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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 10 December 2020

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

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

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

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF MATERNITY SERVICES

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of a Paper, entitled Emerging Findings and Recommendations from the Independent Review of Maternity Services at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, dated 10 December 2020.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Creative Industries: Highly Skilled Workers

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to retain highly skilled workers in the creative industries. [910104]

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinagen): We recognise the crucial role of high-skilled workers in making our creative industries world leading. The £1.57 billion culture recovery fund provides targeted support to critical cultural arts and heritage organisations during the pandemic and the £500 million film and TV production restart scheme has supported 4,500 jobs in the screen sectors to date.

Bill Esterson: SSE Audio employed 196 people in the supply chain of the events industry until March; 75 of those have already been made redundant. Last year it paid £2.45 million to freelancers as well. Its freelancers are among the excluded group who have had no financial support, the business did not qualify for the cultural recovery fund, 99% of which has gone to venues, not suppliers, and unless the furlough scheme is extended in January it will have to make the rest of its workforce redundant. Is it not the case that suppliers such as SEE Audio and its freelancers are essential to the recovery of this brilliant sector of our economy?

Caroline Dinagen: The hon. Gentleman is right to talk about all the amazing parts of the industry that support our creative and cultural venues up and down the country. Of course this Government have just put in an incredible amount of unprecedented business support

right across every sector—over £100 billion for the furloughing scheme, the self-employment income support scheme, grants, loans, VAT deferrals—and for freelancers we know the best thing we can do is get our sectors back up and running. That is what the culture recovery fund is all about.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Today, research from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre has shown that in the last six months there have been 55,000 job losses in music and the performing and visual arts—all that talent, dedication and diversity of voices lost. Our creative workers are desperate to get back to doing what they do best, and we know the simplest way to get money to freelancers is to make shows, but to do that producers need a safety net. Germany has just announced an indemnity fund so event organisers can plan for the second half of 2021 without the financial risk posed by a potential covid outbreak. Industry predictions suggest a three-month indemnity here could get the sector back on its feet. I know that the Minister is receptive to this idea, so can she explain what is holding things up? Has the Chancellor again said no?

Caroline Dinagen: The hon. Member is absolutely right to highlight that our creative industries are a fantastic success story. They contribute more than £112 billion to our economy, more than the automotive, aerospace and life sciences sectors combined, so we do need to do everything we can to help them. The next stage of the cultural recovery fund will be announced shortly—that is another £258 million—and we are looking very carefully at the German insurance model. It has only been announced this week so the details have not been made clear. We have to be sure that it really is the only obstacle to things being able to reopen, but we are very happy to have those conversations with the Treasury.

Digital Advertising

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reform digital advertising. [910105]

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinagen): We are carefully considering the extent to which current advertising regulation is fit to tackle the challenges posed by the modern world. Next year we will be launching a public consultation on the regulation of online advertising. We are also working on more specific areas, including high fat, salt and sugar advertising, and establishing a new pro-competition regime.

Andy Carter: I thank the Minister for that detailed answer. Local journalism is funded on the whole by local advertising, be that in local newspapers or local radio, and the structural impact of the changes in our local economies and the move online is having a significant impact on the way that local independent news is produced. Can the Minister give us more details on the steps the Government are taking to protect local journalism, which is so important to maintaining local democracy?

Caroline Dinagen: My hon. Friend is a great champion for local media and newspapers in his area. We recognise the vital role publications like his own *Warrington Guardian*

play in supporting communities but also in providing reliable information. We strongly welcome the recommendations in the Competition and Markets Authority report and the setting up of a digital markets unit within the CMA to ensure fairness in regulating digital platforms. The Minister for Media and Data meets very regularly with the sector to discuss all its ongoing concerns about this.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I do not know who your secret Santa is, Mr Speaker, but I do know the Minister's: Google and Facebook. Only, they are not buying presents—just using our data, behaviour and social contacts to tell us what to buy through their domination of online advertising, while our local retailers, who pay significant taxes and employ so many people, lose out. Can the Minister confirm that the digital markets unit's powers have yet to be defined and that powers in the long-delayed online harms Bill are being watered down? Will she promise now to stop tech companies selling on our data, and put us back in control of our digital lives and Santa back in charge of Christmas?

Caroline Dinenege: I sincerely hope they are not my secret Santa. Online advertising is clearly an important driver of the UK economy. The Government are really committed to supporting the continued growth of the industry, but it needs to be fairer and better regulated. So we will launch a public consultation next year on measures to enhance how online advertising is regulated in the UK. That will build on the call for evidence we launched this year, and we will consider options to enhance the regulation of advertising content and placement online. The hon. Member asks about the online harms response. It will be published very shortly and it will not be watered down—there is my secret Santa gift for her, Mr Speaker.

Gigabit Broadband Roll-out

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to roll out gigabit broadband. [910106]

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to roll out gigabit broadband. [910112]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): The Government are absolutely committed to delivering nationwide gigabit broadband as soon as possible. That is why we are investing £5 billion to support roll-out in the hardest-to-reach areas of the country. We will go as fast as we can and the only thing that will hold us up is how fast we can get the fibre into the ground. We are engaging closely with industry to support its efforts by incentivising investment and removing barriers to roll-out.

Jonathan Gullis: I thank my hon. Friend for his positive answer. Now that Stoke-on-Trent has a complete city-wide full-fibre network offering gigabit speeds and capability, does he agree that Stoke-on-Trent would be the perfect test bed to show how, post Brexit, smaller UK cities can more than match up to similar-sized centres of digital innovation such as Eindhoven, Karlsruhe

and Aalborg? Will he commit the Government to help make my Silicon Stoke vision a reality, as part of the levelling up commitments?

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend misses no opportunity to promote Silicon Stoke. The Government are absolutely committed to using trials and test beds to support the kind of innovation he talks about. We are interested in new ideas as part of that levelling-up commitment. I look forward to continuing our conversations with Stoke and maybe even visiting one day.

Rob Roberts: Mrs Sharp, who lives in Delyn in my constituency, has just had a quote for £131,638 to install full-fibre broadband for her and her 18 neighbours. That works out at about £7,000 per property. When I queried this with Openreach, it said, "Well, she lives in a rural community. Perhaps she could dig her own trenches to reduce the cost of the groundwork." Given that levelling up should not only be for people in towns and cities and those who happen to own heavy machinery, can my hon. Friend look into this case and others like it to come up with a better answer for Mrs Sharp than "dig your own holes"?

Matt Warman: There are communities that have successfully dug their own trenches, but it is obviously not right to suggest that that would be right for everybody. Ofcom is looking at the universal service obligation, one of the routes to getting broadband into rural areas, but there are other methods. I encourage my hon. Friend to ask his constituents to look at the voucher schemes, particularly those supported by the Welsh Government, and other technologies. But I am happy to look into this specific case, because obviously it is not likely that everyone owns enough heavy machinery to dig every trench.

Mobile Coverage in Rural Areas

Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con): What progress his Department has made on improving mobile coverage in rural areas. [910107]

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): What progress his Department has made on improving mobile coverage in rural areas. [910111]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): The Government have agreed a £1 billion deal with mobile network operators to deliver the shared rural network. This landmark deal will deliver 95% coverage by the end of 2025. The exact deployment plans will be managed by operators and we look forward to seeing more details of those.

Robert Largan: The unique geography of the Peak District means that we have some of the worst mobile phone coverage blackspots anywhere in the country. I welcome the introduction of the shared rural network, but can the Minister provide further information to the House on when my constituents might see some of the benefit of this? Would he agree to meet me, so we can discuss how we can roll out better phone coverage to the whole High Peak?

Matt Warman: The shared rural network is already benefiting some parts of the country, but my hon. Friend is right that in areas such as High Peak it cannot come soon enough. I am very happy to meet him to discuss that, and I am very happy for him to join me in continuing to encourage operators to make their plans public as quickly as possible.

Simon Baynes: Will the Minister join me in praising the often unsung work of local councils in improving rural mobile connectivity, such as the digital officers of Wrexham and Denbighshire councils in Clwyd South, who bring together local solutions to complex mobile coverage problems?

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that, whether it is in Wrexham and Denbighshire or up and down the country, the work of local authorities has been absolutely essential in delivering the kind of bespoke solutions that work best for local communities. I am grateful to those in Wrexham and Denbighshire who have engaged closely with my Department's barrier-busting taskforce to make sure that his constituents get the connectivity that they deserve.

Covid-19: Sporting Fixtures and Sport Facilities

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to permit the (a) resumption of grassroots sporting fixtures and (b) reopening of sport facilities during the covid-19 outbreak. [910108]

Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to permit the (a) resumption of grassroots sporting fixtures and (b) reopening of sport facilities. [910110]

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to permit the (a) resumption of grassroots sporting fixtures and (b) reopening of sport facilities. [910113]

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden): Sports and physical activity are vital for our physical and mental health and an important weapon in the fight against coronavirus. That is why I made the return of grassroots sports an immediate priority after national restrictions ended. Since 2 December, I am pleased to say that grassroots clubs, sports facilities and gyms have opened across all tiers.

Karl McCartney [V]: As my right hon. Friend is aware, my constituency of Lincoln is home to the mighty Imps—something that my constituents and I are very proud of. While the partial resumption of fan attendance is positive news, this does not end the concern that clubs and fans have. Will he confirm his plans to see a full return of fans, and what further financial support will be provided for those clubs, which have had a very difficult 2020? Finally, has snooker now been reclassified as entertainment and not sport?

Oliver Dowden: I know that my hon. Friend is not impish in his devotion to Lincoln City, and it is good to see them doing so well this season. First, I am pleased about the deal that has been reached between the Premier League and the English Football League for £250 million, which I am confident will secure the game through to the end of the season. Of course, we want it to reopen

as rapidly as possible. The first important step for somewhere such as Lincolnshire is to get out of tier 3 into tier 2, and then into tier 1, and we will see more fans able to attend as we go through that process.

In relation to snooker, the professional game has returned, but some recreational snooker and leagues may not be happening in higher tiers due to the risk of spreading. We will keep this under review.

Ian Levy [V]: Blyth Valley is currently under tier 3 restrictions, with gyms and sports facilities open for individual exercise. Increased ventilation, enhanced cleaning of sports equipment and a constant supply of hand sanitiser are just some of the measures required to ensure that facilities can operate in a covid-19-secure way. The implementation of such measures is adding significant cost to an industry that has had a terrible year. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will engage with the industry and find a way to help it to remain open in a safe and covid-secure way?

Oliver Dowden: Sport is of course a force for good in all our communities, and I made it a priority to open sports facilities and gyms in all tiers as part of this reopening. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the incredible efforts made by venues to ensure that this could happen. I know the difficult financial situation many of them find themselves in. We have already provided over £2 billion to sport, including, for example, the £300 million sport rescue fund, money for local leisure centres and support from Sport England, but of course I will continue to work with sports over the weeks and months ahead to support them.

Mark Jenkinson: Workington Reds are under the new chairmanship of David Bowden, and I would like to send him my best wishes for taking over at such a difficult time. Will my right hon. Friend tell me what support has been made available to clubs such as Workington Reds?

Oliver Dowden: I of course join my hon. Friend in giving my very best wishes to the new chairman, David Bowden, at Workington Reds. We know the value of these clubs. That is precisely why we included £25 million of funding for national league clubs in the sports winter survival package. That is, of course, on top of the unique lottery deal, which has provided £10 million for the national league's top two tiers to get them playing this season. Of course, we will continue to work with the sport.

Covid-19: Live Music

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What steps he is taking to help the live music sector respond to the economic effect of the covid-19 outbreak. [910109]

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage): In addition to more than £100 billion of general business support, our unprecedented investment of £1.57 billion in the culture recovery fund has seen more than £500 million handed out to organisations across England to date, a fifth of which has gone to the music sector. Those funds are providing valuable protection to live music venues and festivals, and to all the valuable jobs that rely on them.

Theresa Villiers: I know the whole sector is very grateful for the support it has received from the Government, but if we are going to get music festivals and major events on again from the spring and summer, businesses need to be signing contracts and spending money now. Will the Minister give serious consideration to Government support for an indemnity or insurance scheme so that they can make those decisions in the confidence that, if there is a third wave, their losses will be mitigated?

Caroline Dinagen: I thank my right hon. Friend for that question. I am well aware of the concerns about and the challenges of securing insurance for live music events. It is something we are looking at very carefully, but the key is for the industry to build an evidence base that demonstrates that insurance coverage is the only barrier to events being able to take place. That is what we managed to prove with the film and TV production restart scheme. In the meantime, the remaining £258 million of the culture recovery fund will very shortly be made available to provide extra support.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con) [V]: On a similar theme, the UK is the world leader in music and arts festivals. The sector is worth £12 billion and supports many thousands of highly skilled jobs, as well as being the financial lifeblood of the nation's musicians. However, there will be no festival season next year unless insurance is underwritten in case of covid disruption. First, will the Minister meet with me and MPs from across the House to see how that reinsurance can be put in place? Secondly, noting her answer to the previous question, does she recognise that with a minimum lead time of six months, the reinsurance needs to be in place now before the likes of Glastonbury can commit and, if it is not, those festivals effectively cannot be put in place? We need them to be able to sign those contracts today, rather than to wait several months and then have an insurance scheme in place.

Caroline Dinagen: I know this is something that my hon. Friend cares deeply about and that he met the Secretary of State recently to discuss it. Festivals are a vibrant and integral part of our creative community and our economy, and I am well aware that many will take decisions very soon about whether they can go ahead next year, so this is an urgent situation. There is a sub-group of my entertainment and events working group looking specifically at how we can get festivals reopened. I have met in the past few weeks with representatives from festivals in Edinburgh, and only yesterday with representatives from festivals on the Isle of Wight.

Covid-19 Tiers: Performing Arts

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the tiered system of covid-19 restrictions on the performing arts. [910115]

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinagen): Following the recent introduction of regional tiers, venues in tiers 1 and 2 are open to audiences, subject to social distancing and caps on capacity. Venues in tier 3 are adapting their performances to broadcast without audiences. The Government continue to work with the

performing arts sector to assess the impact of the tiers and to develop proposals for how venues can open with fuller audiences when it is safe to do so.

Paul Blomfield [V]: The culture recovery fund, which the Minister mentioned earlier, has of course been welcomed by our award-winning Sheffield theatres, along with others across the sector. However, she knows that the performing arts depend on an army of freelancers. They make up some 70% of the theatre workforce alone, not only actors and performers, but more working in lighting, set design, stage management and other areas. She also knows that they have been shut out of the business support that she talked about earlier—more than 200,000 people, part of the 3 million excluded across all sectors—so will she recognise the problem for freelancers and press the Treasury to provide the support they need?

Caroline Dinagen: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the culture recovery fund has been a lifeline for cultural and artistic institutions up and down our country. Sheffield Central has received over £7 million in funding in 2020-21. The whole thing about supporting freelancers is getting things up and running. For example, the Crucible theatre in Sheffield is in tier 3, but it is continuing to rehearse its panto with the aim of performing it live if restrictions are lifted in time, but whatever happens, it will record its work and stream it into hospitals, schools and, hopefully, to audiences. That is how we get our freelancers back to work—by continuing to produce the high-quality cultural content that audiences are so desperate for.

