide the following: first, external testing support, and details on when it will be available; secondly, clarity

on the turnaround time for processing test results—the turnaround time for some health and care providers is currently three to seven days—and finally, clarification on whether testing capacity is being made available to support a range of services to recommence, or whether certain services are being given priority.

Last week, during a meeting of the Select Committee on Housing, Communities and Local Government, I asked whether the problems with the contact tracing app first reported during the testing stage on the Isle of Wight had been rectified, but I did not get an answer. Will the Government now give NHS and social care staff the answers and support they need so that long-overdue services can resume and staff can be reassured that all available measures to protect their wellbeing and that of their patients have been taken?

6 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): As other Members have said this afternoon, all through this crisis the staff across the health and care system, whether NHS staff or those working in the private sector, have made huge efforts and sacrifices to look after people who need their help. I therefore welcome this opportunity to pay tribute to them, and to honour those who have given their lives while fighting to save others. A huge number of people in Meon Valley have contributed to the response to covid-19, working in our hospitals and care homes, or by providing support to neighbours and relatives, alongside other key workers.

The motion states that at least 312 people working across the NHS and social care have died during the outbreak, but I think it is important to get another analysis, such as the one that the Office for National Statistics released in May, which covers England and Wales. I realise that there have been different approaches to collecting data across the devolved Governments, so I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will press them to produce similarly definitive data so that we can make informed judgments about the effectiveness of measures over time, and the risks to those in minority communities working in the NHS and in care homes. Every death caused by this illness is a tragedy for a family, and for friends and colleagues, and I feel their loss.

The motion mentions preparedness for the coming winter, when we may need to protect our NHS again, and that means protecting those who work for it. We need to establish and maintain routine testing for staff in all areas of healthcare, which I hope will become a simpler process if the trial currently underway in Southampton, based on saliva samples, gives positive results.

However, although the burden of covid is easing, there is a risk that we will see a surge in demand for health services unrelated to it, as the diagnosis of other conditions has been suppressed during the outbreak. I know that GPs and hospital staff are anxious to get back to normal and have been contacting patients. Already the figures show an average reduction of 33% in the use of the emergency departments at my three local hospitals, in Winchester, Southampton and Portsmouth, so people need to know that the NHS is open for business.

It is vital that staff get an opportunity to recover. Most have been working non-stop since January, and they need a break. If we do see a second wave this winter, we must be ready to deal with it effectively and properly from the outset. The last few months have been deeply traumatic for health and care staff, and I urge the

Government to ensure that all staff who need it get mental health support. I welcome the round-the-clock mental health support line, but I hope that every care setting has procedures in place to help colleagues. We also know that the period of confinement has been very difficult for the many people with mental health needs. We talk about parity of esteem for mental health, and this is the time to prove that it actually gets parity.

Lastly, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and those in his Department, who, like all key workers, have not stopped and have been quick to respond to events and to us as MPs. This has been an unprecedented coronavirus for this country. We have put in place many measures very quickly. I thank everyone who has been part of that, on behalf of my constituents in Meon Valley. I am confident that we are much better prepared for the future.

6.4 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is a great honour to speak in this important debate on testing for NHS and social care staff. I would like to take this opportunity to put on record the boundless thanks of the people of Witney and West Oxfordshire for everything that social care staff and the NHS have done to care for them throughout this crisis. I know that their gratitude is profound and will never be forgotten.

We have now performed more coronavirus tests than any country in Europe, except for Russia. Given the point we started from and the challenges we have had to overcome, that is a significant accomplishment. We have developed a world-leading diagnostics industry virtually from scratch in a matter of months. That extraordinary achievement is a huge credit to the Government and to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. If we can put the politics to one side for a minute, it is a shining example of what we can do in this country when we all pull together.

It is absolutely right that NHS and social care staff are prioritised for testing. They are on the frontline of the fight against the pandemic, and they should be at the front of the queue when it comes to testing as well. I welcome the fact that we are now in a position where any care worker who needs a coronavirus test can apply for a priority test, and there is not a restriction on the number of tests they can take, but I want to look at how we can do better for them.

We have only been able to expand our testing capacity so significantly and rapidly thanks to the collaboration of the NHS and expert healthcare providers in the private sector. One of the main lessons of this pandemic has been that, during a time of crisis, ideological questions in the realm of healthcare have been put to one side. The priority is ensuring that testing equipment is acquired, PPE is procured and ventilators are produced. That involves teamwork from the private and public sector, and I am pleased that testing is just one of a number of areas where that has borne fruit.

We need to look at what we can do in the future. We need to look at whether there is more that Public Health England, which is operationally independent of Government, could have done to sponsor and to bring on that partnership at an earlier stage. We could look at Germany, which is very good at this aspect of diagnostics and that partnership model, which is one reason why it has done so well during this crisis.

[*Robert Courts*]

I would like to spend a few moments talking about one of the major employers in my constituency: Abbott. Its diabetes operation is in Witney, where it manufactures FreeStyle Libre diabetes devices, which are life-changing, and I have spoken about them in the House before. Abbott is at the forefront of the nation's testing regime, albeit its diagnostics section is in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). Abbott has developed a coronavirus antibody test with a specificity and sensitivity of greater than 99%. I had a brilliant call to hear about that, and I am delighted that PHE has now assessed and approved it. The Government have rightly increased their investment in that test and signed a contract to provide over 10 million antibody tests in the coming months.

Antibody testing is not a silver bullet. There is much more work that we need to do. We do not know whether someone acquires resistance to coronavirus once they have had it and recovered, and we do not know how long any resistance will last, but our immunological research is world-leading. I would like to stress that we would not be in this position without the efforts of Abbott, which is an American private healthcare company. We should not view the relationship between the NHS and private healthcare as an adversarial one; it is a collaborative one.

6.8 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): As someone who has worked in the NHS as a physiotherapist for 32 years, I am proud to speak in this important debate on the heroic efforts of NHS staff throughout the covid-19 crisis. While I miss my former colleagues, I now have the opportunity to sing their praises from these Benches and defend the NHS whenever possible.

We come together at a difficult time for our nation, as we continue to grapple with the effects of covid-19 and the havoc and devastation it has brought to our country and to so many people in it, in Newport West and right across the United Kingdom. We mourn with all those who have lost a loved one. We remember all those who have lost their life, and we can and should in this debate today commit ourselves to doing whatever we can to prevent further loss of life now and in the future.

In making that commitment, I would like to pay tribute to all those working in our NHS in Newport West, in Wales and up and down the UK. As we approach the 72nd birthday of the NHS, to those workers I say: thank you for your compassion and sacrifice. Thank you for always going the extra mile, and thank you for standing firm in the wake of years of Tory austerity. Perhaps one of the best ways to say thank you is to ensure that NHS workers across the board get a decent pay rise. Like many other Members across the House, I have received numerous emails from constituents asking me to obtain a pay rise for all NHS workers. I point out to the Secretary of State that the weekly clapping on a Thursday night was great, but a much more useful thank you would be the delivery of a decent pay rise to ensure that those on the lowest pay in the NHS can be lifted out of poverty. Please remember that when negotiations begin for our next round of the NHS pay talks.

Newport is one of the most diverse parts of Wales and I am proud of our city and its diversity. It is a matter of deep regret, however, that our cherished diversity

has seen us on the frontline in the fight against the devastating impact of the coronavirus on black and minority ethnic communities. A report commissioned by the Welsh Labour Government under the First Minister was published on Monday, and it calls rightly for action to tackle the structural and systemic racism that may have contributed to the higher-than-average BME death rate. I welcome the First Minister's commitment that this is a priority for him and his Government, and I assure my constituents that it is a priority for me and my colleague Jayne Bryant, who represents our community in the national Parliament of Wales, too.

A few weeks ago, a new comprehensive risk assessment was launched by the Welsh Labour Government to support people from BME backgrounds in the NHS and social care in Wales. I hope that the Minister, in winding up, will outline what plans there are to do the same thing in England. This is important, particularly when we reflect on the fact that the first 10 doctors to die in the UK from covid-19 were from BME backgrounds.

I note that the Wales TUC has made it clear that the pandemic is hitting people who are poorer harder and that language barriers in our community have impacted on the speed at which information is being fed to certain communities, so there is work for us all to do here. Members across the House and, importantly, our constituents will know that the coronavirus pandemic is putting the NHS under an unprecedented strain at a time when demand for health and care services was already at an all-time high.

Despite these extraordinary pressures, the NHS in all parts of the UK has achieved an extraordinary amount over the last few months. In 1948, Nye Bevan noted that the NHS must meet everyone's needs, be free at the point of delivery and be based on clinical need, not the ability to pay. That is our collective mission and that will be my focus now and into the future.

6.12 pm

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): I had always known that I was very lucky to be the MP for North Devon and, in their response to the pandemic, I have nothing but humble words to say for the people of North Devon and the surrounding areas. We have been spared a large amount of the pandemic, fortunately—with regards to the actual virus—but our response was still there. That is not to take away from anyone who has lost loved ones during this time; my thoughts and prayers are with them all.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the health staff in North Devon and the exemplary leadership that has been shown, particularly by our director of public health, Dr Virginia Pearson, the clinical commissioning group, our NHS trust and the incredible team at the North Devon District Hospital, which is the smallest mainland hospital—small but perfectly formed—who, during this pandemic, looked after one patient with the virus for a full 75 days in intensive care before enabling them to go back home again. I thank all the teams there. We have learnt that when we work together, we can really do things well, and letting people focus on what they are good at has enabled some great outcomes in North Devon. I thank my care home staff, the social care staff, and particularly Natasha Koerner, who has led, motivated and looked after those teams throughout the pandemic.