Data Protection: GDPR and Other EU Regulations

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the retention of (a) the GDPR and (b) other EU regulations on data protection after the transition period. [910119]

The Minister for Media and Data (Mr John Whittingdale): The general data protection regulation regime will be retained in domestic law after the transition period through the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. The UK remains committed to maintaining high data protection standards now and in the future.

Martyn Day [V]: The EU has been a world leader when it comes to the protection of citizens' digital rights. This is evidenced by the large number of countries, such as South Korea, Japan and Brazil, that sought to emulate its groundbreaking GDPR policy. As the end of the transition period looms, how will the UK Government ensure that digital rights law not only lives up to the EU's high standards but exceeds them?

Mr Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the GDPR has ensured that we have high standards and, as I say, we are absolutely committed to maintaining them. We have no intention of diverging substantially from the GDPR, but obviously we will be looking to see whether there are ways in which we can improve our regime while maintaining those high standards.

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) [V]: The independent Information Commissioner recently revealed that the Conservative party had racially and

religiously profiled 10 million voters at the last election. I was shocked to learn that it did this by buying data that

“identified a person’s...ethnic origin and religion based on their first and last name.”

Can the Minister explain to the House why his party does this?

Mr Whittingdale: As I recall, the Information Commissioner examined the practices of all political parties and made comments against all of them. However, it did not find that any breaches of the law had occurred.

Misinformation and Disinformation Online.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What recent steps his Department has taken to tackle the proliferation of (a) misinformation and (b) disinformation online. [910124]

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage): The Government take the issue of misinformation and disinformation very seriously, and DCMS is leading work across Government to tackle it. As this can be particularly harmful during the pandemic, we stood up the counter-disinformation unit to bring together cross-Government monitoring and analysis capabilities. We are working closely with social media platforms to help them to identify and remove incorrect claims about the virus and to promote authoritative information.

Gavin Newlands: Online misinformation is a great harm to us all. It can make people refuse life-saving medicines, it can make people believe that the so-called leader of the free world has been cheated out of an election, and in the last of the 16 days of action on gender-based violence against women and girls, it is important to note that 52% of young women and girls have been abused online and that 87% think the problem is getting worse. When will we finally see the online harms Bill, given that the social media and tech companies are doing nowhere near enough to protect individuals and society at large?

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight this. We know that the vast majority of misinformation is harmful but legal. It is really important that we develop a comprehensive piece of legislation, working closely with civil society and the tech platforms, so that where disinformation is illegal or encourages illegal behaviours it can be dealt with, and so that we can address false narratives online and try to root out the content that is legal but harmful, particularly to children. With that in mind, we will be publishing the online harms response very shortly, and we plan to bring forward the legislation early next year.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Like many other Members, I have been sharing information about the excellent developments on the vaccines with my constituents on social media, but I have been deeply worried by some of the anti-vax nonsense I have seen in response. What is the Minister’s advice to my constituents when they see this information online? Should they simply report it to the social media companies and expect them to remove it—they have a

pretty poor track record of doing that—or is there some way of feeding into the disinformation unit that she has described?

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this. Anti-vaccination propaganda can be really harmful and can deter people from getting treatment that could save their life or the life of a loved one. That is why it is really important to bring it to the attention of the social media companies themselves. Last month, my colleague the Secretary of State, alongside the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, met the social media companies, which agreed to reduce the spread of harmful and misleading narratives, particularly around the potential covid-19 vaccine. We are holding them to account for this; it is vital that they get it right and that their work is transparent and effective.

Creative Industries: Support to Work in the EU

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): What plans he has to support the creative industries to work in the EU when the transitional arrangements with the EU come to an end. [910129]

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage): The Government continue to engage with the creative sectors so that they know how to prepare for changes at the end of the transition period. We are seeking a reciprocal arrangement with the EU that would allow UK citizens to undertake some business activities in the EU without a work permit on a short-term basis. We cannot comment on the details of those arrangements at the moment, as the negotiations are still ongoing.

Kerry McCarthy: As the least musically talented member ever of the Musicians Union, I draw the House’s attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I am sort of pleased that the Minister gave that answer, although it does mean that I am slightly floundering as to what question to ask her now, because that was what I was going to ask. Musicians really need that reciprocal exemption. I know she says that what is important is that they are ready and prepared for when they can resume touring again, but it is really late in the day to leave this, and Ministers told the Musicians Union that it would be quite an easy thing to do. Is it possible to get some reassurance to them now, rather than later?

Caroline Dinenage: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady; she may not have musical talent, but she has some of the best musical taste in this House. The cultural and creative sectors are, as she knows, some of the UK’s greatest success stories and produce talent that is recognised the world over. Being outside the EU will not change that, but it does mean that we need practical changes on both sides of the channel. That will not come as a big surprise; DCMS has been engaging for a very long time with the relevant trade and membership bodies, which cover a membership of approximately 150,000 businesses and freelancers. We have also had “Get ready for Brexit” and “Check. Change. Go.” public information campaigns, so we have been keeping people updated every step of the way.

Topical Questions

[910064] **Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden): We continue to protect our sectors through the covid crisis. In the past month alone, we have announced a £300 million winter survival package for sports clubs, seen a £250 million deal between the English Football League and the Premier League and announced £100 million in emergency funding for leisure centres. At the same time, we continue to deliver on our non-covid priorities, for example, the Telecommunications (Security) Bill and telecoms diversification strategy, the review of the Gambling Act 2005, the response to the Competition and Markets Authority and, of course, plans for Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Damien Moore: Britannia has just been voted the UK's worst hotel chain for the 8th year in a row. This is doing untold damage to resort constituencies such as mine in Southport, which have Britannia Hotels and Pontins campsites. What does my right hon. Friend have to say about this truly appalling record?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise concerns about the management and cleanliness practices of sites owned by Britannia Hotels, and he has also raised them with me privately. I know that in November the Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), met them, and he was again in contact with them yesterday to raise those concerns. Of course, local authorities have appropriate powers to deal with this, but it is something I am taking a very close interest in.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): This week, we learnt that a former Conservative DCMS Secretary, now the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, had to promise to be positive towards Mark Zuckerberg and his monopolistic company before Mr Zuckerberg would even agree to meet him in 2018. Has the current Secretary of State adopted the same approach in his meetings with Facebook executives during his tenure?

Oliver Dowden: I do not know what information the hon. Lady has been reading; if she is referring to the information released in the freedom of information request, that was certainly not how I read it. We have been taking a robust approach to social media companies. I have already met with Nick Clegg and Sheryl Sandberg about encryption, with the Home Secretary, and we continue to develop robust proposals for online harms, which we will announce very shortly.

Jo Stevens: I am pleased to hear that we will finally get the much-delayed online harms Bill to ensure that the regulator has the strength to tackle online child abuse comprehensively and ensure trust and transparency from online platforms—including, of course, Facebook; Instagram, which is owned by Facebook; and WhatsApp, which is also owned by Facebook—as standard, as the Secretary of State has promised. However, we have heard this week that the Bill has been watered down and will not include criminal penalties for senior tech executives after multiple breaches. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that he will not put his relationship with powerful tech companies ahead of the safety of children and that criminal penalties will be included in the Bill?

Oliver Dowden: I gently advise the hon. Lady that as much as I respect our newspapers and have done a great deal to support them, she should not believe everything that she reads in newspapers; wait to see the response. There is talk of things being watered down but people should wait and see what is in the Bill. I am confident that we will have a robust and effective regime that achieves two outcomes: first, we will ensure that people are safe online, and secondly, the legislation will at the same time be proportionate to ensure that we have a vibrant tech sector in this country.

[910069] **Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree with me about the importance of appropriate training, education and professional practices across the performing arts, which will be championed by the new all-party parliamentary group on performing arts, education and training, which I hope to chair, starting early in the new year?

Oliver Dowden: I do not want to interfere in the election of the chairman of that APPG, but my hon. Friend will make an excellent candidate for that position. We of course remain committed to ensuring that all children and young people have a broad and balanced curriculum, of which creative education is a key part. We will work with the Department for Education and other valued education partners to deliver high-quality education and training across all disciplines in the arts.

[910065] **Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP) [V]:** Scotland is making good progress in tackling alcohol abuse, but exposure to alcohol marketing makes children more likely to drink at a younger age and to consume more. Advertising is reserved to Westminster. As the Government have rightly announced a consultation on the total restriction of the online advertising of foods high in fat, sugar and salt, will the Secretary of State do likewise for alcohol? The harm is just as great.

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this issue. We have opened the consultation on products high in fat, salt and sugar and continue to keep all advertising restrictions under review. It is vital that the drinks industry does not undertake advertising that in any way encourages young people to drink or people to engage in excessive drinking.

[910070] **Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con):** I am sure you will not mind, Mr Speaker, if I put on record my thanks for the support that the Government have given to rugby league clubs across the north of England, including my local team Warrington Wolves. Will my right hon. Friend look into what support the Government can provide in terms of insurance and indemnity so that planning can continue for the rugby league world cup, which is due to take place across the north of England next year? There are of course concerns because of covid and the risk that such an important tournament might not be able to take place. Will he look carefully at what support the Government can give?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue. I should mention again, for your benefit, Mr Speaker, that not only did we provide £16 million of support to protect rugby league earlier this year, but we announced a further £12 million last month. The Halliwell Jones stadium in my hon. Friend's constituency will be a terrific host of the rugby league world cup next year—

Mr Speaker: It's not in his constituency.

Oliver Dowden: Just outside—very close to his constituency. [*Laughter.*] I stand corrected, Mr Speaker. I assure you that it is an excellent stadium wherever in the United Kingdom it is located. We are very much looking forward to the rugby league world cup as the main event of 2021 and we are of course working very closely indeed with those involved. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the risks around covid; I very much hope that by that point we will be able to have the full return of fans to stadiums, but we will of course ensure that contingencies are in place.

Finally, I should say how grateful I am to Ralph Rimmer at the Rugby Football League and the rugby league world cup team for all their excellent efforts.

Mr Speaker: Absolutely right.

[910066] **Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Secretary of State will know that millions of people—children and adults—with speech and language difficulties have had a very difficult time in the pandemic through lack of physical and digital support. Will he meet me, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on speech and language difficulties, and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists to discuss how to improve digital support for those with speech and language difficulties at this very difficult time?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue of digital exclusion across the board. My Department is working closely to address that, and of course I would be very happy for either me or one of my ministerial colleagues to meet him and that group to discuss those ideas further.

[910072] **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con) [V]: My local newspaper, the *Cornish Times*, was concerned about planning changes, which could mean a loss of advertising revenue. What long-term Government revenue streams can local papers take advantage of so as to secure their future?

Oliver Dowden: We are very committed to ensuring that we have vibrant local newspapers. They are a cornerstone of our democracy. We have already extended business rates relief on local newspaper offices, fast-tracked zero-rating of VAT on e-publications and will continue to explore further options for support. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the important role of statutory notices and the role that they play in newspapers' revenue and we are working closely to ensure that we protect that.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General was asked—

Covid-19: Backlog of Cases

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): What steps she is taking with (a) the CPS and (b) partner agencies in the criminal justice system to help reduce the backlog of cases as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [910024]

The Attorney General (Suella Braverman): Morning, Mr Speaker. The criminal justice response to the pandemic has been truly collaborative, and I thank all frontline staff for their incredibly hard work. The Crown Prosecution

Service is working closely with partner agencies to reduce the backlog of cases in courts. That includes introducing internal measures to manage larger, live caseloads and working to ensure maximum throughput of cases at court. I am pleased to say to the hon. Lady that Newport and Cwmbran magistrates court is now listing cases in line with pre-covid timescales.

Jessica Morden: The backlog of cases has meant a serious delay in the ability to access justice. As the Law Society has pointed out:

“Investing in legal aid for early advice and legal representation will ensure judicial time is used as efficiently as possible in cases which do go to court.”

What is the Attorney General doing with the Lord Chancellor to ensure that legal aid and early advice are funded properly to help tackle the backlog?

The Attorney General: I am grateful for the question from the hon. Lady. I am working with the Lord Chancellor and with all Government Departments to support publicly funded lawyers. At the beginning of the pandemic, the CPS, for which I am mainly responsible, made changes to its system for paying fees to advocates to help support them during this difficult time. In August, the Government invested a further £51 million in the criminal legal aid fee scheme to better reflect the important work that publicly funded barristers provide.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I and members of the Justice Committee join the Attorney General in paying tribute to all those in the justice system who have worked very hard to deal with the extra pressures of the covid pandemic. Recognising that, she will know of course that the Lord Chief Justice has recently observed that a significant number of multi-handed large-scale organised crime cases are likely to be coming into the Crown court system in the coming year. That will add to pressure because of the social distancing arrangements required in Crown courts, and, given that we are listing, at the moment, some cases up to 2022, that is clearly not desirable. How is she proposing that the CPS deals specifically with those pressures, given also the comments by the inspectorate around disclosure still needing to be improved, as that can cause delays at trials?

The Attorney General: Again, my hon. Friend raises an important point, because, in order to tackle the backlog and ensure that court activity continues where possible, the CPS has moved over its Crown advocates to increase its resources in reviewing cases and has offered secondments to the Bar. That is something that has been welcomed by the Bar and by the profession. That move to bring CPS advocates in-house to deal with charging and case progression—matters that my hon. Friend raises—ensures that the CPS is in the best place to be ready for trials and to support the courts recovery plan to deal with the backlog and, in particular, those multi-handed trials, which are of concern when it comes to bearing down on this backlog.

Mr Speaker: I now call shadow Attorney General, Ellie Reeves, to whom I send birthday greetings. Happy birthday.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and I congratulate the Attorney General on her happy news.

The CPS case backlog is up 55% since March; victims of domestic violence are being told by police to pursue civil action rather than criminal prosecutions because the courts are so overwhelmed; and the latest figures show that domestic abuse prosecutions are down by 19%. On the final day of 16 days of action against gender-based violence, it is clear that the Government are letting down victims on every front. What exactly is the Attorney General doing about this?

The Attorney General: I wish the hon. Lady a happy birthday and thank her for her kind wishes, but I have to disagree with the premise of her question.

Of course, the Government take very seriously the challenges faced by vulnerable victims, particularly at this difficult time, and we acknowledge there are challenges and strains in the court system. That is why, earlier this year, the CPS introduced the interim charging protocol with the police, which prioritised high-harm cases, including those with victims of domestic abuse or serious violence. That has enabled a slower decrease or fall in the prosecutions of those cases.

We have also seen the roll-out of section 28 in 18 courts since February, and, as of 23 November, throughout 82 Crown courts. That is a real benefit for vulnerable victims who are going through the traumatic experience of giving evidence in domestic abuse cases and on sexual violence matters.

Immigration Offences: Prosecution

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the CPS's policy on the prosecution of immigration offences. [910025]

The Solicitor General (Michael Ellis): The CPS is committed to prosecuting immigration crime to protect UK borders, and, in particular, to bring to justice those who exploit and facilitate the entry of illegal migrants. The CPS has clear and published policy guidance on the prosecution of immigration offences that reflects the memorandum of understanding agreed between the CPS and Home Office Immigration Enforcement.