In addition, the mental health of staff has been a concern throughout this, and I am very fortunate in my constituency to have a remarkable woman, Michaela Willis, who, in the first few weeks of the pandemic, phoned me to say that she used to run the National Bereavement Partnership and she was thinking that she would like to come out of retirement and reform it. I am very proud that that national initiative comes from this tiny village in North Devon and is there for all of us and staff right across the health service to phone in to and, I hope, to find some comfort, some way forward and help at this very difficult time.

While thinking about people who have taken extraordinary steps perhaps beyond their normal role, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Applegate and its chief executive Stuart Brocklehurst, who at the start of the pandemic recognised that PPE might be a concern. He has set up a non-commercial covid-19 hub, which is nationally shipping PPE behind the frontline, not straight into the NHS. He has helped those small new producers of PPE in the UK and is matching them with supply. Last week alone, his hub shipped 30 million items of PPE. I thank him for this step behind the fantastic efforts of our health team and Lord Deighton to ensure that our PPE response was great.

As we consider a second wave, which we hope we will not see, I am delighted that plans in North Devon are already well under way. As the MP, I have been briefed, our hospital is prepared and our Nightingale is still under construction but almost finished. I say a massive thank you to the team here and also to everyone in North Devon at this difficult time.

6.15 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I rise to speak in this important debate as a co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on adult social care. I pay tribute to everyone working in social care throughout the coronavirus pandemic along with staff in our amazing NHS. They have been on the frontline of a pandemic that has taken a brutal toll on our most vulnerable residents and on many staff.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, a working group of the APPG, drawn from members across the social care sector, has held a virtual meeting every week. Those meetings have been an invaluable opportunity to understand exactly how harrowing the crisis has been for the social care sector and how forgotten and ignored many of those who have striven to care for our most vulnerable residents have felt. It has also been a useful reality check on the mismatch between what the Government have claimed about support for the care sector and the situation on the ground.

Week after week, members of the APPG working group raised the difficulties they found in obtaining PPE in the quantity and to the specification needed. Week after week, they reported the lack of access to testing. Members of the working group who manage their own care at home have reported almost total abandonment by the Government in the early weeks of the crisis—no PPE, no guidance, no testing and often no care as the risks of coronavirus infection were too high for home care to be delivered. All that was happening while the coronavirus death toll in the care sector spiralled higher and higher. The part of our society with the greatest vulnerability has suffered the greatest losses

from the pandemic. For months now, the Government have failed to put in place the key provision the care sector needs to keep its residents safe: frequent, comprehensive, regular testing.

At the beginning of the crisis, no testing was available to care homes, even for symptomatic residents. We know that hospital patients were discharged into care homes without confirmed coronavirus status and that some of them took the infection back with them into homes that were previously coronavirus-free. When testing centres were opened, they were situated in inaccessible locations and had to be accessed in a private car, putting testing out of reach for thousands of low-paid care workers who cannot afford to run cars. A constituent of mine runs a large care home in south London. She told me recently that they had just completed comprehensive testing of all staff and residents in the home, after many weeks of waiting for access to tests, but that the last two tests they had completed were positive, one of them from a staff member who was asymptomatic. She asks how, knowing that an asymptomatic staff member had been at the care home, they could be sure that they were coronavirus-free without the ability to test all staff and residents again immediately. I ask the Minister to confirm in her closing remarks when care homes and carers delivering home care will be able to access frequent, regular testing to enable the protection of vulnerable people.

The Prime Minister promised a world-beating testing system. The social care sector would settle for one that functions at all. Will the Minister also address the situation facing care staff who have been shielding? The Government have announced an end to shielding, but without comprehensive testing to demonstrate that a care home is coronavirus-free, it will be impossible for them to return to work safely. The crisis has exposed a social care system that is fragmented and underfunded and that has been pushed to breaking point. Within that system, there have been many acts of extraordinary courage, compassion and creativity in our care homes but it is clear that the responsibility for the devastation of coronavirus in the care sector lies firmly at the Government's door. Coming out of this crisis, the Government cannot continue to neglect and ignore social care, but must build a system that is properly funded and in which staff are properly paid and recognised.

6.19 pm

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): It seems like a very long time ago, but I remember making a visit to Ipswich Hospital in February, before the lockdown, when it was still unclear how widespread covid-19 would become. During the visit, I inspected a number of isolation pods that had been constructed in anticipation of a virus. The set-up was a real tribute to the forward thinking and expertise of our NHS staff.

Since then, the efforts of all staff at Ipswich Hospital have been nothing short of exceptional. They have taken on considerable extra risk to take care of the rest of us, and I would like to use this opportunity, on behalf of our town, to thank them and those who work in our social care sector for all the work they have done over the last few months. Of course it is important that we ensure that they have access to as much testing as possible so that they can do their job confidently and so that valuable NHS staff are not self-isolating as a precaution when they may not have covid.

[Tom Hunt]

Mental health is mentioned in the motion. We really need to consider the impact of covid-19 on the wider mental health of our country. The mental health aspects of covid will be with us for a lot longer than the virus itself, and it is important that we do everything we can to confront this issue head-on across society in the coming months and years.

Throughout this crisis, I have been in close contact with Suffolk Mind about the important work that it has been doing to support those whose mental health has been impacted by covid-19. To put it starkly, four out of five people in Suffolk feel disconnected from the wider community, and similarly high numbers of people feel that their needs for community interaction are no longer being met. I therefore urge the Minister to take into careful consideration people's mental health, and the ways in which it has been impacted by covid-19, over the coming years.

Let me also touch on the issue of waiting lists, the extra pressure that covid-19 places on our NHS, and the knock-on impact that has on the treatment of illnesses such as cancer, which has been mentioned, and on the provision of knee and hip replacements. There is a significant challenge in hospitals up and down our country to get on top of waiting lists to ensure that people do not have to wait months—that they do not have to experience delays or cancellations—for hip and knee replacements.

However, when looking to confront that nationally, we should still look to do everything we can to keep orthopaedic services as local to patients as possible. I draw attention to the situation at the hospital in my constituency. Yesterday, I signed a cross-party letter with the leader of Ipswich Borough Council to say that, as the local and national representatives of Ipswich, we do not believe that the plan to open an orthopaedic centre in Colchester is in the interests of the people we represent.

I urge the Minister to take that into consideration, to meet me to discuss my concerns and those of my constituents, and to discuss a way forward that addresses delays and cancellations to hip and knee replacements but in a way that keeps care as close to people as possible.

6.23 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt). I intend to make two brief points, both to the Minister specifically and more generally. First, I want to thank the NHS staff on the Island, thank Islanders for using the app and thank care home staff; and secondly, I want to reinforce some points about the fragility of health services in unavoidably small hospitals. I am aware that the Minister has heard that before from me, and I fear that she will hear it in the future too.

First, I thank NHS staff on the Isle of Wight for the remarkable work they have done, and I thank the leadership team under Maggie, Darren and Paul for the work they have done to reconfigure St Mary's Hospital incredibly quickly. All the feedback that I have had from people who have been in the hospital has expressed a massive thanks to all the NHS staff on the Isle of Wight.

Secondly, I thank Islanders for using the sadly ill-fated app. About 75% of Islanders who could download it did so, which reinforces my efforts to develop a relationship

with the Government in which we get to pilot schemes on the Island. We know that social scientists like isolated communities to pilot schemes on. For me, the best way to get the Isle of Wight to the front of the queue is to ensure that we pilot national schemes. We have had four in the last year. The app was the least successful, although we actually ran a pretty successful test. It cost £11 million—rather less than the £11 billion that new Labour spent on the IT system back in the early 2000s, but we will park that for the moment. We are testing drones flying into St Mary's, which is excellent, and that drone test is going well. We are one of the hospitals testing dexamethasone, if I have said it correctly, which is potentially a fantastically good treatment for covid. We are also one of the health authorities piloting the use of telemedicine, which clearly is especially important as we have an isolated community separated from the mainland by water. I am grateful to Islanders, and I make no apologies for trying to get pilot schemes for the Island and I will continue to do so.

I also thank nursing home staff who have been extraordinarily diligent. I have spoken to many, including Belinda in Sandown, and Ian Bennett. I am grateful for their advice and the feedback that I got from many other people who work in care homes. I did visit one that had an outbreak of corona, and it was a pretty distressing situation. I am very much involved with many people who work in the care home environment.

I have a series of questions about care homes. The more we can test staff—fortnightly, if not weekly—the better. It would be good to know from the Government when the care badge scheme will be launched. The crisis in care homes has brought home the importance for us all of ensuring that our social care is fit for the 21st century. I know that is a much bigger issue which this Minister, and other Ministers, are dealing with.

My final point is on significant additional pressures to unavoidably small hospitals. There are 12 in England and Wales. The Minister knows the facts and figures, and she has been good enough to talk to me about this in the past. We put the additional extra costs of running an unavoidably small hospital on an island at about £12 million a year. The NHS long-term plan sets out a 10 year strategy and it says it is unable to find evidence of specific unavoidable costs, but I beg to differ. I think we have evidence of what those unavoidable costs are, both generally in terms of unavoidably small hospitals, but also specifically in the case of the Isle of Wight. In fact, we have specifically listed and itemised those additional expenditures when compared to a hospital that has a more average size population. As the Minister knows, St Mary's is about half that of a normal district general hospital.

6.27 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Labour party for bringing this debate to the House for consideration, and the way it was promoted as well, which I thought was very positive. It is helpful for everyone to be able to see the same things. I also want to put on record my thanks to all the NHS staff across the whole of the United Kingdom, but especially in Northern Ireland. Those on the frontline have worked extremely hard and long hours, faced with the coronavirus outbreak, and we owe them a great deal. I live on a farm outside Greyabbey, and at 8 o'clock on a Thursday night we

could hear the clapping from three miles away down in the village by those who came out to show their appreciation. We do owe those staff a lot.

There seems to be light at the end of the covid tunnel, and I am thankful for that, but we must remember the more than 40,000 families that have been plunged into the ongoing darkness of the loss of a loved one. That must be remembered in every covid-19 debate we have in this House as a salient reminder of those who have passed away. Our thoughts and prayers remain with them all.