Martyn Day [V]: The offence of facilitating unlawful immigration has previously been used, quite rightly, to tackle smuggling gangs and traffickers, but in recent months the Crown Prosecution Service has started prosecuting refugees crossing the channel simply because they were the unlucky ones forced to steer the boat. As the chief inspector of borders has made clear, these people are victims of the gangs—they are not gang members—so why are they being prosecuted and put in prison, contrary to the spirit of UN protocols and the published CPS guidance?

The Solicitor General: The CPS has not changed its policy on prosecuting immigration offences. The joint approach between the CPS and Immigration Enforcement is to consider prosecution for anyone who has been involved in organising and planning these journeys—I emphasise, the organising and planning—together with those responsible for controlling the vessels. As always, every case has to be considered on its merits and on the facts, and decisions must be in line with the code in the usual way. Prosecutors have to be satisfied about that, and prosecutors understand their obligations.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The Solicitor General referred to prosecuting the people who control the vessels, but they are, as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) said, the victims of these gangs—not members of the gangs—so there has been a change in CPS policy and practice. If he wants to prove me wrong on that, will he publish the new note or guidance on this offence that I understand was issued to CPS lawyers last month, and will he also publish details of any representations made by the Home Office in the last 18 months in relation to this offence?

The Solicitor General: As I say, the policy is clear on prosecutors' obligations. They have obligations—the obligations that we have under article 31 of the refugee convention—and it is well to point out that those obligations are actually enshrined in our domestic legislation, here in this honourable House. The domestic legislation in section 31 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 is quite clear in this area. Those who facilitate, control and engineer these offences are subject to prosecution.

Spending Review 2020 Additional Funding

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What plans the CPS has to deliver improvements to services in (a) Northamptonshire and (b) England from the additional funding announced in the spending review 2020. [910026]

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): What the CPS plans to deliver with the additional funding announced in the spending review 2020. [910042]

The Solicitor General (Michael Ellis): The Government are investing across the justice system, with a further £23 million for the CPS, on top of £85 million invested over the past two years. That investment will enable the CPS to respond effectively to the increase in caseload that we expect; we are recruiting 20,000 new police officers. That will strengthen our response to things like rape and serious sexual offences.

Investing in the CPS demonstrates this Government's commitment to securing justice for victims of crime. I am pleased to say that funding will support the recruitment of new roles across England and Wales, including in CPS East Midlands, which covers Northamptonshire—both my county and my hon. Friend's county.

Mr Hollobone: Advocates for defendants at Northampton Crown court are regularly using the fact that their client has waited so long for justice during the pandemic as mitigation when seeking a lesser sentence from the judge. How is the Crown Prosecution Service countering such pleas so that convicted criminals receive the tougher sentences that the public want to see?

The Solicitor General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning Northampton Crown court, at which I appeared for many years, both prosecuting and defending. Sentencing is a matter for the courts. The CPS prosecutors will assist the courts when it comes to sentencing to ensure that all relevant factors are brought to the court's attention when considering a sentence.

Courts do have to have regard to guidance that the Sentencing Council publishes on sentencing principles, including during the covid pandemic. That includes

advice that each case must be considered on its own facts. The court has an obligation—my hon. Friend is right to raise this—to protect the public and victims of crime, and sentencing by our judiciary is actually very robust. It is right, though, that judges hear mitigating features as well as aggravating features. They do that, and they sentence accordingly.

Jerome Mayhew: The Government should be commended for bringing down the number of outstanding Crown court cases, prior to covid, to a 10-year low, but of course the social distancing requirements of covid have changed the situation. Is the Crown court system now keeping up with the current inflow of cases? If not, how are the Government going to get a handle on the backlog?

The Solicitor General: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, which is well made. We have unlocked vital capacity by opening 16 so-called Nightingale courts to provide 29 extra courtrooms, 10 of which are being used for non-custodial types of cases and jury trials. We are continuing to open more Nightingale courts. We are spending £110 million on a range of emergency measures to help courts to tackle the impact of covid-19. We have recruited 1,600 additional staff, who are using the cloud video platform, and that continues to increase: virtual hearings are taking place more than ever. That has now been rolled out to over 150 magistrates courts and about 70 Crown courts. A lot of work is being done to increase capacity, but my hon. Friend is very right to raise this.

Rape and Sexual Assault: Prosecutions

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): What steps she has taken to increase the number of prosecutions relating to rape and sexual assault. [910027]

The Attorney General (Suella Braverman): Tackling rape is a priority for this Government, and £3 million has been awarded to the CPS in this year's spending review specifically for rape and serious sexual offence work. This year the CPS published its own rape strategy, "Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) 2025", and has updated rape legal guidance and training for specialist prosecutors. The CPS is also engaging stakeholders on a joint action plan on rape, with the police, aimed at improving joint working, launching in 2021.

Tony Lloyd [V]: I can rehearse the figures, as indeed the Attorney General can, on declining rates of prosecution for rape and sexual violence. The Victims Commissioner, Vera Baird, found that only one in seven victims believes they will get any form of justice through our criminal justice system. Does the Attorney General agree that if rape is not to be a de facto matter of impunity for the attacker, we must have the rape review published as soon as possible, and that we have to see urgent action to begin to bring these catastrophic and scandalous numbers down and to give confidence to victims that they will actually get justice?

The Attorney General: The hon. Gentleman is, with respect, wrong to suggest that perpetrators of rape can behave with immunity—I think that was the word he used. There is a real priority shared throughout Government to bear down on the low rates of prosecutions and convictions in this area. Following the publishing of the

shadow rape review, the Government have decided to delay publication of the end-to-end rape review until 2021, so that we can ensure proper engagement with the views and perspectives of stakeholders. That will allow us to assess other recently published findings, including the survey of victims of rape undertaken by the Victims' Commissioner. That is important work, and we want to get it right.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Rape prosecutions are at their lowest level on record, and the recent survey of survivors found that just 14% believed they would receive justice by reporting the crime. Does the Attorney General agree that violence against women is a violation of women's fundamental human rights, and does she therefore think that instead of announcing unnecessary consultations on the Human Rights Act 1998, which is there to protect victims and the public, the Government should instead focus on addressing the complete and systematic failures of the current criminal justice system?

The Attorney General: The decline in criminal justice outcomes for rape is a cause of deep concern for us all, and although the increased charge rates in 2019-20 and in quarter 1 of 2020-21 have led to increases in the volume of cases proceeding to prosecution following charge, there is clearly more to be done.

The decline in this issue is complex and cross-system. It is why the Government have commissioned an end-to-end rape review, which, as I said, is due to be published next year. The CPS is proactive in making improvements, including the publication of its strategy, which deals head-on with trying to support victims and to address the concerns expressed in the 2019 inspectorate report. It has also published updated rape legal guidance for public consultation. That is the way to get it right, so that we can inject long-term benefits and change in the system.

Publicly Funded Barristers

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What discussions she has had Cabinet colleagues on providing financial support for publicly funded barristers. [910028]

The Attorney General (Suella Braverman): Criminal defence lawyers play a crucial role in upholding the rule of law, and the Government greatly value the work that they do. In my meetings with the Bar Council, the Criminal Bar Association and with circuit leaders, support for the publicly funded Bar is always high on the agenda.

There are three things here. First, at the beginning of the pandemic, the CPS made changes to its system for paying fees to advocates to support them at that difficult time. Secondly, the Government made it easier for barristers to claim hardship payments for Crown court work. Thirdly, in August, the Government invested an extra £51 million in the criminal legal aid fee scheme to better reflect the important work that criminal barristers do.

Afzal Khan [V]: It was extremely disappointing to see no further funding for legal aid practitioners announced in the Chancellor's spending review. There has not been a rise in legal aid payments for 25 years, and a decade of Government cuts to legal aid have left thousands of

practitioners facing the prospect of going out of business, even before coronavirus. Does the Attorney General agree that legal aid practitioners should have been included in the spending review?

The Attorney General: As I have already mentioned, the £51 million of additional funding through the criminal legal aid review has been allocated specifically for those publicly funded barristers and lawyers of whom the hon. Gentleman speaks. The next phase of CLAR will involve an independently led review that will ensure the market meets demands, provides value for money for the taxpayer and provides for defendants to continue to receive high-quality advice from a diverse range of practitioners, protecting access to justice now and into the future.

Covid-19 Lockdown: Domestic Abuse Prosecutions

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the adequacy of CPS resources to tackle domestic abuse prosecutions arising from the covid-19 lockdown. [910029]

The Solicitor General (Michael Ellis): The CPS is determined to bring perpetrators of domestic abuse to justice and provide protection for victims in spite of the pandemic. I have personally presented cases in the Court of Appeal where I have felt that sentences were too low in this area of law. Following the £85 million uplift awarded last year, CPS recruitment has continued to boost our resources and ensure that cases progress through the courts.

Catherine West: The Solicitor General will be aware of the 88% increase in case load and the 23% drop in resources to deal with that. What urgency can he inject to deal with this burning issue?

The Solicitor General: The hon. Member is right: it is a burning issue and a very important one. Domestic abuse cases are among our highest priorities in the court system, being dealt with by the criminal justice system. They continued to be afforded a higher priority as social distancing restrictions were eased. That was reinforced in guidance for judges about listing in magistrates courts issued by the senior presiding judge for England and Wales, and the CPS is working across Government. We are at one on this. We recognise it as a priority. Domestic abuse cases are appalling, and they remain among our highest priorities.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that up to 30% of domestic violence starts during pregnancy, so

can he tell me what the CPS is doing to protect vulnerable babies from that toxic environment, which has such a profoundly damaging impact on their lifelong potential?

The Solicitor General: I am full of admiration for the work that my right hon. Friend does in this area. She is a powerful and committed advocate for this cause. She is undertaking some work for the Prime Minister, which I know the Government are eagerly awaiting. Tackling domestic abuse and supporting victims is a key priority for this Government, now more than ever. The Domestic Abuse Bill and the wider action plan will help to protect and support victims and their children. All NHS staff must undertake mandatory safeguarding training nowadays, which includes a focus on domestic abuse, so that they can pick it up. The new “Working Together to Safeguard Children” arrangements help to strengthen the multi-agency approach of partnership and collaborative working.

Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What recent sentences she has extended through the unduly lenient sentence scheme. [910030]

The Solicitor General (Michael Ellis): The Court of Appeal has this month increased sentences referred by me for a range of offending. Those have included the supply of drugs in one of Her Majesty’s prisons, the possession of firearms, and the rape of a victim who was asleep combined with the making of indecent images and recordings.

Mrs Latham: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the purposes of sentencing include public protection as well as punishment, and that is important for the unduly lenient sentence scheme?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend is entirely right about public protection. It is one reason why, exceptionally, I will refer a case involving a dangerous offender, for example. In two separate cases this year—one involving a stabbing, and the other involving rape, where both the victims were lone females—the offenders had their original sentences extended following my reference to the Court of Appeal to properly reflect the dangerousness of their offending. She is quite right to highlight this point, and that work will continue.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am suspending the House for a few minutes.

10.33 am

Sitting suspended.

Future Relationship with the EU

10.37 am

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office to make a statement on the progress of the negotiations on the UK's future relationship with the EU and preparations for the end of the transition period.

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): I am grateful for the opportunity to update the House again on the progress of our negotiations with the European Union. The Prime Minister met the Commission President yesterday evening in Brussels. They, along with the chief negotiators, Lord Frost and Michel Barnier, discussed the significant obstacles that still remain in the negotiations. It is clear that we remain far apart on the so-called level playing field, fisheries and governance. However, they agreed that talks should resume in Brussels today to see whether the gaps can be bridged. They also agreed that a decision should be taken by Sunday regarding the future of the talks.

We are working tirelessly to get a deal, but we cannot accept one at any cost. We cannot accept a deal that would compromise the control of our money, laws, borders and fish. The only deal that is possible is one that is compatible with our sovereignty and takes back control of our laws, trade and waters. As the Prime Minister said, whether we agree trading arrangements resembling those of Australia or Canada, the United Kingdom will prosper as an independent nation. We will continue to keep the House updated as we seek to secure a future relationship with our EU friends that respects our status as a sovereign, equal and independent country.

Rachel Reeves: The country was hoping for a breakthrough last night, yet there was none. There is a sense of huge dismay, as we all wanted to hear significant progress, but we heard more about the Prime Minister's meal than we did about his deal. In fact, we have not heard from the Prime Minister at all, even though he was supposed to be taking charge of these negotiations.

On Sunday, we will have just 18 days to go until the end of the transition period. How has it come to this? Businesses desperately trying to plan need to know what on earth is going on. If talks break down and the Government pursue no deal, what happens next? Will the Government look to swiftly restart negotiations, or do the Government believe there should be no talks next year or even for the rest of this Parliament? Or have the Government not thought that far ahead?

I want to focus in my question today on the security implications of no deal. The political declaration, signed by the Prime Minister, stated that there should be a "broad, comprehensive and balanced security partnership."

Yet despite numerous questions from the Opposition, and indeed from the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), Ministers have been unable to tell us how border officers and police will be able to access security data. The Government's "No-Deal Readiness Report" admitted that, without a deal on security and data, the UK would lose access to key law enforcement tools such as SIS II—the second-generation Schengen information system—Europol and the European arrest

warrant. These databases help us to fight organised crime and terrorism. Can the Minister guarantee that the security of the British people will be in no way undermined in the event of no security agreement?

The Labour party believes that the security of our country and our people is crucial. The Government will not be forgiven for undermining it. So for our economic prosperity and for our country's security, will the Government do the responsible thing and bring back the deal?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. First, let me assure her of the Prime Minister's resolve, efforts and determination to secure a deal. It is one reason why she is having to endure me today and not others. We are going to do everything we can to secure a deal. The best outcome is a Canada-style arrangement, and we are going to leave no stone unturned. We will carry on in talks and carry on negotiating until there is no hope of that happening, but at the moment there is hope of that happening, even though things do appear gloomy.

I appreciate also that Members are very concerned about these matters. Ministers are always happy to come and answer questions and update as much as we can on these issues, but I would say to all colleagues, particularly those on the Opposition Benches, that calling for urgent questions or asking other questions on the Floor of the House with the express mission of trying to undermine our negotiating position by pretending we are not ready for any outcome that these negotiations might yield is not helping to secure the outcome we all want, and it is certainly not in the interests of the country. These are serious times and none of us should be doing anything that may undermine the possibility of our getting the deal we all want.

Let me turn to the issues the hon. Lady raises. We have been clear that the end of the transition period will bring opportunities but also challenges. We have been making extensive preparations for a wide range of scenarios at the end of the year, including whether it is an Australian-style outcome, and we are ready to seize those opportunities of being outside the single market and the customs union. This includes investing over £700 million in jobs, technology and infrastructure at the border and providing £84 million in grants to boost the customs intermediary sector, alongside implementing border controls in stages and ensuring that we have the necessary time to prepare.