The recent advice in Northern Ireland has been put in a very clear way: shielding will pause at the end of July. It has been put in that way to make people aware that the war has not been won. The war will not be fully won until we have a vaccine in place for this strain and a basis in place for future mutations. I thank Queen's University, Belfast for the sterling work that it is doing in that area.

One of the main ways to win the battle has been isolation and containment. My mother has been in self-isolation for some 14 weeks. She is 88, almost 89, and she had a chance to go and do a bit of shopping. She went mad the day she got out, and was touring round all the shops. She has a real buzz for going round the shops, and I think everyone in Newtownards must have said to themselves, "She's back!" She was, and she did plenty of shopping.

We need to have the testing in place to move on, and that is very important. The testing has to be accurate and give us the results that we need. It is very important to have professionals who have the knowledge. It is imperative that the workforce are tested often and accurately, when we consider that 80% of UK cases are mild or asymptomatic. We must have an accurate system in place, not simply for NHS staff, but for all those around it. The Minister has spent a second day in the Chamber and we look forward to her response, which I know will be positive.

The NHS has been incredible, but we must not fool ourselves into thinking that the pressure is off, because it is not. On the contrary, the pressure is most assuredly on. We have had almost four months of rescheduled operations and cancer screenings and steroid injection cancellations—all of those needs exist. It has been argued that the pressure is worse.

Covid-19 has devastated cancer services. I referred to that in two interventions on the shadow Minister earlier, so I will not ask those questions again, but as lockdown measures came into effect, urgent referrals plummeted, screening programmes were paused, many surgeries were cancelled, clinical trials were put on hold and existing health inequalities were exacerbated. The epidemic has led to a huge backlog of patients waiting for cancer services.

Cancer Research UK has said that a backlog of some 2.4 million people has developed in the first 10 weeks of lockdown. We need to address that, and I know that the Minister will address that in her response. Steps must be taken to ensure that not only NHS staff but staff in the charitable sector and in cancer care homes are tested accurately, routinely and to a high standard.

In terms of pancreatic cancer, Northern Ireland has one of the worst five-year survival rates in the world and ranks at roughly 32 out of 36 countries with comparable data, according to CONCORD-3. I dread

to see—I hope I am wrong—the reality of what covid-19 has done to cancer patients, and we need to work to address that.

6.31 pm

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I will be brief so that as many hon. Members as possible can speak. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) on securing this debate. It is good to debate this important subject.

I invite the Minister to join me in placing on record my thanks to the leadership team and all the staff at the Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust. Sadly, we have had more than 100 deaths in west Sussex, but every one of those people was in the wonderful care and hands of the first acute trust in the country to be rated outstanding by the Care Quality Commission twice in a row.

Collective achievements have individual heroes behind them. We are talking about testing, so I mention in particular the pathology lab at St Richard's in Chichester. It has been working on swab tests since the start of the crisis, but it has now moved on to doing antibody tests as well. It has done 7,000 already and its capacity is now at 1,000 tests a day, which will be a valuable resource across west Sussex as we move into the next phase of the crisis.

Finally, I extend my thanks and recognition to all the hard-working staff in our care homes, of which we have a great many, for the wonderful job they have done. As we move forward from the acute phase, I am conscious that they will continue to bear that burden, so I thank them.

6.32 pm

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): We should all be grateful for the dedication that we have seen throughout the pandemic. I do not believe that anybody in this House disagrees with that.

In Hyndburn and Haslingden, frontline staff in the NHS, social care and other key industries, such as food production, manufacturing and transport, went above and beyond to protect my community. The Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust also went above and beyond, particularly when it saw an increase in those requiring mental health support. It quickly and efficiently launched a mental health urgent response line for anyone of any age in need of professional 24-hour support. It has made great use of video and digital technology to provide services, including appointments, online through the Attend Anywhere initiative. It has also expanded the health and wellbeing support line for those who want to chat or who want emotional support.

In March, I welcomed the UK Government's announcement of a £5 million grant to fund additional services for people struggling with their mental wellbeing during the coronavirus outbreak. On 22 May, the Government announced that a further £4.2 million would be awarded to mental health charities such as Samaritans, YoungMinds and Bipolar UK to continue to support people experiencing mental health challenges throughout the outbreak. Lancashire's response to the virus has been nationally recognised as exemplary, and I am very proud to be Lancashire born and bred.

NHS testing has ended the uncertainty about whether essential staff needed to stay at home, and I fully support the Government step to empower that. The East

[Sara Britcliffe]

Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust has tested more than 7,000 staff, with around 13% showing that they have antibodies to covid. This data is important and provides clear evidence of the effectiveness of PPE and the social distancing measures put in place.

In Hyndburn, as of 23 June there have been 159 confirmed cases, the second lowest number in Lancashire, and Rossendale was the third lowest with 178. This is a testament to the sacrifice of people staying at home, avoiding all unnecessary contact. The test and trace service has already helped to gather more information about the spread of the virus, and I congratulate those members of the public who have been contacted and have followed the guidance to self-isolate. That is how we stop the transmission of the virus. Alongside industry professionals and committed staff, the test and trace system contacted 87,000 people in its first week, and I know that the Government are continuing to explore all options and utilising technology to improve our understanding of this virus.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) was absolutely right that this motion's proposal could put strain on our NHS, and I would like also to hear the evidence from Opposition Members that it is the most effective approach.

Many key services have sought to continue throughout this time, albeit in a reduced or socially distant capacity, and I congratulate the hard-working staff delivering all types of care throughout the NHS. I am truly proud of our NHS and social care workers; the sacrifices they have made to protect the vulnerable during this time are extraordinary, and I want to thank those men and women who are still working tirelessly to protect this country, and particularly those in Hyndburn and Haslingden.

6.36 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): Let me start by paying tribute to the staff on our frontline—our NHS and care staff, far too many of whom have paid the ultimate sacrifice while trying to keep us safe and well. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my good friend the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch); not only is she a friend of mine on the same football team, but she is an outstanding parliamentarian and somebody I am proud to call a friend. I know we all join together in wishing her well and she fights cancer.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) for his opening speech.

Jonathan Ashworth: Thank you.

Dr Allin-Khan: You are welcome.

My hon. Friends the Members for Newport West (Ruth Jones) and for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) paid passionate tributes to NHS and care staff, while my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) and for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) spoke eloquently about the importance of recognising the sacrifices made by our BAME communities. My hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) and for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) spoke movingly about the

impact of losing local staff and loved ones; I know that we were all moved. I am also grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) and for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for ensuring that pregnant mothers are not forgotten at this time.

From the very beginning of this pandemic, health and care staff have made immense sacrifices. When we were asked to stay at home, hiding behind closed doors, they went to work and faced this deadly virus head-on. Nothing is more worthy of commendation than the unwavering courage of our health and care staff, fighting this ruthless virus, going to work and facing it to care for us, leaving behind the worries that they had for their own families at home. However, although it is right to pay tribute through our words, it is only through our actions that we can truly honour those who have died.

Our healthcare staff have given everything to fight covid-19, but this Government could not even give them PPE at the height of the crisis. Our frontline staff were sadly unprepared; many went to their death. Ministers must learn from this. Never again can we ask medics and carers to treat patients without protective equipment. Never again can we ask staff to clean the rooms of people who have died from covid-19 without adequate PPE. Our frontline staff have lost patients and colleagues on an unimaginable scale, and the impact will be felt by them for a lifetime.

I cannot tell the House what it is like, as a trained medic used to delivering bad news, to have to break the hearts of people over the telephone, telling them that the worst has happened and their loved one has died, or on rare occasions to have them there in front of you as you deliver the news, fully covered in PPE with only your eyes showing, unable to give them the hug you would previously have been able to give. In those worst of circumstances, you are left shaken to your core because the very thing you have been trained to do is to provide nurturing support. It feels robotic; it feels sterile; it feels inhumane.

As we leave behind the peak of this virus and life slowly starts to resemble some form of normality, it is important to remember that the horrors—the true horrors—of fighting covid-19 on the frontline will never leave the minds of the frontline care and NHS staff. Never will they forget, in their heart of hearts, at their core, what it has been like to face this virus. Our NHS and care staff need mental health support that is tailored to their unique needs, and they need it now. Clapping simply is not good enough. Without action, it is an empty gesture. Only by protecting the mental health of our healthcare workers can we expect them to protect both the physical and the mental health of the nation. Public health fears, social isolation and economic uncertainty are all major risk factors for mental ill health. The coronavirus and the subsequent lockdown have affected us all, and there will undoubtedly be a rise in demand for mental health support in the coming weeks, months and even years.

The Government must prepare now and put in place a long-term plan to ensure that services can cope with the inevitable surge in demand. Let me be clear: this must include provision for children and young people. Their mental health needs are so often forgotten, and they have suffered immeasurably throughout this period. With child and adolescent mental health services referrals decreasing massively during the crisis, many mental

health problems will be picked up only when children return to school. A report by children's charity Barnardo's found that 88% of school staff thought that covid-19 would have a negative impact on their pupils' mental health and wellbeing. We need to ensure that our most vulnerable children do not slip through the cracks. I am sure that, party politics aside and regardless of which Bench we sit on in this place, we all agree on the importance of prioritising the mental health of our children and young people.

To get a handle on the virus early on and come through the crisis completely unscathed might have been impossible, but there is merit in the ambition. From the outset, sadly, the Government seemed to accept that thousands of deaths were inevitable. The lockdown came too late, and it cost us dearly. It cost us friends, it cost us family, it cost us colleagues, it cost us members of our black and minority ethnic community, it cost us NHS and care frontline workers. Our communities have paid the price, and they will suffer immeasurably for a long time to come.

When healthcare systems in other parts of the world began to crumble in the wake of covid-19, when on our television screens on "News at Ten" we could see what was playing out globally, this Government sat idle. At a time when we needed quick, decisive actions, this Government dithered and refused to enter lockdown, failed to get PPE where it was needed and abandoned their community test and trace strategy, letting the virus run rampant through this country. With the benefit of hindsight, that gamble clearly failed, causing countless avoidable deaths.

The last time I stood here and tried to raise that issue with the Government—with the Secretary of State himself—my tone was challenged, but I say this: it was not my tone that was the issue, but the very content of what I had to say. It was the sentiment and the understanding that many frontline workers feel that unnecessarily they had to break people's hearts in the way I have just described. In the most inhumane of ways, this virus stripped the humanity out of grieving, and there were many avoidable deaths. That is what the Secretary of State took issue with.

With the benefit of hindsight, the gamble clearly failed, causing a countless number of avoidable deaths. Imagine people waving their loved ones off in ambulances, never to see them again—never able to give that last kiss, and never able to say goodbye in person to the person who had brought them the most love and joy in the whole wide world. Our communities will grieve for a lifetime, as will the healthcare workers who had to pass a paltry phone to someone as they took their last breaths, so that their relatives could say words like, "Hang on dad, we love you." Never again can we find ourselves in this position, when it could have been prevented. Never again can we ever allow our communities to be so failed.

In February, the Government may have been able to feign ignorance of the threat posed by the coronavirus, but today we know all too well its devastating impacts. We have the evidence, we have had the reviews and we have seen it play out in technicolour. I say this: with the very real danger of a second spike and with winter flu season on the horizon, preparations must begin now to ensure that the NHS and the social care sector have everything they need to keep themselves and the public

safe in the months and years to come. Will the Government please outline what preparations are being undertaken to plan for those eventualities? We must stockpile PPE now, not later. We needed the track and trace system up and fully operational weeks ago, not in the autumn. We need urgently to learn the lessons and prepare.

We honour those who have died by learning from their sacrifice and ensuring that never again will this country sleepwalk into a crisis. Never again will we accept unnecessary deaths as a consequence of inaction. I believe that there are good people on both sides of this Chamber, and I believe we all are here because we care about our communities. We are all here because in essence, we truly believe and want to believe that we care about our NHS and care staff. So in that light, I sincerely hope that Members from across the House will join us today in supporting the motion.

6.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): Like all other Members from all parts of the House and from all four nations, I add my thanks to all those in the NHS and across social care, although actually it is broader than that. There are those in primary care, our community health teams, those who have adapted the way they work in addiction services and so on, because all these things have had to change at pace.

When we started to get the news towards the end of January that this was a pandemic, we started to realise that we were dealing with a completely unprecedented time, and all those people stepped forward. We have heard repeatedly this afternoon that more people stepped forward to make this a journey of collaboration and innovation. We have seen changes right across the national health service and the services that we have had to build to make decisive changes.

I gently say that 12 weeks ago, as we went into lockdown, many of those services were very different: the delivery of PPE to just over 200 national health trusts has now ramped up to 58,000 providers; we have developed Clipper and local resilience forums to help us with the distribution of PPE throughout these extremely complex changes; and a large amount of work has been done on vaccines and testing. All these things are a tribute to collaboration and we need to thank the innovation of not only private industry, as my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) mentioned, but the Army. This truly has been an effort of public service, and as we have come together—as we have done across the House—we have achieved so much more.

How do we carry on achieving more? There was a challenge before we went into the crisis, and the decision to postpone non-urgent elective treatment was the right one, because it allowed us to have the capacity required to help us to manage increased demand in the NHS. Throughout the outbreak, we have ensured that patients who require urgent treatment have been able to access it and, like many Members, we encourage people not to delay in coming forward for treatment as they normally would, should they require it. NHS has a firm "Help Us Help You" message.

We heard of how, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) put it—I do not think I can put it better—we achieve much more by working together and focusing on what we do best. How do we

[Jo Churchill]

drive down waiting times and have routine services return as quickly as possible to their normal provision? We must ensure that that is done in a safe and managed way to maintain capacity but avoid any further surge in covid. As outlined in the guidance already issued to the NHS, the restarting of routine electives should prioritise long waiters first and make full use of all contracted independent-sector hospital and diagnostic capacity.

Cancer was mentioned by severable Members. Urgent cancer care and treatment has continued throughout the pandemic. We know how important it is that referrals, diagnostics and cancer treatment reach pre-pandemic levels as soon as possible. Urgent action should now be taken by hospitals on the two-week-wait referrals, and they should provide two-week-wait out-patient diagnostic appointments at pre-covid-19 levels. That is easy to say but really hard to achieve.

The work done by protected hubs and to ensure that rapid diagnostic centres have been pushed out has been important. During the outbreak, the Secretary of State and I have regularly met the national cancer director, Dame Cally Palmer, to discuss progress not only on how we were dealing with cancer during the crisis, but on restoring cancer services as quickly as possible. We will keep a laser focus on that.

The NHS has continued to deliver over and above. Guidance has been issued and further guidance to restore urgent non-covid services in a safe way while ensuring that surge capacity can be stood up again, should it be needed, is already being planned. Preparations for going forward have already begun: we are learning lessons from where we have been but also driving ourselves to where we need to go. My hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer) said that we should think about what we can learn, how we can reset and how we can make sure that as we go forward we can take the best of what has changed, develop it and weave it in.

Stephanie Peacock: Will the Minister give way?

Jo Churchill: I am really sorry—I have only a couple of minutes.

Stephanie Peacock *rose*—

Jo Churchill: I give way very briefly.

Stephanie Peacock: I really appreciate the Minister giving way. I just wondered whether she could respond to the question that I put in my contribution to the debate, which is around the relaxation of guidance on death certificates for those suffering from industrial diseases. I am just asking the Government to revise their guidance so that anyone who has an industrial disease has that recorded on their death certificate.

Jo Churchill: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I will write to her on that exact point after the end of this debate. If I segway off, I will not make the points that I would like to make.

I was very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), who said that the decision by the Secretary of State to put in a stretch

target for testing was indeed courageous—something with which many hon. Members, I am sure, would agree. That dramatic expansion of testing has got us to where we are today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) spoke of improving care pathways and the joint work between the private sector and the NHS, being ambitious and changing methods of working to meet demand. My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) spoke articulately about the issues, including the stretch target, but also about preparation and how we make sure that our hospitals are ready and fit for the future. My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) talked about how challenging it is but pointed out how the four nations have worked together. I join him in supporting the fact that we are stronger together. I have missed out my hon. Friend for—

Harriett Baldwin: West Worcestershire.

Jo Churchill: I am sorry. I put Worcestershire, but I knew that it had a bit of the compass before it.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) spoke of innovation. She said that the appointment of Lord Deighton had led to a revolution in the UK manufacturing of PPE to support all our NHS workers as we drive forward. Some 2 billion items have been ordered to be made in this country. She also mentioned innovations by our GPs, pointing to the fact that the number of surgeries delivering video consultations has risen from 3% to 99%. She talked about innovations in medicines and treatment, and about the first effective treatment to save lives. On testing, she said how proud she is of everything that is going on there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) talked about managers and workloads as normal services return. He, like many hon. Members, brings to the House his experience from the NHS. One thing struck me in particular—that we target messages at the right groups. We know that health inequalities are persistent and stubborn, so we must get the messaging right as we go forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond) spoke about the importance of preparedness, including assisting staff. This afternoon, mental health came up repeatedly and ensuring that helplines are in place to assist all our NHS recover and gain resilience throughout the next phase.

Karin Smyth: Will the Minister give way?

Jo Churchill: I am sorry, I will not give way, as I have only a minute left.

On testing, we are continuing to prioritise our frontline NHS staff with symptoms for testing and testing asymptomatic NHS staff where appropriate, where there is an incident. We are surveying the health and care settings in Public Health England's SIREN study and monitoring prevalence. Although the CMO has recommended that testing happens fortnightly at the moment, all these issues are currently under review.

At the start of this crisis, we made sure that NHS capacity was always there at the time of need. The goal was clear that, however tough things got, the NHS

would never fall short of that founding promise to be there for somebody who needs it. It meant taking difficult decisions and, as we rebuild and refocus on delivering for all those on the waiting list, I want to put on record my thanks to those on the frontline for their heroic efforts.

At the same time, the NHS has been instrumental in carrying out the world's first successful clinical trial and, in just a few months, it has achieved much. The NHS is also playing a crucial role to help to operate one of the largest and most comprehensive test and trace systems in the world, with capacity for 280,000 tests today. I have gone on the record many times to say that our colleagues in the NHS and across the public services are always there for us. If you are concerned about anything, you should seek help. The NHS will always be there for you. But what we have discovered from the speech by the shadow Secretary of State—

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House divided: Ayes 198, Noes 344.