We will not compromise on security. This has been an absolutely key part of our preparations on any outcome, and it is one of the reasons why, even in these gloomy times, I still am optimistic that a deal can be secured, because I do not believe that any European Union member state would wish to affect or compromise the security of its own citizens. But if we leave on an Australian-style outcome, we have measures in place to ensure that our citizens will be safe, and that we will be able to share intelligence and the other things we need to do to ensure our security arrangements are as they should be. I urge all colleagues, whatever their political hue or imperative, to put our nation first over the next few days, to support our negotiating team, to demonstrate our readiness under any scenario and our resolve, and to help us get a deal.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): It was interesting that the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), who speaks for the Opposition, did not address the central question at the root of these issues, which is about the ability of this House of Commons to make decisions about our rules without the European Union being able to override it. That is the central question, and on that question I would like the Government to hold firm. My constituents voted to leave the European Union and to take back control of making our laws. Will my right hon. Friend take a message to the Prime Minister that, whatever decision he takes on Sunday—I am glad we are still talking, which shows that there is still opportunity—to secure the ability of this House to make our laws, he has the support of this side of the House? Perhaps the other side of the House should reflect that their approach is why they have lost the last two general elections and are probably going to lose a third.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks. It is helpful for the negotiating team that we are facing across the table to hear the resolve of Members in this House and that they are representing the views of their constituents. We have had many years of wrangling over this, but the Government have a clear mandate to deliver on the referendum result. We will do that and we will hold to our promises.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP) [V]: Here we are again—yet another deadline. October was a deadline, then it was November, then 1 December, then Friday, then Monday, then it was the last supper and now it is Sunday. God knows what it will be after that. I remember the good old days when Brexit was concluded and this was the easiest deal in history. The easiest deal in history now has more cliffhangers than “EastEnders” and we are just 21 days away from a likely no-deal Brexit—a no deal that will bring chaos, disruption and ruin for many.

The only policy in the negotiation position that the Government seem to have left is the forlorn hope that the EU will back down before their demands and concede that the British are right. The Government have made themselves hostage to their own Brexit right wing—any compromise will now be interpreted as a sell-out by that right wing. They have only themselves to blame, with the appalling language that they have used against the EU and their demonisation of the EU as some sort of cartoon villains. The EU are not going to back down, this Government are not going to compromise, so what is going to change in the next few days?

Penny Mordaunt: I am going to miss these exchanges with the hon. Gentleman, but my experience of my involvement on the Joint Committee under the withdrawal agreement and all aspects of these negotiations is that they have been done constructively and that there has been good rapport. The critical factor, however, in this is the EU recognising that the United Kingdom is a sovereign equal in these negotiations. That can be laid on the table in a charming way, but that is the bottom line, the cold hard facts of this situation. I appeal to the EU not only to recognise that fact, but to put the interests of the citizens and businesses in their own member states first, above any political project and above the political imperatives of the Commission. That is what we should all be doing. The negotiating

position of the United Kingdom is one that creates that mutual beneficial outcome and I am hopeful that the EU will recognise that before the time runs out.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): We all want a deal, but UK businesses—let us be frank—are looking at the prospect of no deal with utter dismay. In the political declaration, the Government signed up to common high standards “commensurate with the scope and depth of the future relationship” and agreed to robust level playing field commitments to “prevent distortions of trade and unfair competitive advantages.” What proposals has the UK made in the negotiations to maintain common high standards in the years ahead, given that it is inevitable that these standards may change on both sides of the relationship?

Penny Mordaunt: We have always given that commitment. Clearly, there have been discussions in recent days focused on that precise issue, but right back even when we set out our opening positions, the UK position was to make those commitments. This Government and future Governments would not want to roll back on those standards, so we did not hesitate in giving those guarantees. The sticking point is our ability to control our own destiny. The EU has got to recognise that it cannot keep us within its own orbit, and that is something we will not compromise on.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Many on the Opposition Benches see that the biggest failure would be for there to be no deal, but does my right hon. Friend agree with me that actually the biggest failure would be to capitulate and to accept a deal that would not fully respect a sovereign Britain leaving the EU? Also, does she agree with me that it is not a great look for the Opposition Benches when it comes to this negotiation—and, of course, it does take two to tango—to incessantly, all the time, be seeing reasonableness in the EU and unreasonableness in our own Government? For a party supposedly looking to reconnect with some of its patriotic voters, this is hardly a good look.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. I would say that we have compromised on a great deal. We have not been intransigent in these negotiations. We have compromised on all sorts of things, including accepting an overarching framework to the agreement. We are going to be as creative and as determined as we possibly can be in the next few days in order to try to secure that deal, but he is right: we will not compromise on those fundamental issues.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Can I assure the right hon. Lady that no one, as far as I am aware, on this side of the House in any way wants to undermine the negotiating position of this Government in Europe, because so much about the future of this country hangs on successful negotiations with the European Union? But in the rollercoaster of emotions that we have been through in the past few days—there is going to be a deal, there is not going to be a deal—and at the end of four years of a rollercoaster, would she accept that what we need is some reassurance that if, by Sunday, there is not an agreement, the Government will not give up on trying to reach a trade deal with the European Union that does not see us crash out on 1 January, with all the catastrophic effect that could have for our local businesses and for the economy?

Penny Mordaunt: We are already out, I would just remind the hon. Lady, but clearly we have prepared for every eventuality. We have a phased approach to the border. We have many pots of work going on into the new year to ensure that there are not those cliff edges that she refers to. We have thought long and hard, and there has been a huge effort by the civil service to ensure that, whatever the outcome, it will be as smooth as possible for our businesses and our citizens. I thank the hon. Lady, who has been consistent in helping us secure a deal, and I urge all Members of this House to follow her example. I think that all Members can, from whichever seat they sit in in this Chamber, help us, and I would ask that everyone does that in the coming days.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind) [V]: One of the concessions the Government made this week is on clause 45 of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, which would have allowed the UK Government to apply UK state aid rules in Northern Ireland. Given that the UK Government feel comfortable conceding on this clause, will the Minister now also look at deleting clause 50, which reserves the power to Westminster to apply state aid rules in Scotland and Wales?

Penny Mordaunt: I refer the hon. Lady to the statement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster yesterday and just reiterate Northern Ireland's unique position in the United Kingdom.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Government have already published an economic impact assessment of no deal. Will the Minister ensure that they publish an economic assessment of any EU deal on offer, so if any deal is rejected we will all know at what cost?

Penny Mordaunt: At the moment efforts are on securing a deal, and the deal that is there—the component parts of it—is in the best interests of the people of the United Kingdom and in the best interests of the citizens and businesses in the member states of the European Union. That is very clear and that is what we are all hoping for and all working towards. The question is: will the EU accept that?

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): We end 2020 with Britain as the first country in the world to be protecting its citizens against covid with a properly authorised vaccine. For millions of workers in the manufacturing sectors—automotive, aerospace, food and drink, pharmaceuticals, chemicals—to end 2020 with a free trade agreement will be a huge relief and boost to confidence, so can my right hon. Friend reinforce with the Prime Minister the opportunity for 2021 to be a very much better year for Britain than we might have expected a few months ago, and urge him to use all his personal efforts, energy and creativity to secure a deal in the remaining days ahead?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for that and assure him again of the Prime Minister's resolve to leave no stone unturned to get the Canada-style arrangements that we would all hope for. I would say to him that, as well as a boost for our own manufacturers and scientists and everyone else in the United Kingdom,

securing such a deal would be a boost for the world economy and I hope that that focuses minds over the next few days.

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP) [V]: In terms of the internal market Bill, we all remember Scottish Tory MPs in this House voting against amendments from the other place that would have forced the Government to seek the consent of the people of Scotland, and time and again we have witnessed the utter violation of not only the devolution settlement but potentially Scotland's entire constitutional existence. We in Scotland did not vote for this Brexit, or indeed any Brexit, and we will not watch idly as our work and relations with our European friends and neighbours are unravelled. We will make our voice heard at next May's Holyrood elections, but the truth is that the people of Scotland have had enough now. So I ask the Minister: come May, will she accept our democratic intent, or will we in Scotland always come a distant second to such reckless Tory ideology?

Penny Mordaunt: I would ask the hon. Gentleman if he thinks his constituents and the people of Scotland would benefit from us securing the deal that we seek. Would they benefit from us being able to take back control of our waters and not cede that to European partners? If he thinks that is the case, and I understand that is his position, he might like in the coming days to add his voice to those of Scottish MPs on these Benches who are supporting our negotiating team.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I am sure it was absolutely no coincidence that the Prime Minister dined on scallops and turbot last night. I represent a coastal community. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that this is not about the fact that fishing is a necessarily small part of our GDP at the moment; it is about what the future can be for our coastal communities? It is so important to return sovereignty and that those coastal communities have a fishing future that includes my constituency of North Norfolk.

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend understands these issues very well and makes those points very well. He will also understand the Prime Minister's resolve on this issue. I can reassure him that, with the exception of the scallops and that very fine piece of turbot, fish was not on the table last night.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I get on well with the Minister, but I must tell her this morning that it is our duty to hold this Government to account at this crucial time for all our constituents. That being said, being creative and determined is all very well, and I have been impressed by the negotiating skills of the two men leading this over these weeks, as I sit on the Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union, but this is about leadership. As soon as the Prime Minister gets his sweaty hands on this issue, there is failure—failure of leadership, failure of determination and failure really to deliver this Government's message. I hope the Minister comes back on that.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the kind remarks that he makes about our negotiating team. They have done an incredible job. It is an incredibly technical job, with many details to work through, and

[Penny Mordaunt]

their respective teams have done an incredible job. We owe them an immense debt of gratitude, whatever the outcome of these negotiations.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: it is the job of Members of Parliament to hold the Government to account. We will always be here, whether it is on an urgent question or other matters. Again, I should plug that I am available at 10 am every day to take calls from Members of Parliament on any issue, whether it is Brexit or covid-related. But I would just say to him: please do not misinterpret the Prime Minister's determination on sticking to these fundamental principles as somehow a negative in these negotiations. The only way we are going to get any arrangement that will enable our country to thrive is if he sticks to his guns, and he is going to stick to his guns.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): A free trade agreement is manifestly, overwhelmingly to the advantage of both sides, and it should be pressed for to the very last opportunity. However, does my right hon. Friend also recognise that security issues are critical to the welfare of this country, and so is civil justice co-operation? Those do not depend on a free trade agreement as such. The data adequacy agreement would certainly be of great advantage in sharing intelligence information. Now that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has reached an agreement in relation to the Joint Committee and it is not necessary for us to deal with certain potentially controversial clauses in the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, it would be greatly to the advantage of both sides if the EU Commission were to withdraw its objection to the UK joining the Lugano convention on civil justice co-operation in its own right. That would benefit both sides too, regardless of whatever else is decided.

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are many things that we could agree to and could do that would be beneficial to both parties. Of course, what lies behind the politics and the negotiations are decades of relationships between law enforcement and all the agencies, services and forces that work together and will continue to work together in the interests of all our citizens.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) [V]: On Monday, the Paymaster General had no opinion as to whether a 20% average tariff on food imports would be "modest" for poor people. With the prospect of a no-deal resolution now greater than ever, does she think that an export tariff of 48% on lamb and 84% on beef would be modest for Welsh farmers?

Penny Mordaunt: Clearly, the information on tariffs has been published. It is on gov.uk, but I stress to the hon. Gentleman that we are working to secure a deal that is in the best interests of our farmers, our hauliers, our businesses and our citizens, and we will continue to do that until all hope is exhausted.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con) [V]: Would my right hon. Friend accept that even if a deal is done now, it will be very late for businesses to have a chance to understand and interpret it? Will she therefore urge the EU to go further than in the announcement that it made this morning and mirror our proposals not to

impose the full import formalities for a period of six months to give a period of time for business to understand and get used to the new rules?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for that suggestion. I think it is in everyone's interests if a pragmatic stance is taken on all these issues. That has, by and large, been the case to date. We should continue to do that as we go into the new year, no matter what the outcome of the future relationship.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): The Minister will be aware of my party's support for a deal, and we wish the Prime Minister well in his continued negotiations. She will also be aware of my party's views on the Northern Ireland protocol and our opposition to it. In light of the announcement yesterday, will the Minister outline what actions she and the Government plan to take at the end of the six-month derogation on chilled meats moving from GB to Northern Ireland, so that businesses do not look elsewhere for those supplies? Will she commit to take unilateral action where necessary if all these new arrangements are seen to be detrimental to Northern Ireland's economic wellbeing?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. She will know that throughout all this we have sought to provide not just the practical support that Northern Ireland businesses need, but also the confidence in the environment that businesses need to continue to make investments. She will be aware that this morning the Northern Ireland Office announced a further £400 million, which has been committed to assisting businesses and boosting economic growth, and to support throughout the transition. She has my assurance that the success and some new opportunities that will come with this if we get it right for Northern Ireland are there to be seized.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): My right hon. Friend and I both campaigned for leave in the referendum, but more importantly 70% of voters in Dudley South and a majority nationwide decided to take back control over our laws, our borders and our trade. Does she agree that an agreement is only going to be possible if it respects that decision and ensures that laws are made here in the United Kingdom?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and this comes to the heart of it. I cannot, I am afraid, give him any guarantees as to whether the EU will reconcile itself to those facts, and I cannot say what the outcome will be. All I can assure him of is that the Government will stick to those principles and are absolutely determined within that to do everything we can to secure a deal.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): I would like to press the Minister further on the issue of policing, justice and security co-operation. This is, of course, of huge importance to the whole of the UK, but particularly so for us in Northern Ireland, given our problems with organised crime and terrorism, and the existence of a land border. Given that the UK is facing a cliff edge at the end of the month in this regard, can she tell us what will be happening specifically on matters such as extradition, data sharing and data adequacy?

Penny Mordaunt: Of all people, I know the importance of these matters to every part of the UK. We will be gaining access to new information via safety and security declarations. These will be required by the middle of next year. For every issue the hon. Gentleman raises, there are clear plans for how we can ensure a smooth transition to new arrangements. However, I would also just emphasise the fundamental principle that I do not think anyone—a member state, in the Commission and certainly not in this Government—is going to compromise on matters of security.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Whether it is a Canada or an Australia deal, the people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, 72% of whom voted to leave the European Union in 2016, are rightly proud that this Government are sticking up for the United Kingdom's interests, something the Labour party desperately needs to learn if it wishes to regain the red wall in the future. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that no matter what comes out of these negotiations, the fine world-leading potteries have an exciting future in global Britain?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for that upbeat question. He is absolutely right to say that we have taken care of the challenges in any scenario, and again great credit goes to the civil service for preparing for that. There are also opportunities, which is why the people of this country voted to extract themselves from the EU. We would be doing them a disservice if we did not create the conditions for us to be able to seize those opportunities, and that is what we will do in the coming days.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Last October, in preparation for a possible no deal, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster told us that stockpiles had been built up of essential medicines, including asthma inhalers, antibiotics, paracetamol and ibuprofen. That was just as well, given that they were needed in the coronavirus pandemic. Have stockpiles of those things been returned to the levels they were at in October 2019?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the efforts the civil service went to in order to prepare for a no-deal scenario last year stood us in much better stead for what then happened with regard to the pandemic. That is not an argument for Brexit; it is simply a fact that this nation was much more resilient because of the no-deal planning scenario. I cannot give him drug by drug, line by line details on the stocks, as he will appreciate, but I am sure the Department of Health and Social Care can. I can, however, reassure him on those matters. A huge amount of work has been done, in a multi-layered approach, asking suppliers of medicines, medical products and other medical devices to help us replenish those stocks, while making sure that they themselves are trader-ready, so that their businesses are not interrupted. *[Interruption.]* No, I am saying that he should have reassurance on the points he has raised, and I will be happy to follow up with him with further detail regarding paracetamol and the other items he mentioned.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): Financial services are crucial for not only London but Scotland and many of our regional cities. Will my right hon. Friend assure

me that financial services, and indeed the service sector as a whole, will be at the forefront of our minds in the next few days, given the importance of services to our economy?

Penny Mordaunt: I can give my hon. Friend those assurances. Services were one area where we were very poorly served by our membership of the EU. As well as negotiating, the Department for International Trade has been doing fantastic work in signing roll-over trade agreements and new agreements with many nations. There are fantastic opportunities for our service economy in those nations.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): Investing in green industries and our transport infrastructure will be key to building back better after the pandemic and transitioning to net zero. With Government support, the automotive sector, including Vauxhall in my constituency, could move more quickly to producing more electric vehicles and councils could move to implementing the required green infrastructure to support them. Will the Minister outline whether a position on what is considered state aid has been reached, and whether any agreement will enable Government to invest in and subsidise green sectors?

Penny Mordaunt: There were certainly elements of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's statement earlier in the week that touched on that, but the hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that we want to be able to secure opportunities to set the conditions for our economy to thrive. Clearly, we have very challenging environmental goals that we wish to reach. Those are the freedoms we are working and fighting for.

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con) [V]: The end of the transition period will present both opportunities and significant challenges for those involved in the agriculture and food production sector. Will my right hon. Friend reassure those in that sector in Penrith and The Border, Cumbria and the wider UK that sufficient provisions are in place for veterinary and certification work at borders? Will she reassure farmers in sectors that may face severe challenges in tariffs, such as the sheep and beef sectors, that the Government are prepared to step in and provide support?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend raises two important points. I can assure him that a great deal of thought has gone into ensuring that we have the supplies and enough personnel to meet the requirements on the veterinary side of things. We have always stood by any sector or part of the UK that is facing tough times, and we will continue to do so.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab) [V]: England and Wales were due to qualify for BSE negligible risk status next year, but due to the diversion of Government resources and staff to work on Brexit and covid, the Government missed the OIE—the World Organisation for Animal Health—submission deadline. Will the Minister apologise to my constituent in Bedford who runs Dunbia Cardington, who, despite his attempts to send out a message in a post-Brexit world that he is open for business and has the highest food standards in the world, will have to wait at least another year for his meat to qualify for this world-class status because of her Government's failure?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sorry to hear of the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises. I do not know the details, but I would be happy to look into it if he would like to pass those details to my office.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, if we cannot find suitable compromises with our European friends on the remaining issues of the level playing field, governance and fisheries, we will be fully prepared to leave the transition period on Australian terms on 1 January?

Penny Mordaunt: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. I thank him for all he has done to champion the interests of his constituents, in particular the fishing industry.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Yesterday the Prime Minister said that Scotland “will benefit” even if the UK crashes out of the EU single market without a trade deal with the EU, despite the fact that no deal will mean higher food prices, additional costs for businesses and job losses. As we stare down the barrel of a no-deal Brexit, can the Minister explain to what extent she believes Brexit is turning into the titanic success that the Prime Minister predicted it would be?

Penny Mordaunt: I say to the hon. Lady, as I have said to her colleagues, that if she does not want that scenario—and I get that impression from the tone of her question—she ought to be helping this Government to secure the deal that would be in the interests of her constituents. I urge her, even at this late hour, to consider that.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) [V]: I have no doubt that the Prime Minister will achieve a good trade deal for this country if there is one to be achieved. However, when I was in business and negotiating international trade deals with Governments, I found that they could only be concluded if there was a firm deadline, or they would continue to be pushed back. Given that, could the excellent Minister confirm that Sunday is the absolute deadline, which will make people focus on the negotiations and come to a conclusion?

Penny Mordaunt: I can give my hon. Friend greater assurance than that, because there is a very firm deadline, which is that at the end of this year, we and others have to legislate. Time is running out. We will carry on negotiating until there is no hope left, and the statement made yesterday would indicate that, unless progress is made, Sunday may well be that deadline.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP) [V]: On Tuesday, the chief executive of the Food and Drink Federation said that his members could not agree export sales for next year with any certainty as they cannot be sure what tariffs may apply, what delays they may face or how much they will get paid for their goods. He also said that there is a shortage of general ambient warehousing space and cold chain storage. Businesses are trying to stockpile against the shocks and offset increased costs, but how can they do that if there is not facility for that stockpiling? What are the Government going to do about that, and why on earth have they not thought this through sooner than just three weeks before exit day?

Penny Mordaunt: These are serious issues and, partly because of the stresses that global trade is under with regard to the pandemic, there are other issues—for example, containers being at the wrong end of the globe to enable particular trade to continue—to contend with in addition to the ones the hon. Lady mentions. For each of these issues, the relevant Department has a mitigation plan that it is carrying out. I understand that this situation is very difficult for business, but we are here to provide both the practical and the financial support, as we have done through the investments we have made in infrastructure, technology and people. Where specific issues affect particular sectors, the relevant Departments are doing all that they can to rectify those situations.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con) [V]: I know that my right hon. Friend agrees that it is good that the negotiations continue—we all want a good trade deal—but will she convey to the Prime Minister the message that if the EU refuses to recognise or accept British sovereignty, which was at the very heart of the 2016 vote, and there is no deal, he has the party's full support? After all, both the UK and the EU trade very profitably with much of the world, including the United States, China, India and Australia, on no-deal terms.

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in what he says and I thank him for that demonstration of support for the Prime Minister and the position of the negotiating team. I think it will help, in the coming days, for them to have heard that.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): In acknowledging its importance yesterday, the Minister for the Cabinet Office told me that he could “see no reason why” a data adequacy agreement with the EU should not be in place by the end of the month. Will the Minister confirm that one has actually been applied for? When is a decision expected? Does she recognise that, in the national interest, we must have one?

Penny Mordaunt: The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is the lead Department on that issue; I will ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to update the right hon. Gentleman on the precise timetable that the Department is working to. The right hon. Gentleman is right in what he says: there is no logical reason why all sorts of things cannot be agreed to—they are in the interests of all parties and I hope that that is the conclusion that the EU negotiating team come to in the coming days.

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): The fishing communities in Grimsby are pleased that we have not accepted the EU's unreasonable requests in the negotiations. Does my right hon. Friend agree that any deal must allow us as a country to control who fishes in our waters?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I reassure her, as I have other hon. Members, that the Prime Minister knows what his responsibilities are, the expectation of the fishing industry and what is in the interests of this country.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab) [V]: Does the Minister accept that even the sovereign United States believes that trade disputes can be resolved through internationalised

mechanisms such as the World Trade Organisation and others? In that context, is not the concern of business about a crash-out no deal limited by the fact that it is not so much the Prime Minister's guns that he is sticking to but the guns of those siren voices behind him who want that no-deal Brexit?

Penny Mordaunt: No, I think the Prime Minister has been very clear about what the optimal outcome is. We are not crashing out; what is being decided over the next few days is which set of rules will be taken forward for our future relationship with our European friends. There are plans and support in place for every scenario and I think what business really wants is the certainty of what that will look like. We are talking about an incredibly resilient group of organisations and people who can prepare for any scenario; what has been a strain is preparing for every scenario. They will get certainty in the coming days.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I am clear that most of my constituents in Bracknell, and those beyond, really want a free trade deal, but given the ongoing inability of the bully boys in Brussels to accept that we are now a sovereign nation, does the Minister agree that there may be a point in time at which a clean break is the only option, with a view, perhaps, to returning to the table in 2021, as a sovereign nation, to secure a deal that other sovereign nations have already achieved?

Penny Mordaunt: If we have to go on those terms then that is what will happen and we will prosper, but it is clearly not our first choice. The key factor in this is whether the EU is going to place above its own political interests the interests of the citizens and businesses in its member states. Fundamentally, that is what is at the heart of this, and if the EU does not do that, that will be a very serious mistake.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP) [V]: The EU is the source of 26% of the UK's food. The next biggest country of origin for food imports to the UK provides only 4%. Considering that we are not acceding to any new markets on 1 January, never mind that we are leaving one with which we have unfettered access, will the Minister finally come clean with consumers and shoppers that no deal will mean increased costs for putting food on the table and that it is the actions of this Government that are directly responsible for this?

Penny Mordaunt: The future is not yet written and I invite the hon. Lady to consider at this critical moment for Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom what she might do to assist the UK Government in achieving the objective that she wants.

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that, because of the agreement reached by the Joint Committee on the Northern Ireland protocol and regardless of the outcome of our negotiations with the EU, there will be no new customs infrastructure required in Northern Ireland?

Penny Mordaunt: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. We accept our responsibilities with regard to the Northern Ireland protocol, as does the EU, and, again, I put on record my thanks and congratulations to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on all the work that he has done to secure that.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I spent yesterday in meetings listening to businesses small and large, locally and nationally, including the aerospace industry, farming, hospitality, tourism, finance and manufacturing. They had two things in common. Thing one was that they spent the past nine months completely battling as hard as they could to protect their workers and to keep their heads above water during the covid crisis. The other thing they have in common was complete and total frustration and dismay that we are three weeks off a new arrangement of one kind or another but whatever great contingency plans the Minister speaks of, she has not shared them with them. Will she allow businesses in this country to do the best for our country by giving them an adjustment period after whatever happens on 1 January, so that they are not clobbered by changes for which they are not prepared?

Penny Mordaunt: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. It is called the phased approach to the border. The civil service and the experts that we have on all these matters relating to the border, whether they sit in Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or elsewhere, have spoken to tens of thousands of businesses at literally thousands of events and on webinars. When colleagues in this House request access to that expertise, those meetings are set up by my office. We will do everything we can to give them the right advice and support. Colleagues can help in this, too. I do not know whether he has seen in his inbox the pack that we put together for his caseworkers.

Tim Farron *indicated assent.*

Penny Mordaunt: Good. Please use it. There is contact information in there if there are technical questions that he needs to follow up on. We know that this is really hard for businesses, and that our businesses have been amazing in dealing with everything that they have had to in the past year. We will do all we can to support them, both practically and in the information that we will give them, so please do use the services that are there.

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that, throughout this process, some have tried to suggest that the Government actively want to trade only on WTO terms, but does she agree that the huge amount of time and effort spent on the negotiations in these months shows that the Government do want a good trade deal, but, rightly, not at any cost?

Penny Mordaunt: Absolutely. As someone who has been very close to this whole process and sits on the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee, I can say that that is our prime effort. It is the focus of the Prime Minister, but he is, as my hon. Friend says, not prepared to compromise on those issues that would affect our ability to capitalise on our new-found freedoms. That is what, I think, the people of this country understand and expect.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, thank the Minister for her hard work and for her positive responses to the urgent question. Will she outline the steps that are being taken with regard to the beef, sheep and pork industries and the vegetable sector—particularly the

[Jim Shannon]

potato sector—to secure tax-free, hassle-free and EU bureaucracy-free transport between Northern Ireland and the other nations of this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the very large amount of work that DEFRA and other parts of Government have undertaken to get the best possible outcome and smooth the path for businesses, whatever the destination of their products. I mentioned the announcement today of £400 million of new money from the Northern Ireland Office; that is obviously on top of the £650 million UK investment announced in August, to deliver the Trader Support Service and our contribution to the PEACE PLUS programme.

Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con): In the four years since the referendum, the Opposition have wanted to be in, to be out, to shake it all about. Does my right hon. Friend agree that their failure to support any deal that we deliver means that they have learned nothing from last year's general election and that they cannot be trusted to deliver on the will of the British people?

Penny Mordaunt: Second only to the outcome of the negotiations is what Labour's position on Brexit will be. We all need to focus on the first job, which is to secure a good deal for this nation. I hope all Members of this House, whatever their political hue, will recognise the seriousness of this moment and will support the Government in securing that objective.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The only thing that those on the Labour Benches want is a decent deal that serves the people of this country well and supports business. There are just 18 days left for businesses to prepare, and they certainly do not have the tools to understand, digest and implement a new deal. What additional resources will the Minister bring forward for businesses across my community and others to ensure that they can be helped not only to the end of the year but beyond 1 January?

Penny Mordaunt: Most of the things that businesses will have to do are not contingent on these final negotiations. As I mentioned, there has been a huge amount of investment in people, technology and infrastructure, and there will be a phased approach next year. We are giving businesses, colleagues and other intermediaries

who will be working with those businesses the information they need to prepare well; that includes the hon. Lady's casework team, who will have had the pack that I mentioned earlier. If there are outstanding issues, specifics or technical matters that you need help on—I am sorry, Mr Speaker: I mean “the hon. Lady needs help on”, or indeed you, Mr Speaker—we are available to assist. Please do make use of those services.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): This Saturday, it will be a whole year since I was elected on a manifesto pledge to get Brexit done. Two thirds of people in my community voted to leave the EU and take back control of our laws, borders, fishing waters and money. Will the Minister confirm that we will not sell out on any of those priorities, and that no trade deal remains better than a bad trade deal?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I congratulate him on reaching his anniversary, and I thank him for all the work he is doing to represent his constituents' interests in this matter and many others.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): This afternoon, the Government are finally removing the clause from the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill that would break international law, arguably after having committed to do so as a concession to secure a deal. If there is a no-deal outcome this weekend, do the Government have any plans to bring forward new measures that break international law, either in the Taxation (Post-transition Period) Bill, which was introduced this week, or as part of any unknown business?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Lady will know the reasons why those clauses were in the UKIM Bill. We will not compromise on the integrity of the United Kingdom. The fact that the Prime Minister made that offer shows that we are doing everything we can to be creative and try to ensure we get a preferable outcome. As I say, the Prime Minister has resolved that he will not move on those red lines.

Mr Speaker: 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 suspending the House for a few minutes.

11.34 am

Sitting suspended.

Business of the House

11.38 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): The business for the week commencing 14 December will include:

MONDAY 14 DECEMBER—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by a general debate on covid-19.

TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by the remaining stages of the Taxation (Post-transition Period) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 16 DECEMBER—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by a motion to approve the draft Airports Slot Allocation (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2021, followed by a motion to approve the draft Tax Credits Reviews and Appeals (Amendment) Order 2020, followed by a motion to approve the draft Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2020, followed by a motion relating to the appointment of Members to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

THURSDAY 17 DECEMBER—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment.

Valerie Vaz: I do not think the Leader of the House mentioned what is happening on Friday 18 December. Will the House be sitting or not?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The House will not be sitting.

Valerie Vaz: Yes—thank you.