Division No. 60]

[7 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Cryer, John
Abrahams, Debbie	Cummins, Judith
Ali, Rushanara	Cunningham, Alex
Ali, Tahir	Daby, Janet
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	David, Wayne
Amesbury, Mike	Davies, Geraint
Anderson, Fleur	Davies-Jones, Alex
Antoniazzi, Tonia	De Cordova, Marsha
Ashworth, Jonathan	Debbonaire, Thangam
Barker, Paula	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Beckett, rh Margaret	Dodds, Anneliese
Begum, Apsana	Doughty, Stephen
Benn, rh Hilary	Dromey, Jack
Blake, Olivia	Duffield, Rosie
Blomfield, Paul	Eagle, Ms Angela
Brabin, Tracy	Eagle, Maria
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Eastwood, Colum
Brennan, Kevin	Efford, Clive
Brown, Ms Lyn	Elliott, Julie
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Elmore, Chris
Bryant, Chris	Eshalomi, Florence
Buck, Ms Karen	Esterson, Bill
Burgon, Richard	Evans, Chris
Byrne, Ian	Fletcher, Colleen
Cadbury, Ruth	Fovargue, Yvonne
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Foxcroft, Vicky
Carden, Dan	Foy, Mary Kelly
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Furniss, Gill
Champion, Sarah	Gill, Preet Kaur
Charalambous, Bambos	Glindon, Mary
Clark, Feryal	Green, Kate
Cooper, Daisy	Greenwood, Lilian
Cooper, Rosie	Greenwood, Margaret
Cooper, rh Yvette	Griffith, Nia
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Gwynne, Andrew
Coyle, Neil	Haigh, Louise
Creasy, Stella	Hamilton, Fabian
Cruddas, Jon	Hanna, Claire

Hardy, Emma	Oppong-Asare, Abena
Harris, Carolyn	Osamor, Kate
Hayes, Helen	Osborne, Kate
Healey, rh John	Owatemi, Taiwo
Hendrick, Sir Mark	Owen, Sarah
Hill, Mike	Peacock, Stephanie
Hillier, Meg	Pennycook, Matthew
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Perkins, Mr Toby
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Phillips, Jess
Hollern, Kate	Phillipson, Bridget
Hopkins, Rachel	Pollard, Luke
Howarth, rh Sir George	Powell, Lucy
Huq, Dr Rupa	Qureshi, Yasmin
Jardine, Christine	Reed, Steve
Jarvis, Dan	Rees, Christina
Johnson, Dame Diana	Reeves, Ellie
Johnson, Kim	Reeves, Rachel
Jones, Darren	Reynolds, Jonathan
Jones, Gerald	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Jones, Ruth	Rodda, Matt
Jones, Sarah	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Kane, Mike	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Keeley, Barbara	Shah, Naz
Kendall, Liz	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Khan, Afzal	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Kinnock, Stephen	Slaughter, Andy
Kyle, Peter	Smith, Cat
Lake, Ben	Smith, Nick
Lammy, rh Mr David	Smyth, Karin
Lavery, Ian	Sobel, Alex
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Spellar, rh John
Lewis, Clive	Starmer, rh Keir
Lloyd, Tony	Stevens, Jo
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Stone, Jamie
Lynch, Holly	Streeting, Wes
Madders, Justin	Stringer, Graham
Mahmood, Shabana	Sultana, Zarah
Malhotra, Seema	Tarry, Sam
Maskell, Rachael	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Matheson, Christian	Thornberry, rh Emily
McCabe, Steve	Timms, rh Stephen
McCarthy, Kerry	Trickett, Jon
McDonagh, Siobhain	Turner, Karl
McDonald, Andy	Twigg, Derek
McDonnell, rh John	Twist, Liz
McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Vaz, rh Valerie
McGinn, Conor	Webbe, Claudia
McGovern, Alison	West, Catherine
McKinnell, Catherine	Western, Matt
McMahon, Jim	Whitehead, Dr Alan
McMorrin, Anna	Whitley, Mick
Mearns, Ian	Whittome, Nadia
Mishra, Navendu	Williams, Hywel
Morden, Jessica	Wilson, Munira
Morgan, Stephen	Winter, Beth
Morris, Grahame	Yasin, Mohammad
Murray, Ian	Zeichner, Daniel
Murray, James	
Nandy, Lisa	
Nichols, Charlotte	
Norris, Alex	
Onwurah, Chi	

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mark Tami and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel	Anderson, Lee
Afolami, Bim	Anderson, Stuart
Aiken, Nickie	Andrew, Stuart
Aldous, Peter	Ansell, Caroline
Allan, Lucy	Argar, Edward
Amess, Sir David	Atherton, Sarah

Atkins, Victoria	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Holmes, Paul	Morris, James
Bacon, Gareth	Docherty, Leo	Howell, John	Morrissey, Joy
Bacon, Mr Richard	Donelan, Michelle	Howell, Paul	Morton, Wendy
Badenoch, Kemi	Double, Steve	Huddleston, Nigel	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Bailey, Shaun	Dowden, rh Oliver	Hudson, Dr Neil	Mumby-Croft, Holly
Baillie, Siobhan	Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hughes, Eddie	Mundell, rh David
Baker, Duncan	Drax, Richard	Hunt, Jane	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Baker, Mr Steve	Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hunt, rh Jeremy	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Baldwin, Harriett	Duddridge, James	Hunt, Tom	Neill, Sir Robert
Baron, Mr John	Duguid, David	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Nici, Lia
Baynes, Simon	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Javid, rh Sajid	Nokes, rh Caroline
Bell, Aaron	Dunne, rh Philip	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Norman, rh Jesse
Benton, Scott	Eastwood, Mark	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	O'Brien, Neil
Beresford, Sir Paul	Edwards, Ruth	Jenkinson, Mark	Offord, Dr Matthew
Berry, rh Jake	Ellis, rh Michael	Jenkyns, Andrea	Opperman, Guy
Bhatti, Saqib	Eustice, rh George	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Parish, Neil
Blackman, Bob	Evans, Dr Luke	Johnston, David	Patel, rh Priti
Blunt, Crispin	Evennett, rh Sir David	Jones, Andrew	Pawsey, Mark
Bone, Mr Peter	Everitt, Ben	Jones, rh Mr David	Penning, rh Sir Mike
Bowie, Andrew	Fabricant, Michael	Jones, Fay	Penrose, John
Bradley, Ben	Farris, Laura	Jupp, Simon	Percy, Andrew
Bradley, rh Karen	Fell, Simon	Kawczynski, Daniel	Philp, Chris
Brady, Sir Graham	Fletcher, Katherine	Kearns, Alicia	Pincher, rh Christopher
Braverman, rh Suella	Fletcher, Mark	Keegan, Gillian	Poulter, Dr Dan
Brereton, Jack	Fletcher, Nick	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Pow, Rebecca
Bridgen, Andrew	Ford, Vicky	Knight, Julian	Prentis, Victoria
Brine, Steve	Foster, Kevin	Kruger, Danny	Pursglove, Tom
Bristow, Paul	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Quin, Jeremy
Britcliffe, Sara	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Lamont, John	Quince, Will
Brokenshire, rh James	Frazer, Lucy	Largan, Robert	Randall, Tom
Browne, Anthony	Freeman, George	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Redwood, rh John
Bruce, Fiona	Freer, Mike	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Buchan, Felicity	Fuller, Richard	Levy, Ian	Richards, Nicola
Buckland, rh Robert	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Lewer, Andrew	Richardson, Angela
Burghart, Alex	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Roberts, Rob
Burns, rh Conor	Garnier, Mark	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Butler, Rob	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Loder, Chris	Robinson, Mary
Cairns, rh Alun	Gibb, rh Nick	Logan, Mark	Rosindell, Andrew
Carter, Andy	Gibson, Peter	Longhi, Marco	Ross, Douglas
Cartledge, James	Gideon, Jo	Lopez, Julia	Rowley, Lee
Cash, Sir William	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Lopresti, Jack	Russell, Dean
Cates, Miriam	Glen, John	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Sambrook, Gary
Caulfield, Maria	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Loughton, Tim	Saxby, Selaine
Chalk, Alex	Graham, Richard	Mackinlay, Craig	Scully, Paul
Chishti, Rehman	Grant, Mrs Helen	Mackrory, Cherilyn	Seely, Bob
Churchill, Jo	Grayling, rh Chris	Maclean, Rachel	Selous, Andrew
Clark, rh Greg	Green, Chris	Mak, Alan	Shannon, Jim
Clarke, Mr Simon	Green, rh Damian	Malthouse, Kit	Shapps, rh Grant
Clarke, Theo	Griffith, Andrew	Mangnall, Anthony	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Griffiths, Kate	Mann, Scott	Simmonds, David
Clarkson, Chris	Grundy, James	Marson, Julie	Skidmore, rh Chris
Cleverly, rh James	Gullis, Jonathan	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Smith, Chloe
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Halfon, rh Robert	Mayhew, Jerome	Smith, Greg
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Hall, Luke	Maynard, Paul	Smith, Henry
Colburn, Elliot	Hammond, Stephen	McCartney, Jason	Smith, rh Julian
Collins, Damian	Hands, rh Greg	McCartney, Karl	Smith, Royston
Costa, Alberto	Harper, rh Mr Mark	McPartland, Stephen	Spencer, Dr Ben
Courts, Robert	Harris, Rebecca	Menzies, Mark	Spencer, rh Mark
Coutinho, Claire	Harrison, Trudy	Mercer, Johnny	Stafford, Alexander
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Hart, Sally-Ann	Merriman, Huw	Stephenson, Andrew
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hart, rh Simon	Metcalfe, Stephen	Stevenson, Jane
Crosbie, Virginia	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Millar, Robin	Stevenson, John
Crouch, Tracey	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stewart, Bob
Daly, James	Henderson, Gordon	Milling, rh Amanda	Stewart, Iain
Davies, David T. C.	Henry, Darren	Mills, Nigel	Streeter, Sir Gary
Davies, Gareth	Higginbotham, Antony	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Stride, rh Mel
Davies, Dr James	Hinds, rh Damian	Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Stuart, Graham
Davies, Mims	Hoare, Simon	Moore, Damien	Sturdy, Julian
Davis, rh Mr David	Holden, Mr Richard	Moore, Robbie	Sunak, rh Rishi
Davison, Dehenna	Hollinrake, Kevin	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Sunderland, James
Dinenage, Caroline	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Morris, Anne Marie	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Dines, Miss Sarah	Holloway, Adam	Morris, David	Syms, Sir Robert

Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David

Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

Mr Marcus Jones and
 David Rutley

Question accordingly negated.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the proposed words be there added.

Question agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House expresses thanks to the heroic work of frontline NHS staff who have saved lives throughout the Covid-19 pandemic; pays tribute to the at least 312 NHS and Social Care staff who have died of coronavirus in the United Kingdom; recognises the impact that coronavirus will have upon the NHS to deliver routine care including mental health care without additional Government support; notes that NHS waiting lists are projected to reach 10 million by the end of 2020, that cancer referrals fell 60 per cent during the peak of the coronavirus lockdown and that four out of five children have reported their mental health has got worse during the pandemic; further notes that there is a backlog of NHS care that needs to be tackled and that it is vital to prepare NHS services to deliver safe care alongside care for coronavirus, including preparing for winter and ensuring necessary supplies of PPE and medicine; and recognises the unprecedented action the Government has taken in its tireless efforts against Coronavirus to protect the NHS and save lives.

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Has the Speaker received notification from the Secretary of State for Communities that he wishes to give a statement on the documents he has recently released regarding the Westferry decision? There appear to be significant discrepancies between what the Secretary of State told the House and what is revealed in the documents, specifically: that he did not immediately notify officials following his dinner with the applicant, Richard Desmond; that rather than closing discussion down with the developer as the Secretary

of State implied, he instead initiated contact with him the next day via text; and that the letters confirm that he rushed through the decision deliberately to help the developer avoid a £30 million to £50 million levy payable to Tower Hamlets Council.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point of order. I have received no notification that the Secretary of State intends to make a statement, but those on the Treasury Bench will have heard his comments. It is obviously up to Ministers to come to the House if they wish to say anything to correct the record through a statement or any other means.

PETITION

Extension of the Brexit transition period

7.22 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): This has been a period when the Governments across the United Kingdom, and indeed across the European Union, have understandably and correctly been focused on combating the global health pandemic. As we approach the date when agreement between the UK and the EU must be reached to avoid a no-deal Brexit, large numbers of my constituents in North Ayrshire and Arran feel strongly that, in the current context, I should present this petition on an extension of the Brexit transition period.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of the constituency of North Ayrshire & Arran,

Declares that the current COVID-19 pandemic should be the primary focus of the Government at this time rather than the withdrawal talks with the European Union; notes that the Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown could shrink the UK economy by 35% and that unemployment could rise by two million; further notes that the International Monetary Fund has stated that the crisis 'dwarfs the losses that triggered the global financial crisis', and that it is 'very likely that this year the global economy will experience its worst recession since the Great Depression'; further notes that the Brexit transition timetable requires agreements to be reached with the European Union by 30 June; declares that the prospect of a 'No Deal Brexit' remains and that this poses additional challenges to businesses already facing significant economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic; and further declares that any decision to stick to the current timetable, given the huge economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, will have a devastating impact on people's livelihoods, prosperity and the national good.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to seek an immediate extension to the Brexit transition period to avoid further unnecessary and severe economic harm to Scotland and the entire UK.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002584]

Protection of UK Food Standards

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

7.25 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): In Scotland and across the entire United Kingdom, we produce some incredible food. In the borders, where I live and which I have the privilege of representing in this place, we have many fine examples, including Standhill Farm tomatoes near Denholm; Shaw's Fine Meats in Lauder; Hardiesmill ethical Scotch beef, which has been enjoyed on the Orient Express and is reared north of Kelso; ice cream produced by the Giacomazzi family in Eyemouth; Border Berries near Rutherford, which is one of Scotland's last remaining outdoor berry farms; and Born in the Borders brewery outside Jedburgh, which creates real ale using barley grown in the neighbouring rolling fields of the borders.

I love the local foods produced in the borders, and I think that more people around the world should be able to enjoy food from Scotland and the rest of Britain too. That is why I am so excited by the opportunities that the global trade deals will offer to Scotland and the United Kingdom. We should be proud not just of the amazing foods that we produce but of the fact that they are of the highest quality and meet the highest standards of production in the world. Consumers in our country not only have an extensive choice of foods but can be assured that they meet the highest quality.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Is it not the fact that we have such high standards in this country that makes our foodstuffs and other products produced in Scotland so in demand across the rest of the world? Should we not be doing everything in our power to make sure that we can export more of what we produce in this country because it is so good?

John Lamont: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I entirely agree. I will come back to it further, because there are some great success stories about where we have been able to export our food products, not just from Scotland but across the entirety of the UK, around the world.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Lamont: I want to make some progress.

Sadly, in recent weeks the standards of the food we consume here in Britain has been conflated into a debate about our ability to trade on the international stage. As the son of a Berwickshire farmer who has the privilege of representing the rural communities of the Scottish borders, I know from very personal experience the truth of the saying that

“the cultivation of the earth is the most important labour of man.”

That is why it is so important that we get the Agriculture Bill currently going through this Parliament right—right for Scottish producers and right for Scottish consumers. Consumers rightly want high-welfare produce, and if our trading partners want to access the UK market, they must be required to meet those standards. Farmers and consumers have the right to expect no less.

Deidre Brock: Does the hon. Gentleman think, then, that food imports should be produced to the same high standards as UK food production, and so would he agree that protection should be placed in legislation to make sure that that good food quality is protected?

John Lamont: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. If I could ask her to be patient for a little while, I am going to come on to that very point.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): Does it concern my hon. Friend that in Scotland we appear to have a campaign of disinformation that suggests that a vote took place in the House of Commons to reduce food standards in the United Kingdom, yet I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that no such vote took place?

John Lamont: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that point, which neatly leads on to the next part of my speech.

There has been considerable discussion about food standards in relation to international trade and, unfortunately, a high degree of misinformation about what will happen to our food standards. We are told by campaign groups and the Opposition parties that Parliament voted against protecting our food standards and that that opened the door to substandard food supplies flooding on to shop shelves. That is utter nonsense, and I want to use this debate to put the record straight.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his speech. I very much enjoyed the culinary tour of his constituency—I am just about ready for my tea, so he has made me very hungry. I spoke to him earlier, to seek his permission to intervene. Hailing from the constituency of Strangford, with its thriving agrifoods sector, I believe it is imperative that we remember that many of the standards to which we hold ourselves are actually higher than those that the EU has determined to be necessary. We must continue to accept only foods of the highest quality that bear British approval across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As I always say, better together.

John Lamont: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that important point. It is important to record that the UK Government have been very clear that they will never compromise on those food standards.

In Scotland, Food Standards Scotland will continue to ensure that all food imports comply with the UK's high safety standards. The Government have also made it clear that they will examine options on labelling and better consumer information, including voluntary animal welfare assurance schemes and Government-backed labelling. Our Ministers will also work across the globe to enhance welfare standards through bilateral promotion with trade partners and advocacy of animal welfare and environmental issues in the World Trade Organisation and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) *rose*—

John Lamont: I give way to the hon. Gentleman from the highlands.

Jamie Stone: I think that I should declare an interest, Madam Deputy Speaker, by pointing out that my younger brother is a maker of highland cheese. Highland crofters and farmers do very well out of the fact that the image of highland food is that it is of the highest standard. None of us wants to see standards lowered; I think that we in this Chamber speak with one voice in that regard. However, the general public are very discerning when they shop, and they are becoming ever more discerning as time goes by. I think that the more we push and advertise the sheer quality of Scottish, highland and Northern Irish food products, the better we will do.

John Lamont: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making the crucial point. Without doubt, we produce food of an exceptionally high value. I do not think that consumers in this country always recognise the value of the food we produce, and how lucky we are to live in a country where we can be assured of it.

The Government have made a commitment that in all our trade negotiations we will not compromise on the UK's high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards. We are, and will remain, firmly committed to upholding those high standards outside the EU. Crucially, the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 will transfer all existing EU food safety provisions, including existing import requirements, on to the UK statute book, where they will be enshrined in law.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman praising the quality of good Scottish produce, and I am sure that view is shared across the House. He made a serious point about misinformation. Does he not understand that the National Farmers Union has expressed real concerns about cheap food imports flooding the UK market and undercutting our excellent quality produce? Is he saying that the NFU is spreading misinformation?

John Lamont: I will move on to that point shortly. I have had a very robust conversation with NFU Scotland. It claims to support trade and to support the amendment to the Agriculture Bill that would have stopped our ability to do that trade. It cannot on the one hand say that it wants to support Scottish farmers and food producers to export, and on the other hand support an amendment that would have pulled the rug from under them. That is a conversation I have had with the NFU, and that is the purpose of this debate.

Our import standards, which are enshrined in UK law, include a ban on using artificial growth hormones in domestic and imported products, so that means no hormone-injected beef. Our standards also set out that no product other than water is approved for decontaminating poultry carcasses, so that means no chlorine-washed chicken, despite what we hear from opposition parties and some parts of the media. Any changes to existing food safety legislation would require new legislation to be brought before Parliament.

As I have suggested, Scottish and British farmers have a great deal to gain from the lowering of trade barriers, which will allow them to access new markets for our high-quality produce. We need those new trade

deals with other countries to enable our farmers and other businesses to expand the range and volume of products for export around the world. Let us take, for example, the export of Scottish malt and grain to non-EU countries such as Japan, or the enormous potential for further growth of Scottish red meat export. Last year, the total value of UK red meat exports rose by 13% to £1.5 billion, with 661,000 tonnes of pork, lamb and beef shipped globally from the UK. It was one of the strongest years on record.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am sure none of us in the House, regardless of our views on the European Union, American beef or American chicken, wants to prevent our farmers in any constituency from exporting their high-quality food. However, the very consumers the hon. Member mentioned a few minutes ago fill my inbox daily, concerned about the quality of food that will be imported into this country. They are afraid that the food that will appear on supermarket shelves will be cheaper and of less good quality than what is produced in this country. We want to protect those people.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been very generous in taking interventions. Any interventions need to be short, because there is limited time for the debate and I am sure that the Minister wants sufficient time to wind up.

John Lamont: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) explains to her constituents that she voted for an amendment that would have restricted the choice for consumers in supermarkets and stopped Scottish farmers and other businesses exporting. She would have stopped them doing the trade deals. I will come on to those points in a bit more detail shortly.