I do not think there has ever been a time like this when it comes to the usual courtesies that help the working of this House, respect democracy and respect the Opposition. This is absolutely chaotic: we knew more about the menu for the dinner yesterday than we did about the business of the House for the forthcoming week.

I ask the Leader of the House, for the fourth time, when he expects the current parliamentary Session to end and when the House will rise for the Christmas recess. He mentioned the recess Adjournment debate, but that is not the same. This is an incredible discourtesy to the staff of the House, who, as Mr Speaker pointed out, have worked so hard to keep us going. They need to prepare. They need to check on childcare; there are all sorts of arrangements they need to make. When I asked the Leader of the House a fortnight ago, he said that he would be announcing the recess in the normal manner, but these are not normal times. We have a confluence of events—covid and Brexit—all coming at the same time.

This uncertainty is not good for the House, but it is also not good for businesses. Listen to the Food and Drink Federation's chief executive, who said at the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee:

“How on earth can traders prepare in this environment?”

We were promised frictionless trade, but what we got was lorry parks, red tape, forms and a border in the Irish sea. The Government reneged on the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020, then on Monday asked the troops to vote for something, only to change

their mind on Tuesday. The arch-Brexiter Sir Jim Ratcliffe does not care about sovereignty—he is taking his business to Germany. When will the Prime Minister come back to the House and explain exactly what is going on? Can he do that on Monday?

Where is the vaccine Minister? I know he was sitting with the Secretary of State for Health at one point, but we have not heard anything from him. The vaccine tsar has resigned. She has appointed her deputy and then given out money to friends of the Government. Nobody has come to the House to tell us what is happening about the roll-out of the vaccine and the criteria that are going to be used. Why is the vaccine Minister so silent?

I do not know whether the Leader of the House has seen it, but on Monday the Procedure Committee published its report, “Procedure under coronavirus restrictions”. He will know about the motion on the 24th. The Committee has asked for that to be tabled again and for it to be done in a proper fashion, given the conditions. It also recommended that Members cannot decide to put their name on the call list and then withdraw it—hence collapsing the business, as they did on the 24th. Those are two important recommendations that need to be debated. Most importantly, on Standing Order No. 47, the Committee asks for no injury time to be added in debates with a very short time limit of five minutes or less, because that helps the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers to organise business and it is fair to hon. Members. When will the Leader of the House bring forward a motion on all those recommendations?

I thank the Leader of the House for placing the letter in the Library about the International Development Committee. It is important now to amend Standing Orders because the two Select Committees—the IDC and the Foreign Affairs Committee—are doing different things. The DFID Committee, which has been in existence since 1969, did not have a Department to shadow until very recently. It is now looking across different Government Departments, so the Standing Orders should reflect a change of name. This is about transparency and accountability with regard to public money. When will the Standing Orders be amended?

Today is Human Rights Day. Her Majesty's Opposition are proud that people of this country were the framers of the declaration on human rights, which then became the convention on human rights, which then became the Human Rights Act 1998. The Lord Chancellor needs to come here and explain the article where he says that judges can influence policy. They cannot.

How is the Lord Chancellor telling the judges what to do? If he reads their judgments, he will see that they are very careful not to interfere with policy. Then he says that the Government do not have preconceived ideas. Well, actually it was in their manifesto, and Minister after Minister has come to the Dispatch Box to say that they are going to repeal the Human Rights Act. So what is the point of the review?

This issue goes all the way back to Magna Carta. It is about the rights and obligations of our citizens, and it must not be changed. There is a letter co-ordinated by 140 well-known organisations who said, “Please don't touch it.” This is a sad next chapter to our island story—that we do not respect all the rights from Magna Carta onwards, which I know the Leader of the House is very keen on.

[Valerie Vaz]

Now, Mr Speaker, we say goodbye and thank you to Eric Hepburn. You and I and David Lidington were in the Chamber when PC Keith Palmer was murdered and Eric came to the House and explained what was happening. He has also been part of the change. We thank him for all his work and wish him well in the future.

The Leader of the House will have seen, I am sure, Elika and Gabriella lighting a candle for their parents, Anousheh and Nazanin. Each day that we have the covid virus is a day that they are separated from their parents, and Luke Symons's parents are in Cardiff and his family are in Yemen. I ask again that something be done so that they can be released before Christmas.

Finally, I want to wish everyone in the Jewish community a happy Hanukkah, as they light the first Hanukkah candle.

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I join the right hon. Lady in wishing members of the Jewish community a happy Hanukkah? Lighting candles is something done very often in the Catholic Church as well, as she will know. Lighting candles is a very good religious symbol.

May I also thank Eric Hepburn for his service to the House, which has been very impressive and has led to a professionalisation of security in this House? I wish his successor well.

I absolutely agree with the right hon. Lady that British citizens detained abroad unfairly and illegally ought to be released. The Government are doing what they can, and I can reassure her that every week I write to the Foreign Secretary reminding him that this issue has been raised in the House.

Now let me come to the other issues that the right hon. Lady raised. I would dispute very strongly that the usual courtesies are not being observed, but we are in a time when we are waiting for the end of a very important negotiation that may have legislative consequences. It would be absolutely disgraceful if this House were not able to facilitate any ratification of any deal that may or may not come. We have a duty to the country to ensure that the House of Commons is not an obstacle to ratification. If that means a degree of uncertainty about business, that is simply the political reality. It is an important political reality, which we should embrace rather than complain about, and I am surprised at the right hon. Lady that she would complain about it in that way.

There will be change on 1 January. That is absolutely clear. The reason the Bill was changed mid-week was the success of the Joint Committee—the success of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who managed to get a deal so that 98% of goods going from GB to Northern Ireland will not need to have any tariffs paid on them and all goods coming from Northern Ireland to GB will not need export declarations. It has been a real achievement to ensure that what we legislated for was actually going to happen. We should be proud of that and actually commend the wisdom of Her Majesty's Government in bringing forward the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill in all its glory, which helped the negotiations to succeed.

There will be a debate on covid on Monday, when the roll-out of the vaccine can be raised. I am always asked for debates, but when I provide them, the hon. Lady

ignores them, but we have got one. She can raise those questions, and other hon. and right hon. Members can do so too.

The right hon. Lady also referred to the Procedure Committee and its plethora of recommendations, which the Government will of course reply to, in accordance with the Osmotherly principles, although I would say that injury time encourages interventions, and interventions are an essential part of debate. I would therefore be nervous about taking away something that adds to the flow of debate.

I am delighted that the right hon. Lady is pleased about the International Development Committee being retained. It has been going, as she said, since 1969, which is a vintage year because it happens to be the year of my birth, so I have a certain prejudice in favour of that date. I think we have come to a good solution to ensure proper scrutiny, and it reiterates the Government's commitment to scrutiny.

Let me come to Human Rights Day. In our island story, which the right hon. Lady referred to, we should be so proud of the fact that we have led to the world in having proper protection of the subject in relation to the state. Bear in mind that in 1215 at Runnymede what they did was confirm ancient rights, which they thought—almost certainly incorrectly, as it happens—had been drawn up by Edward the Confessor. However, the principle was that they were confirming ancient rights, not inventing ones. Exactly the same happened when habeas corpus was passed into law in the reign of Charles II: they were confirming rights of antiquity, so that we would not have the illegal detention of people without the prospect of a trial or the process of a court. It is worth bearing in mind that at that point in France it was still possible to hold people on the word of the King. There were letters of cachet that meant that people could be locked up simply on the word of the King.

Then, in the 18th century, we had the Mansfield judgment, one of the judgments we should be proudest of in this House, with the understanding that in the United Kingdom there is no such thing as a person who is not free. We then led the world democratically in 1832 with the Reform Bill. We are a model to the world of rights, which are our rights—United Kingdom rights—and other countries have followed behind. We should recognise that we know how to do it and we have done it extraordinarily well, to the prosperity of the British people and the solidity of our constitution.

Mr Speaker: I call Andrea Leadsom. [Interruption.]

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was gobsmacked, just wishing I could have been such a class act as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, with his vast knowledge. That was a real history lesson. I want to ask him what news there is on the Elizabeth Tower, as we are all aware that the restoration was very much over budget and over time. It is an iconic part of our great United Kingdom history. I am particularly keen to know what disability access has been installed in Elizabeth Tower so that everybody across the UK can access that wonderful site.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend has led the way in this, because it was her pressure to ensure that the Elizabeth Tower should have disabled access when she

was Leader of the House that has ensured that one of the ventilation shafts will have a lift in it, which will make disabled access possible. The lift will improve safety and help reduce the time it would take to evacuate a mobility-impaired person from the Tower. In more general terms, the Elizabeth Tower team is back working at full productivity, and the work is continuing across all sites, in line with advice from the Government. The Commons is working with its supply chain to update its programme of work, ascertaining and limiting the impact of covid-19 on all projects. It is encouraging that the work is going ahead full steam and that there will be disabled access, and I thank her for the contribution she has made to ensuring that.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP) [V]: It seems the Conservative party's toxic political cocktail of British exceptionalism and arrogance has hit the buffers of the real world. We await Sunday, but if there is a deal, it will be a sordid and pitiful affair. Can the Leader of the House at least answer this: in what fashion will the Government involve Parliament in this endgame? Will they put down a resolution, introduce a Bill, table a statutory instrument or simply make a statement, which we can neither amend, nor agree? With three weeks to go, if the Government do not yet know how they will present to Parliament our future relationship with the EU, is this not only a failure of statecraft, but a shocking level of domestic political mismanagement?

It seems that the people of Northern Ireland will get to march to a European beat after all. In consequence, the Government have withdrawn part 5 of their United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, but the assault on devolution remains, so may we have a debate on why Scotland is the only nation within the UK that is getting a hard Brexit against its will? If a bespoke solution is available for Northern Ireland, why is there not one for Scotland? The arguments against are unconvincing. A border is a border; it has the same legal and economic status whether on land or on the seabed. Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was effusive about what he called the "primacy of democracy", saying that it is

"for the people of Northern Ireland to decide"—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 685, c. 849.]

their future. May we debate why the Government take that view regarding one part of the UK but not another? May I give the Leader of the House another opportunity to say whether he will respect the outcome of the Scottish general election in May next year? That is something he has refused to do so far.

Finally, today is international Human Rights Day. Given his comments a moment ago, will he support a debate on the Justice Secretary's plan to review the Human Rights Act and give an assurance that it will not weaken the protection of the European Court of Human Rights or the authority of the devolved Administrations in these matters?

Mr Rees-Mogg: What a joy it is, as always, to hear from the hon. Gentleman. He is an uplifting advocate for the United Kingdom, because he comes on and talks about sectionalism, but what is the most sectionalist party? Oh, good heavens: it is the Scottish National party that is the one trying to split up the United Kingdom. I would say "pot and kettle", but it has to be said that there is no kettle, only a pot. He then says that

Her Majesty's Government believe in the primacy of democracy—unlike, it must be said, the Scottish Government or the SNP.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): What?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Yes, what? Quite right. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) does not believe in democracy. He is against it, because there was a vote in 2014 that was a generational vote. He may think that a generation means the generation of the fruit fly, but I think the generation in question is the generation of a person, a voter, and we have not got close to a generation. It is fascinating that he does not want to talk about the success of the United Kingdom and the £8.2 billion provided by the UK taxpayer to help Scotland, or the disaster that the SNP is at the moment, with its failures in governing Scotland, its failure in education, its failure in health and its failure in law and order.

The hon. Gentleman does not want to get on to the rather juicy gossip that is coming out of the SNP, either. What do we have? The chief executive of the SNP, when he is at home, never talks about politics with the First Minister—no, of course not—he only talks about cooking. That makes it sound as if his household is even more old-fashioned than mine, because I must confess that in the Rees-Mogg household we spend a lot of time talking about politics; it seems improbable that such a highly politicised family never talks about such interesting things. Scotland is beginning to see through the SNP. We had a vote, and the vote has been respected; we also had a debate on Europe, and that vote is being respected too.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con) [V]: As the Leader of the House is aware, the hospitality sector has suffered very badly during the pandemic and continues to do so. Is he aware, though, that many businesses, including pubs, still need more financial aid to enable them to survive? Irrespective of any future debates, can we have an assurance today from the Leader of the House that the plight of the hospitality sector and the financial support given will remain under constant review by the Government? As he may know, in a number of areas, such as East Yorkshire, the sector is vitally important to the local economy.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Our hospitality sector and our pubs are a glory of the British nation and provide much pleasure to people as well as employment and business activity. Efforts have been made, very serious ones: VAT has been reduced, cash grants of £3,000 a month have been made available and money has been made available to local councils. The Government greatly understand and appreciate the problems that the sector has faced during the lockdowns that have been necessary because of the coronavirus. Support has been made available, but ultimately this is taxpayers' money that is being spent and, while it is right that the Government continue to work out how they can support the sector, ultimately, there is not unlimited money.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab) [V]: I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement. I note that the debate on matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment next Thursday will be held in Government time, not Backbench Business Committee time. I assume

[*Ian Mearns*]

that that is to allow the Government flexibility to change things should they need to do so, but may I ask the Leader of the House for any time that might become available, even at relatively short notice? We can have Back-Bench debates oven ready to fill any slots that might open up to the House.

I also echo the comments of the previous speaker, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight); the hospitality sector across the tier 3 north-east needs urgent support. The policy needs urgent review and upgrade, or many businesses and jobs will be lost. Lastly, Mr Speaker, I live in the midst of and represent a large Orthodox Jewish community here in Gateshead, so I echo the comments of my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House, and of the Leader of the House, in wishing the whole community that I represent a very happy Hanukkah.

Mr Rees-Mogg: An oven-ready debate sounds like a very tempting idea. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the forthcoming Adjournment debate will be in Government time. He is also right that this does allow for flexibility. It is important to recognise that there is a balance to be struck when providing time for debates where Members may do a great deal of preparation and a great deal of work beforehand, and then find that Government business has to supersede them, potentially, at relatively short notice—be that statements, debates or even legislation in the event of a deal. Therefore, I hope the House will understand that next week particularly we need to maintain flexibility, but I am well aware of the Standing Order requirements to provide Backbench Business debates.

The hon. Gentleman mentions the hospitality sector. There is not a great deal for me to add to what I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), but it is something the Government are concerned about. Its being raised by so many Members is a reminder of this House's facility to seek redress of grievance for the constituent, and that is a proper thing for this House to be doing.

Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con): My right hon. Friend once revealed to the House that he likes “a good, proper, plain, British banger.”—[*Official Report*, 1 April 2011; Vol. 526, c. 703.]

However, proposals to restrict the online advertising of certain foods are currently under consultation. If accepted, they would ban farm shops, butchers, restaurants and pubs—from North East Somerset to Dewsbury—advertising their delicious bangers via social media, local newspaper websites and even email newsletters. Given the pervasive impacts of the proposals and the flimsy evidence base, will my right hon. Friend commit to holding a debate before any proposals are taken forward?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend raises an exceptionally important point. In 2020, of all years, I think it is right that we do all we can to support small businesses in our food and hospitality sectors. I must confess that I would not hold up my own diet as being a model for anybody else, child or otherwise. I have a predilection for Creme Eggs that is probably not to be encouraged, and I did even once have a deep-fried Mars bar, which was absolutely delicious.