Within the overall increase in trade to non-EU countries, there are further opportunities to be had, particularly across Asia in markets other than China, such as Taiwan, Singapore and especially Vietnam, to complement the trade we will continue to have with the European Union. Scottish farmers can lead the way on those opportunities. Lowering trade barriers is key to realising that ambition.

It is important to put ourselves in a position where we can build on our successes, but if the contentious amendments to the Agriculture Bill had passed, such trading opportunities would have been lost, to the disadvantage of Scotland's farming sector and the wider economy. If Scottish National party Members and others who supported the amendments had secured them, that would have effectively blocked the enhanced international trade opportunities for Scottish farmers and many other distinctive Scottish industries. It is also important to note that no current trade agreements include provisions to force partners to operate by another country's domestic regulations and standards. If we insisted on that, we could not roll over the comprehensive economic and trade agreement with Canada and other parties such as South Africa and Japan. It would also call into question our refusal to accept a level playing field with the EU if we demand it elsewhere.

Trying to force all trading partners to produce to the exact same standard as the UK will only result in fewer export opportunities for Scottish farmers and cut them off from world markets.

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): I commend the hon. Member for securing the important debate. Like him, I have received countless emails and letters from my Coventry residents who are rightly concerned about a number of our protections, particularly food standards, post Brexit. Does he agree that we should aim for the highest possible standards and protect those that we already enjoy here in the UK?

John Lamont: I completely agree with the hon. Member. To reiterate my earlier point, UK imports and food standards have not changed as a consequence of our leaving the European Union. Cabinet Ministers have committed at the Dispatch Box to maintaining food standards. The Prime Minister is committed to them, too. It is wrong to say that, just because we cannot control the production standards in another country, we cannot control our own import standards and food regulations. There is no other trade agreement where one country imposes its food production standards on another partner. It is also the case that WTO rules prevent such clauses in the trade deals that it governs.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his speech. Like him, I have many Moray producers who are responsible for produce of outstanding quality that is renowned across the globe. However, does he agree that tonight's debate is a useful opportunity to set the record straight? There has never been a Division in this House that has lowered animal welfare standards and, as he said, the EU withdrawal Act takes all the legislation from the EU that protects our environmental standards, food safety standards and animal welfare standards on to the UK statute book.

John Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Despite all the misinformation from SNP Members, the reality—the facts—are somewhat different. If there is another trade agreement that allows one country to impose its production standards on another, show it to me. If I am wrong about the WTO rules, I am happy to take an intervention from somebody who might be able to correct me.

Deidre Brock: Thank you so much. I was going to reference the US ambassador, who made it very clear recently that the US would not accept a US-UK trade deal unless US food standards were accepted within the UK. What does the hon. Gentleman say to the US ambassador?

John Lamont: The UK Government Ministers who represent us in these negotiations have made it very clear that food standards will not be reduced as a consequence of any trade deals. It is very interesting that the hon. Lady has not disputed my points or provided any evidence to support the case that one country's trade deal with another country has imposed its production standards on that trading partner. Nor indeed has she been able to dispute the point that the World Trade Organisation rules ban such clauses in trade agreements. *[Interruption.]* We should be under no illusions that those on the SNP Benches, and indeed elsewhere, who were arguing for the amendments to be imposed were, at best, naive about the consequences of their actions or, at worst, reckless with the future of not just our food exporters, but every other business—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Can everybody just calm down a bit? It is an Adjournment debate.

John Lamont: Welcome to the world of Scottish politics, Madam Deputy Speaker.

To continue, those who were advocating for those amendments were, at best, naive about the consequences of their actions or, at worst, reckless with the future of not just our food exporters, but every other business that hopes to export its produce around the world.

An isolationist approach may be one that the SNP wants to advocate, but I want Scotland and Britain to take their places as global trading partners, so we can sell our top-quality food produce to every corner of the planet. Others may want to restrict the choices available to our businesses, but I hope that SNP Members will come clean and explain that they want to restrict our ability to trade. Their isolationist, anti-trade policy is not one that I think the people of Scotland, or across Britain, want to support.

I am entirely in agreement with the desire to create a thriving domestic agricultural industry that is not undercut by cheap foreign imports, while maintaining and promoting high animal welfare, environmental and food standards abroad. But the answer is not to pass legislation that would create an extreme, blanket, protectionist approach and to slam doors in the faces of our exporters. We need a robust framework that provides support to primary producers to provide security of food supply, while expanding the global trade opportunities to get high-quality Scottish produce on to kitchen tables in as many countries around the world as possible. I believe that the Agriculture Bill provides a platform for those expanded trade opportunities, while maintaining the tough environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards that we all want to see maintained. I know that Scottish farmers have what it takes to compete with the rest of the world, and Scottish farmers can be confident that this UK Government will back them all the way in securing the markets that they need to prosper in future.

7.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): I would like to start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) for securing this important debate. This is a subject that Members across the House are rightly passionate about, and not just Scottish colleagues—all four nations are well represented this evening. It has been good to hear from Northern Ireland, Coventry, the highlands and many other places in the course of the debate.

I am proud that I, with all my colleagues on the Government Benches, stood on a manifesto commitment that, in all our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards. It is always good to hear about farms in my hon. Friend's constituency. As a farmer's son, he is well placed to champion Scottish farming and Scottish produce—I am not saying that only farmer's children make good MPs, but it certainly helps. I know he feels that this is in contrast to those who have chosen to put nationalism before farming. I have fond memories of visiting his constituency and attending the ridings

nearby, and I am pleased to hear that Kelso produce is being enjoyed around the world, even on the Orient Express.

I know that many Members were keen to get involved in this debate, and I look forward to speaking to them further about this important subject in the weeks and months ahead. Across the House, we are all united by a desire for British producers to sell their great produce around the world. The debate on how to promote high standards here while ensuring that we do not import goods produced to standards we find unacceptable is not new. It predates our departure from the EU and will doubtless continue well after the end of the transition period.

To tackle this issue, we require a comprehensive package of measures, one of which is, of course, regulation. I would like to reaffirm once again the Government's commitment to upholding our high environmental, food safety and animal welfare standards as we leave the EU. The European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 will transfer all existing EU food safety provisions, including existing import requirements, on to the UK statute book after the transition period. Those requirements include a ban on using artificial growth hormones in domestic and imported products, and they make it clear that no products, other than potable water, are approved to decontaminate poultry carcasses.

Transparency is also key to this debate. We are going into all our trade negotiations, including with the US, clear that our standards will be upheld in future deals. With regard to the US and other live talks, our negotiating objectives, economic assessment and updates from the initial round have been provided to the House. We will continue to provide further detail as we progress. It is a great pleasure to have my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) here for this debate. The Department for International Trade and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are working closely together at the moment to promote British produce around the world.

All trade deals are also subject to the scrutiny procedures laid out in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, which means that once free trade agreements have been signed, they need to be laid in Parliament for 21 sitting days, alongside an explanatory memorandum, before they can be ratified and enter into force. There will be ample opportunities for scrutiny.

Patricia Gibson: We know that one of the concerns raised by farmers is the flooding of the UK market with cheap imports from America. It looks pretty clear, apparently, that the US negotiators will oppose labelling of their products in the UK as US products, so that consumers will not know which food comes from the US. Is the Minister concerned about that?

Victoria Prentis: I thank the hon. Lady, whom I definitely consider to be a friend, for her intervention. Labelling was raised by a few Members. We have committed to a serious and rapid examination of what can be done through labelling in the UK market to promote high standards and high-welfare goods, and we will consult on this at the end of the transition period. I would like

to reassure her that we have already started work on that consultation. Labelling is undoubtedly one of the tools in the armoury that we will need if we are to produce the situation that we all want—namely, to trade around the world while promoting high standards.

Deidre Brock: Will the Minister give way?

Victoria Prentis: I fear that I need to make some progress. [*Interruption.*] Oh, well, if it is very quick.

Deidre Brock: The Minister is very kind. I wonder whether she is prepared to comment on my remarks about the US ambassador having said recently that, basically, the UK would have to accept US standards in the UK if it wanted a trade deal.

Victoria Prentis: That was answered extremely well earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, so I will carry on, if that is all right.

The Government have in place a range of stakeholder and expert groups that feed into our policy specifically on trade. Those include the strategic trade advisory group, the agri-food expert trade advisory group—that trips off the tongue—and the sustainability expert trade advisory group. We are always looking at how to enhance representation on those groups—although I do not know that the US ambassador would be a candidate to be on one of them—and we are keen to put in place measures to ensure that we keep the groups as closely informed of the negotiations as possible.

DEFRA also runs various supply chain advisory groups, such as the arable group, the livestock group and the food and drink panel. We are strongly supported by expert advice on food standards. Colleagues will know that the UK's food standards, for both domestic production and imports, are overseen by the Food Standards Agency and, indeed, Food Standards Scotland. Those are independent agencies that provide advice to both the UK and Scottish Governments. They will of course continue to do so, to ensure that all food imports comply with our high safety standards. The Government are and always will be keen to continue to work closely with stakeholders across the food chain to understand their concerns about the impact of new trade deals, as well as the opportunities that they will give us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk spoke passionately about the opportunities that the UK's being an independent trading nation presents for British farming and, indeed, for the public at large—sentiments that I really share, as I hope does everybody across the House. I am confident that, from what I have laid out, the House should be reassured that we will both protect food standards through the range of measures that I briefly outlined, and really seize the benefits of our new trade policy for all people and parts of the UK.

Question put and agreed to.

7.52 pm

House adjourned.

Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth)	Jim McMahon
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield)	Eddie Hughes
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster)	Stuart Andrew
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green)	Chris Elmore
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston)	Patrick Grady
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree)	Kim Johnson
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South)	Clive Efford
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen)	Stuart Andrew
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South)	Patrick Grady
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)	Patrick Grady
Bob Blackman (Harrow East)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North)	Patrick Grady
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill)	Patrick Grady
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire)	Stuart Andrew
James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup)	Stuart Andrew
Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)	Patrick Grady
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham)	Chris Elmore
Richard Burgon (Leeds East)	Zarah Sultana
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby)	Chris Elmore
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth)	Chris Elmore
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow)	Patrick Grady
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton)	Alex Norris
Sir William Cash (Stone)	Leo Docherty
Sarah Champion (Rotherham)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife)	Patrick Grady
Feryal Clark (Enfield North)	Chris Elmore
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire)	Chris Elmore
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde)	Patrick Grady

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon)	Alex Burghart
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark)	Bambos Charalambous
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East)	Patrick Grady
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow)	Chris Elmore
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford)	Caroline Nokes
Janet Daby (Lewisham East)	Chris Elmore
Geraint Davies (Swansea West)	Chris Evans
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden)	Stuart Andrew
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk)	Patrick Grady
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West)	Chris Elmore
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Rachel Hopkins
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport)	Caroline Nokes
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire)	Patrick Grady
Dave Doogan (Angus)	Patrick Grady
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock)	Patrick Grady
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington)	Chris Elmore
Philip Dunne (Ludlow)	Jeremy Hunt
Colum Eastwood (Foyle)	Conor McGinn
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central)	Chris Elmore
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Farry (North Down)	Mr Alistair Carmichael
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw)	Patrick Grady
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West)	Patrick Grady
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield)	Chris Elmore
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford)	Chris Elmore
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk)	Theo Clarke
Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough)	Chris Elmore
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet)	Caroline Nokes
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston)	Chris Elmore
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glendon (North Tyneside)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes)	Patrick Grady
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts)	Patrick Grady
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West)	Chris Elmore
Kate Griffiths (Burton)	Aaron Bell
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish)	Chris Elmore
Robert Halfon (Harlow)	Julie Marson
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East)	Chris Elmore
Claire Hanna (Belfast South)	Liz Saville Roberts

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath)	Patrick Grady
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston)	Chris Elmore
Mike Hill (Hartlepool)	Chris Elmore
Simon Hoare (North Dorset)	Fay Jones
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking)	Wes Streeting
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West)	Chris Elmore
Kate Hollern (Blackburn)	Chris Elmore
Adam Holloway (Gravesham)	Maria Caulfield
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley)	Chris Elmore
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border)	Stuart Andrew
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central)	Chris Elmore
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire)	Stuart Andrew
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North)	Chris Elmore
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton)	Ruth Edwards
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South)	Chris Elmore
Afzal Khal (Manchester, Gorton)	Chris Elmore
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire)	Mr William Wragg
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck)	Kate Osborne
Chris Law (Dundee West)	Patrick Grady
Clive Lewis (Norwich South)	Rosie Duffield
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset)	Stuart Andrew
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale)	Chris Elmore
Mark Logan (Bolton North East)	Stuart Andrew
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster)	Lee Rowley
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Lynch (Halifax)	Chris Elmore
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian)	Patrick Grady
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet)	Robert Courts
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood)	Chris Elmore
Alan Mak (Havant)	Stuart Andrew
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston)	Chris Elmore
Rachael Maskell (York Central)	Chris Elmore
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South)	Patrick Grady
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington)	Cat Smith
John Mc Nally (Falkirk)	Patrick Grady
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Mearns (Gateshead)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mark Menzies (Fylde)	Sir David Amess
Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Mills (Amber Valley)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield)	Stuart Andrew
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Patrick Grady
Jessica Morden (Newport East)	Chris Elmore
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale)	Stuart Andrew
Grahame Morris (Easington)	Chris Elmore
James Murray (Ealing North)	Chris Elmore
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North)	Patrick Grady
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire)	Patrick Grady
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon)	Rebecca Harris
Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute)	Patrick Grady
Guy Opperman (Hexham)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Osamor (Edmonton)	Florence Eshalomi
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire)	Patrick Grady
Sarah Owen (Luton North)	Alex Norris
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)	Peter Aldous
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central)	Chris Elmore
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East)	Chris Elmore
Christina Rees (Neath)	Chris Elmore
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge)	Chris Elmore
Rob Roberts (Delyn)	Stuart Andrew
Naz Shah (Bradford West)	Chris Elmore
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall)	Chris Elmore
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield)	Chris Elmore
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East)	Patrick Grady
Alyn Smith (Stirling)	Patrick Grady
Henry Smith (Crawley)	Stuart Andrew
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen)	Robert Courts
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West)	Patrick Grady
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central)	Chris Elmore
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon)	Stuart Andrew
Mel Stride (Central Devon)	Stuart Andrew
Sam Tarry (Ilford South)	Chris Elmore
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central)	Patrick Grady
Owen Thompson (Midlothian)	Patrick Grady
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth)	Olivia Blake
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
David Warburton (Somerton and Frome)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire)	Patrick Grady

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead)	Chris Elmore
Hywel Williams (Arfon)	Ben Lake
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley)	Rachel Hopkins
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford)	Chris Elmore

Written Statements

Wednesday 24 June 2020

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Covid-19: Testing

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Reducing healthcare-associated covid-19 infection is a top priority. Today, the NHS has set out plans for testing of NHS staff. This includes continuing to prioritise testing of all NHS staff with symptoms, asymptomatic regular testing of staff in situations where there is an incident, outbreak or high prevalence and regular surveillance testing across all staff. Under the risk-based approach advised by clinical experts, we are continually reviewing clinical evidence to ensure regular testing of asymptomatic staff is undertaken where appropriate. The CMO's advice is that this is currently best done through a survey, which monitors prevalence in NHS staff. This survey, which will be expanded over the coming months, helps us to determine where wider asymptomatic staff testing is needed. Clinical advice is to focus intensive asymptomatic testing in those areas or settings identified to have high prevalence. This dynamic approach which responds to risk is essential as when prevalence is very low, the risk of misleading results is higher and this can undermine the value of testing. We will continue to keep clinical advice under review.

I also want to clarify a point on the predominant reason for the minority of positive cases that do not go into the NHS Test and Trace scheme. On June 17 I set out that they are largely in-patients in hospital and therefore testing and tracing in the normal sense does not apply. Testing and tracing is different for hospital in-patients than for the general public, as contact tracing is usually done by the hospital rather than by NHS Test and Trace contact tracers. Local hospital infection control teams are often best placed to do the contact tracing for inpatients as these individuals may not be in a position to be able to communicate their contacts and hospitals will have a clear list of patients on wards, staff and shift patterns. This is standard practice for other infections. The data from these hospital in-patients do enter the NHS Test and Trace system. Positive cases who are not contacted by the contact tracing system are either those who do not respond to repeated attempts to make contact (through phone, SMS and email contacts) or for whom NHS Test and Trace has incorrect contact details. Further data will be set out by NHS test and trace tomorrow in the normal way.

[HCWS312]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Rough Sleeping

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): Today I am announcing a further £105 million for local authorities to enable them to support and accommodate rough sleepers.

At the outset of the covid-19 pandemic, the Government took quick action to accommodate rough sleepers and those in communal shelters, giving them the chance to self-isolate. This action was supported by councils, charities, faith groups, public sector partners and businesses. I want to put on record my thanks to everyone who has worked tirelessly to deliver this—this action has undoubtedly saved countless lives. These efforts and the action taken to support people at risk of becoming homeless during the pandemic has resulted in 15,000 vulnerable people being housed in emergency accommodation, including hotels.

Now is the time to help local authorities and the vulnerable people housed during the pandemic with what comes next. Local authorities, working with my Department, have already been assessing the needs of each individual currently in emergency accommodation. For the first time ever, we know who these vulnerable people are and where they are—allowing us to take a more personal and sophisticated look at each of their needs. The additional funding, which is available in this financial year, will allow local authorities to provide appropriate accommodation and support for the next steps, as we help these individuals to put their lives on a more stable footing. It will fund a wide range of measures, including: short-term accommodation before moves into safe, long-term homes can be arranged; moves into the private rental sector; and assistance to secure training and employment. This sustained support is vital to ensure progress is maintained as people move out of emergency accommodation.

This investment comes on top of significant funding we have already provided this year, including plans I announced last month alongside Dame Louise Casey to provide 6,000 supported homes for vulnerable rough sleepers taken off the streets during the pandemic. These homes will be held as a national asset with the specific purpose of providing move-on accommodation to rough sleepers and former rough sleepers.

The Government also understand the need to support people with complex and underlying issues which may be behind their rough sleeping. That is why I am also pleased to announce that a further £16 million in funding will be made available this financial year—bringing the total to £23 million—to tackle the substance dependence treatment needs of rough sleepers. This will help strengthen people's engagement with substance dependence services while in emergency accommodation as they move into safer, long-term accommodation. It will also help people into treatment services and support them as they recover, to prevent a return to the streets.

Our manifesto set out our bold ambition to end rough sleeping within this Parliament and the measures I have announced today are a significant step towards that.

[HCWS311]

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 24 June 2020

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (Accession)

The following is an extract from the statement made by the Secretary of State for International Trade on 17 June 2020.

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss):...The foundations for both deals are strong. We already have close ties in areas such as cars, steel,

services, and food and drink, and **31,000** small businesses export to Australia.

[Official Report, 17 June 2020, Vol. 677, c. 826.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss):

An error has been identified in the statement I made to the House on 17 June 2020.

The correct statement should have been:

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss):...The foundations for both deals are strong. We already have close ties in areas such as cars, steel, services, and food and drink, and **13,400** small businesses export to Australia.

ORAL ANSWERS

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Wednesday 24 June 2020

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**not later than
Wednesday 1 July 2020**

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