Patrick Grady indicated assent.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am glad to see that there is something on which I agree with the Scottish National party.

Reducing obesity levels is a key priority of this Government—and rightly so, bearing in mind the effects of obesity on covid—and our ambition is to halve childhood obesity by 2020. However, I understand that the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport are currently running a consultation on how to proceed with their proposed policies on food advertising, and I would urge all hon. and right hon. Members, and indeed members of the public, to respond. My hon. Friend might like to write in and remind people that

“A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play”.

Mr Speaker: I think we need more work at the moment.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) [V]: Mr Speaker, I would like to pay tribute this morning to a valued member of staff of the House, my former Clerk of the International Trade Committee, Lydia Menzies, who sadly passed away last week at the age of just 38. Lydia was a fantastic Clerk—knowledgeable, helpful to Committee members, and a friend and mentor to her colleagues as well. Lydia's wonderful sense of humour and wit made working with her enjoyable for everyone. In fact, the tie I am wearing this morning was a present from Lydia, of her own tartan, when she left the Committee. Such was her nature: she gave presents at moments like that. It was indeed a privilege to work with Lydia, and I understand that the Leader of the House worked with her, too. Doubtless he will join this morning in paying tribute to Lydia. My thoughts and those of the tremendous ITC staff and colleagues from across this House are with her husband, Greg, her 18-month-old daughter, Orla, and her wider family.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for paying tribute to Lydia Menzies, who was a very valued member of the House staff and a distinguished Clerk. She served on several Committees, including his, and was in the Table Office for a period, and many Members will have come across her there. I have always found that the Table Office provides a wonderful service in helping Members to avoid mistakes and to enable them to craft their questions in a way that will be orderly, and she was very helpful to me when I was visiting the Table Office. She was seconded for a period to the Department for International Trade, so also had some experience of Government, and she was also a great teacher and source of inspiration to colleagues. Her early death is a great loss to the House service, and I pass on my condolences to her husband, Greg, and to her daughter, Orla.

Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord. May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, by the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Mr Speaker: May I, too, add my comments and say that I have sent a letter to the family? Lydia's death was a shock to all of us. She has been robbed from this House far too soon and from her family. She had a great career ahead of her. It is a sad time, but, as the Leader of the House says, all our thoughts and prayers go to the family.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for listening to the Chairman of the International Development Committee and me about keeping that Committee, because we recognise its value, and I am really pleased to see that he does, too.

My question is related to hospitality businesses, and has been raised before. Many of them have spent not just thousands of pounds but tens of thousands of pounds to make themselves covid-secure, but in tier 3 they cannot open at all. They can do takeaways, but they are losing money hand over fist. Could we have a statement, or a debate in Government time, to look at the plight of hospitality businesses, because in my constituency many of them are covid-free but cannot be used? That is not logical.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's approval of our decision to keep the overseas aid Committee going. She and the Chairman of the Committee made a compelling case in meetings with me and with others.

As regards the hospitality sector, the Government absolutely appreciate the enormous sacrifices that businesses and the hospitality sector have made to ensure that their premises are covid-secure. The decision to place restrictions on them has not been taken lightly, but for the clear need to suppress the coronavirus. It is right that the Government should support the sector how it can. The rent is being covered by cash grants worth up to £3,000 for each month a business is forced to close. We estimate that this will cover rent for around 90% of small and medium retail, hospitality and leisure properties in England. Pay is being covered by furlough, with employers only paying national insurance and pension contributions. Businesses facing reduced demand in tiers 2 and 3 can receive cash grants worth up to £2,100 a month, but, as I have already said to other hon. Members, it is quite right that this matter is brought to the Floor of the House, because this is how we carry out our historic responsibility of seeking redress of grievance.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Yesterday, the front page of the *Financial Times* informed the House that the Government would not be applying the tariffs awarded by the World Trade Organisation against the United States. That may well have a devastating impact on tens of thousands of jobs at Airbus and its suppliers and on the UK steel industry, but there has been no statement to this House—not even a measly written statement. Can we have an urgent debate on why this Government are happy to sell British jobs down the river to the fag end of the Trump Administration?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Department did notify two Select Committees of its intention and wrote to the Chairmen of those Select Committees notifying them, so Parliament was informed, although I share the hon. Gentleman's view that a written statement would have been preferable, and I am passing that view on to the Department.

As regards the issue of tariffs, these are the reverse of mercy. Mercy is known to bless both the giver and the receiver, but tariffs harm both the payer and the imposter of the tariff. Therefore, removing tariffs and encouraging free trade is something that we should always welcome. It is good economic policy.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): Employability organisations such as Safe Opportunities and Seetec Pluss and employers such as ao.com and

charities such as Community Recycle Cycles work incredibly hard in my constituency to secure employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Like me, they are concerned about the impact of coronavirus on jobs going forward and their ability to carry on with that work. Will the Leader of the House inform us of what opportunities we might have coming forward to raise those important issues on behalf of our constituents who struggle with employment and disability?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Supporting people with disabilities to find dignified and fulfilling work is one of the most important things our welfare system can do. The coronavirus pandemic has posed huge challenges to our welfare system, and I am pleased to say that the Department for Work and Pensions has managed to withstand and address them. We are actively working on policies to prevent ill health-related job losses, and we provide specific employment support for disabled people out of work. I suggest to my hon. Friend that he might wish to be called in the pre-Adjournment debate, when he can raise the issues specific to his constituency and praise those firms he is working with to help disabled people find employment.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the Prime Minister's 10-point green strategy for the entire economy. I wonder whether the Leader of the House agrees with me that the £600 million spent each year through the bus operator grant to subsidise the purchase of diesel fuel for buses is no longer fit for purpose in the light of that green strategy. Will he agree to a debate on a policy shift that would allow and encourage the purchase of zero-emission buses and allow for a green transport strategy across the entire country to increase employment for our entire people?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Government are committed to spending £2 billion of taxpayers' money to improve local bus services and we are committed to buses that have low emissions. I understand that some of those buses are made in Northern Ireland, possibly even in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, so I hope that there will be employment, prosperity and success in his constituency and in Northern Ireland as a whole.

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): Yesterday I had the incredible privilege of attending a Zoom call with Schools North East and local headteachers from Whitworth Park Academy in Spennymoor and Thornhill Primary in Shildon. They raised concerns about the cost of covid to education budgets, particularly with regard to supply teacher provision and the cost of additional cleaning equipment. One of the key concerns is that those schools, which have worked incredibly hard to balance their budgets and make this work, cannot access the extraordinary funding that schools that have perhaps not been so prudent with their finances can access. I would like to ask my right hon. Friend if he will raise this with the Education Secretary to ensure that the views of local headteachers right across the north-east are taken into account on this.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I can assure the House that after business questions I always pass on to all Secretaries of State any points that are relevant to their Departments that I feel ought to be raised with them, and I return

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

their answers to Members accordingly. However, it is worth pointing out that we have supported schools throughout the pandemic, and they have been able to claim up to £75,000 for unavoidable costs such as the additional cleaning that my hon. Friend mentioned. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced during the recent spending review that school funding would increase by £2.2 billion next year, so the Government are doing everything they can to help schools by providing the necessary taxpayers' money to help them to get through this difficult period.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): The Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford arc has been a major project that the Government have been considering for some years, but the detail seems to have been lost in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Transport. The highly unpopular road link has been paused for a year and there is still no clarity on whether the east-west rail link will be an environmentally friendly electrified line or a diesel line. Can we have a statement from the Minister—some Minister—to provide clarity on this subject?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Transport connectivity is absolutely essential to economic growth. In the arc to which the hon. Gentleman refers there has been enormous economic growth recently, and ensuring that there is good transport infrastructure will help that to go further. As regards a specific debate, I cannot promise him one, but it is a great advantage that we have an end-of-term Adjournment debate, because I can offer that to almost everybody for any subject that they may wish to raise.

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): The great British pub has had a difficult year, not just being closed for much of it but also bearing the heavy brunt of the restrictions when they are permitted to open. Our pubs, restaurants and hospitality businesses in Carshalton and Wallington have been in touch to tell me about the struggles they have been having, so could we have a debate about support for hospitality so we can help them to thrive once the pandemic has passed?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am noting that a lot of people are asking about the hospitality sector. That shows the strength of feeling about this in the House, and it may well be something that people will want to raise in the debate on covid that will take place on Monday. We all know the difficulties that pubs in particular have faced in the extraordinary circumstances of this year. I would reiterate that the restrictions that we have placed on them have not been done lightly, but because of the clear need to suppress the virus. The Prime Minister announced last Tuesday that an additional grant of £1,000 will be provided to all of what are so inelegantly referred to as wet pubs, but what we in this House like to call boozers, in tiers 2 and 3 in December, benefiting around 27,000 businesses, and VAT has been cut to 5%. Ultimately, however, there will be broad sunlit uplands, at which point we must support our pubs. It will be our patriotic duty to go and drink a yard of ale.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Under the Erasmus+ programme, every year over 250 students study at the University of Bath alone and there are many thousands

of students across the country who also study under the programme. We cannot underestimate the value it brings, not least in financial terms, to our universities. In three weeks' time, the transition period ends and the Government do not seem to have any plan, beyond allowing students who are already on the programme to finish it. The all-party group on Erasmus+ has already asked for a debate on this issue, but short of a debate, may we have a statement on what the Government are planning with Erasmus+ and International Student Exchange?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising a question that I know will be of interest to many across the House.

Under the withdrawal agreement negotiated with the EU, the UK will continue to participate fully in the current 2014 to 2020 Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. This means that the projects successfully bid for during the current programmes will continue to receive EU funding for the full duration of the project, including those where funding runs beyond 2020 and the end of the transition period. Negotiations are obviously continuing with the European Union at the moment, but in parallel with those negotiations the Government are continuing to develop a UK-wide domestic alternative to Erasmus+ as a contingency measure. The spending review 2020 provides funding to prepare for a UK-wide domestic alternative to Erasmus+, in the event that the UK no longer participates in Erasmus+, to fund outward global education mobilities—which I think means people studying abroad. The Government will set out further details in due course, but if the hon. Lady feels that that is not a comprehensive enough answer, if she would write to me I will take it up further.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Just a gentle reminder that we do have a lot of business to get through this afternoon, including a heavily subscribed debate on the high street, so if we could have fairly succinct questions and answers that would be superb.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con) [V]: With that in mind, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will just say to my right hon. Friend that, as he knows, there are two plans for local government reform in Somerset. One of them, from the districts, is an extremely good plan and it will restore our wonderful county back to its grandeur. The other one, from the county council, just does not cut the mustard and is rubbish. The panic now setting in with the management there is getting embarrassing. County staff have been told that they are not to allow difficult questions to the management or the councillors. This sort of desperate intimidation was used by the Vikings. We need a full debate to expose the county council's tactics and the bullying it is up to. My right hon. Friend knows that King Alfred beat Guthrum and the Vikings retreated to Essex—obviously. Surely, no one in Somerset deserves such a fate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could be briefer even than that in future. [Laughter.]

Mr Rees-Mogg: Somerset is the glory of our nation and a whole united Somerset would be of great advantage to the United Kingdom. It is worth remembering that, if Alfred had not retreated to the Somerset Levels and worked out how to defeat the Danes, our country would never have achieved the greatness that it has achieved.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Please may we have a debate on the fast growth of the buy now, pay later sector, as highlighted this week by Martin Lewis in the Treasury Committee? These firms are targeting predominantly under-30s who in the run-up to Christmas are shopping online with what is an explosive form of credit that may leave many in debt. Even some in the industry acknowledged that this form of credit needs to be regulated.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady once again raises a really important issue at business questions and I am grateful to her. Whenever new forms of credit come along, they often produce risks that people are not aware of until some time has passed, at which point it is too late to do anything, so I think looking at these things early on is important. From the Government's point of view, we had better wait for the Treasury Committee's report to see what it recommends in this direction, but she is right to highlight the risks of credit, particularly to younger people.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): Last Saturday, a gentleman called Simon Royce-Dexter was taken ill in the mighty Shirebrook in my constituency. A group of young adults were nearby. They called an ambulance, looked after Simon and kept everybody calm during the incident. Simon wrote on Facebook afterwards that Keane, Max, Charlie, Megan, Keegan, Shay and many others were a credit to their parents and to their community. In that spirit, may we have a debate on community champions, so we can praise not only these fine young people but the dozens who have been made heroes of Bolsover in this most difficult of years?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is wonderful to hear what my hon. Friend says and encouraging that young people, who often get a bit of a bad press, are actually heroes too, so may I join him in congratulating Keane, Max, Charlie, Megan and the others, who are community champions? They got involved, modelled themselves on the Good Samaritan and did not walk by. The community champions scheme will support those groups at greatest risk from covid-19 to ensure key public health advice is understood and safer behaviours are followed, but it seems to me that people can do things—can be Good Samaritans—without being told what to do by Her Majesty's Government.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Yesterday, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report describing a “rising tide of destitution” across the UK, including the shocking finding that the number of children experiencing destitution rose by 52% between 2017 and 2019. This means families unable to access absolute essentials—a roof over their head, food, heating and lighting, clothing and footwear, and basic toiletries. Food banks and charities such as Sharewear and Shoe Aid are doing incredible work to try to help, but, as the report says:

“In a society like ours, this is intolerable.”

Can we have a debate on how this Government's policies have led to such a shameful situation and the urgent measures needed to address it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is one of the gloomiest bodies around and it ignores the success of the Conservative party in government. We

have doubled free childcare for eligible working parents and will establish a £1 billion childcare fund, giving parents the support they need and freedom to look after their children. We are having a £400 million scheme to support children, families and the most vulnerable over the winter and through 2021. Child poverty has gone down in absolute levels by 100,000 since 2010. So there is a good, strong record and we should be proud of that. There is always more to do, but more is being done.

Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con): As the National Infrastructure Commission will be publishing its recommendations on the integrated rail plan next week, can my right hon. Friend provide an opportunity for us to impress on the Government that there is cross-party support for the HS2 east midlands hub to be at Toton and the eastern leg to extend to Leeds? We cannot level up in part; we must level up in full.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is right to be a champion for levelling up, and the integrated rail plan will focus on sequencing and delivering transformational rail improvements along the HS2 and northern powerhouse rail routes so that their benefits are delivered to communities as quickly as possible. On the eastern leg, the integrated rail plan will consider how to sequence delivery to ensure that the benefits are realised sooner and to ensure it is integrated with plans for northern powerhouse rail and other rail investment projects. I recognise that there are concerns about what the NIC is likely to suggest in its report, but it is an independent body so it is right that we wait to see what it has to say in its evaluation of the evidence and in undertaking its assessment. Once the report is published, Ministers will consider the conclusions. I hope that provides a degree of reassurance to my hon. Friend.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): First, may I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to pass on to Mr Speaker my thanks and congratulations to everyone involved in the outdoor socially distanced carol service that took place in New Palace Yard yesterday? It was a lovely occasion.

May I ask the Leader of the House if we can have a debate on sovereignty? The briefing pack for his party's Back Benchers keeps banging on about how the United Kingdom is about to become an independent sovereign nation, and I wonder if that means that it is Government policy that other EU members, such as Germany, France, Spain and the rest of them, are somehow not independent sovereign nations, because I think that would be news to them. If he does think that sovereignty is so important, will he confirm that in May next year he will support the sovereign right of the people of Scotland to determine the form of government best suited to their needs?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There will be an election in Scotland and whoever wins it will form the Government in Holyrood; that is an obvious state of democracy. It is also an obvious state of democracy that people voted in 2014 to remain part of the United Kingdom, in the great wisdom of the Scottish people. As regards the point the hon. Gentleman makes about the UK being independent on 1 January, it will be. The other EU member states are the members of a super-state that is increasingly centralising power under a bureaucracy in Brussels. That is why we voted to leave.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con) [V]: Last week, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) sent me a message hoping that I would vote for the amendment in the names of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) and himself. He then proceeded to talk out the provision that would have allowed clinically vulnerable MPs to participate remotely in debates. His message was an empty gesture. Twice this motion has been blocked, and it means that elected MPs are not all treated the same in this House.

This is an affront to democracy, especially when unelected Members in the other place can participate remotely in debates. It is a shameful position for the mother of Parliaments and a very poor international example. Mr Speaker and his office have been supportive throughout on this appalling situation, but can the Leader of the House please bring back this motion, perhaps as a 90-minute debate at the end of the day, so that we do not continue to gag vulnerable MPs and we allow them to contribute to debates? Otherwise, it makes a mockery of business questions; what is the point of my requesting a debate when people like me cannot take part in it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend knows the sympathy I have with her, and that is why we brought forth the motion to allow her and others who are clinically vulnerable to participate in debates. It is quite extraordinary that the debate was talked out—indeed, by somebody talking out his own amendment, which is an unusual use of parliamentary procedure. I can assure my right hon. Friend that our efforts in this regard are kept under review. I would very much like it to be possible to allow people who are seriously clinically vulnerable to be able to participate, but I cannot give her any firm date at the moment.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, based in my constituency, produces high-quality research in order to transform our society and address the tragic issues of poverty.

I want to raise the issue of universities. Will the Leader of the House make time available next week to debate the pressures on universities as they deal with the return of students next term in order to control the pandemic? Issues such as isolation payments for students, testing for students from home and overseas and payment for accommodation that students are not able to return to need to be debated.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is a famously left-wing organisation. It always takes up left-wing causes, and that is not a surprise; that is what it does.

In relation to a debate on covid and universities, there is a debate on Monday on covid generally. That will be a good opportunity to bring up these issues, which I recognise are important and on which universities will want formal answers from the Government.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): Having heard from the tourism and hospitality industry in Devon this week, I am gravely concerned that tier 2 could be the death knell for a huge number of these businesses. Will my right hon. Friend secure Government time to debate

how this vital sector can survive when households cannot meet indoors in tier 2 and these businesses are entitled to far less support than the revenue they are missing?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I will reiterate what I said before: these decisions were not taken lightly, and there is support available. I understand exactly the point that my hon. Friend makes, and I am very aware that this point has been raised more than any other during this set of business questions. The debate on Monday will be an opportunity to raise it, but I can assure her that the points made by her and other Members will be passed on within Government.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: I join others in wishing my Jewish constituents chag urim sameach.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister gave comfort to the 3.6 million leaseholders who are in unsafe buildings because of unsafe cladding that they would not have to pay for the remediation of that cladding. However, the £1.6 billion fund allocated by the Government runs out on 31 December this year. There is no plan yet for what happens in 2021 to remediate that cladding or, indeed, to provide funding for the work to be carried out. Will my right hon. Friend arrange for the Secretary of State or a Minister to come to the House next week and make a statement on what will be done to give comfort to the leaseholders as we go into 2021?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think some comfort has been brought forward with the most significant building safety reforms in almost 40 years, providing £1.6 billion of taxpayers' money to speed up the removal of unsafe cladding, making homes safer, sooner. Almost 80% of buildings with dangerous Grenfell-style cladding have had it removed or are in the process of doing so, rising to 97% in the social housing sector. Over 100 buildings have started remediation on-site in 2020 so far, despite the continuing backdrop of the global pandemic—more than in the whole of 2019—and we are clear that works to remove unsafe aluminium composite material cladding must be completed by the end of 2021. I hope that this will provide some reassurance to leaseholders, but I accept that there are others in difficult circumstances, and my hon. Friend is right to raise this issue.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The Leader of the House has just stressed that we are coming out of the EU on 1 January. Of course, that forces us to look at Government purchasing rules after then so that, locally and nationally, Government can properly support British firms, workers and communities. I have been in correspondence on this with the Cabinet Office Minister Lord Agnew, who has been very helpful. He informs me:

“We are developing a package of proposals to reform the UK's procurement regulations”,

and he goes on to say:

“We still plan to publish our proposals later this year and bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allows”.

This was on 2 December. Can we have a debate so that we can demand that Ministers and especially civil servants get a move on, enable us to behave like every other major European and industrial economy, and back our businesses and our people?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is more joy in heaven over the one sinner who repented than the 99 who never needed to repent in the first place. I am delighted to see the

right hon. Gentleman becoming such an ardent Eurosceptic and welcoming the advantages of leaving the European Union, in that we can set our own procurement rules and, if we choose, help local firms and British businesses. That will be a matter for us to decide as a country, and my noble friend Lord Agnew has written to the right hon. Gentleman and set out the position pretty clearly.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con) [V]: Following the answer given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan), may I press the Leader of the House further on virtual participation in debates and endorse the opinions of the Procedure Committee that we should complete the debate started on 24 November and allow all Members to fully contribute in the Chamber on behalf of their constituents? He and I shared the same trenches when campaigning for an EU referendum, yet many of us will be unable to contribute if and when EU trade deal votes come before the Chamber.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend will be able to vote, because there has been a system set up for proxy votes. We had two hours of debate on this issue, and some hon. Members deliberately decided to talk it out and not allow the House to come to a conclusion. We notice in business questions the pressure of time from Members asking the Backbench Business Committee for debates on specific subjects. Having provided two hours of debate, it is difficult to know what more the Government could have done.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's engagement with faith groups? The Department's faith engagement review closes tomorrow night, but ironically and shockingly, it quietly removed Ahmadi Muslims from the list of Muslim denominations after angry representations from radical groups such as Khatme Nubuwwat. Given that His Holiness the head of the Ahmadi faith and thousands of Ahmadis have sought asylum, support and safety in the UK because of precisely this sort of persecution in Pakistan, is it not shocking that a Department of the British Government would seem to act in a similar way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I begin by thanking the hon. Lady for doing something that she does not know that I know she is doing in helping a member of my parliamentary team who happens to be her constituent? I am very grateful for that and much appreciate what is being done for a member of my team.

The point the hon. Lady raises on the Ahmadis is deeply concerning, and I assure her that I will take it up with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It should not be for other groups to decide which groups are listed. It should be for the groups themselves to determine whether they are identified as specific groups.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Like many others, it was a delight for me to spend Small Business Saturday in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke visiting local retailers such as Goldenhill Garden Centre, Scott's Barbers in Butt Lane, Barewall Art Gallery in Burslem, Abacus Books and Cards in Milton and the lovely Margaret Thelwell, with her

vanilla custards, at Tunstall indoor market. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that we back our local high streets after they have made so many sacrifices to protect us and our NHS, and can we find parliamentary time to celebrate local independent retailers?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Margaret's vanilla custards at the Tunstall indoor market sound mouth-wateringly good to those of us who have a sweet tooth. My hon. Friend is right to raise the importance of supporting our high streets during these difficult times. Small Business Saturday was a great opportunity to show support for businesses across the country. The Government have supported businesses throughout the pandemic, approving nearly 1.4 million bounce back loans for small and micro-businesses worth over £42 billion, and nearly 80,000 coronavirus business interruption loans worth nearly £18.5 billion. If we all follow the lead of my hon. Friend and visit shops such as Goldenhill Garden Centre, Scott's Barbers, Barewall Art Gallery and Abacas Books and Cards, we will find that our bank balances may be lower, but the high street will be higher.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Dirprwy Lefarydd.

A disturbing development this year is the use of military camps in Folkestone and Penally to house asylum seekers. The Home Office is shrouding its actions in secrecy—from not releasing details of the scoping exercise used to select camps, to reportedly using non-disclosure agreements to prevent refugee support groups delivering winter clothing from telling the outside world what is happening inside. With legal challenges being prepared, will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on the use of military camps for this purpose?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Immigration policy is evolving at the moment, as we leave the European Union. We are committed to delivering a firmer, fairer, points-based immigration system, and to ensuring that people who are here are here legally and legitimately. This, of course, has to be done humanely and with respect for people's individual dignity, and I believe that that is what the Government are doing. If the right hon. Lady were to raise this matter next Thursday in the debate before the forthcoming adjournment, it would be an opportunity to get a ministerial response.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): Across the country and in towns like Eston, our high streets have large empty units on them that get in the way of much-needed redevelopment. Eston Square has been held back by the Precinct building, like Redcar has been constrained by Marks & Spencer and B&M. Can we have a debate in Government time on what powers can be given to local communities to help free up these large units?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Government recognise that this is a challenging time for everyone in the country, and the coronavirus is having a significant effect on our communities, town centres and businesses. Now more than ever, it is vital that we continue to help our local economies by supporting town centres and high streets to recover, adapt and evolve. To support our high streets, we have also introduced reforms of use classes to enable the more flexible use of existing buildings. These came into force on 1 September. My hon. Friend

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

may desire to speak—or, if he is not on the call list, to intervene—in the debate that is coming up after statements have been completed and Lords amendments dealt with.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): My caseworker's husband, Alan, is a self-employed mortgage adviser, and applied for a mortgage holiday. Nationwide, their lender, confirmed that it would not affect their credit rating, yet when they went to move home and wanted to transfer the mortgage, the company would not allow it; it actually penalised them and confirmed that their credit rating had been affected. Alan had even made payments during the holiday period to eliminate the risk of this. Can we have a statement on what the Government are doing to ensure they keep their promise that credit ratings would not be affected by mortgage repayment holidays applied for during the pandemic?

Mr Rees-Mogg: That sounds like an appalling way to behave. The hon. Gentleman is right to come to this House and hold Nationwide to account for not treating his constituent fairly. He has now put it on the record. I will take it up with my ministerial colleagues, but the issue at hand is that people who took mortgage holidays were assured that their credit ratings would not be affected. When this is something that is said, it is something that ought also to be done.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for debate on British nationals held in custody overseas? I am delighted to say that my constituent Lakhbir Sandhu was recently found not guilty on all counts by a Czech court, but he did spend a considerable time in prison. I thank our embassy there for all that it did to help. I now have another constituent who was held in prison in Spain. He wants to clear his name; again, any support would be welcome.

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is a reminder that the points made by the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) on this subject are more widespread every week, with more Governments sometimes holding British citizens when they should not. Consular staff aim to help, and contact a person who is arrested as soon as possible after hearing of the arrest or detention, so that

they may assess how the Government can help—although that may depend on local procedures—with an aim of providing assistance according to individual circumstances and local conditions. However, I encourage my hon. Friend and other hon. Members to raise such issues regularly to ensure that the Foreign Office is alerted to them and that pressure is applied, particularly with friendly nations with which we have good relations and which we hope will recognise that Palmerston had something to say about this subject.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD) [V]: Some leaseholders who are affected by the cladding scandal are now starting to declare bankruptcy, because of the escalating service charges that they are being forced to pay. That gives the question of who pays for the fire safety remediation work renewed urgency. There is an opportunity for the House to debate this when the Fire Safety Bill comes back for consideration of Lords amendments, but the programme motion allows for only one hour of debate. Will the Government amend the programme motion to allow sufficient time for a proper debate of Lords amendments and Commons amendments in lieu of Lords amendments and, crucially, to allow MPs to vote on the issues?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising this. The Fire Safety Bill is an essential piece of legislation which this Government have brought forward to bring about real improvements in fire safety across the UK. We are committed to implementing the recommendations made following phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower inquiry. As regards the programme motion available for consideration of Lords amendments, I have heard her appeal. These things always depend on the availability of parliamentary time and the other pressing issues that we may need to debate, but what she said has been noted.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Leader of the House. We will now have a three-minute suspension to allow for the safe exit and entry of right hon. and hon. Members.

12.41 pm

Sitting suspended.

Ockenden Review

12.44 pm

The Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health (Ms Nadine Dorries): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the initial report from the Ockenden review, which was published this morning.

Before I update the House on the findings, I wish to remind the House of the tragic circumstances in which the review was established. It was requested by the Government following concerns raised in December 2016 by two bereaved families whose babies had sadly died shortly following their birth at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), who, as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, asked NHS Improvement to commission the independent inquiry.

The inquiry is chaired by senior registered midwife Donna Ockenden, a clinical expert in maternity who was tasked with assessing the quality of previous investigations and how the trust had implemented recommendations relating to newborn, infant and maternal harm. As the report acknowledges, this year the country has rightly united in pride in and admiration for our NHS, but we must accept that in the past not everyone has experienced the kindness and compassion from the NHS that they deserved.

The review team has met face to face with families who have suffered as a result of the loss of brothers and sisters, or who have, from a young age, been carers to profoundly disabled siblings. The team has also met parents in cases where there have been breakdowns in relationships as a result of the strain of caring for a severely disabled child or the grief after the death of a baby or resultant complications following childbirth.

The original terms of reference for the review covered the handling of 23 cases; however, since its launch more families have come forward and extra cases have been identified by the trust. As a result, the review now covers 1,862 cases, and this has led to an extension of its scope and delivery. An interim report has therefore been published today, and it contains a number of important themes that the review team believes must be shared across all maternity services as a matter of urgency. Indeed, I personally, and the Government, pushed to have this interim report at this point in time so that we could learn from the findings of the inquiry so far.

This is the first of two reports, based on a review of 250 cases between 2000 and 2018; the second, final report will follow next year. Today's report makes it clear that there were serious failings in maternity services at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust. I would like to express my profound sympathies for what the families have gone through. There can be no greater pain for a parent than to lose a child. I am acutely aware that nothing I can say today will lessen the horrendous suffering that these families have been through and continue to suffer. Nevertheless, I would like to give my thanks to all the families who agreed to come forward and assist the inquiry.

The review team held conversations with more than 800 families who have raised serious concerns about the care they received. I know that it has not been easy for

them to revisit painful and distressing experiences, but through sharing their stories we can ensure that no family has to suffer the same pain in the future. From the outset the inquiry wanted families to be central to the team's work and for their voices to be heard, and I am pleased that the families were able to see the report first, this morning, shortly before it was presented to Parliament. I assure them, and Members of this House, that we are taking today's report very seriously and that we expect the trust to act on the recommendations immediately.

I thank Donna Ockenden and her team for their diligent work. Their valuable work provides essential and immediate actions to improve patient safety and ensure that maternity services at the trust are safe. Four of those actions are for the trust and seven are for the wider maternity system. The report sets out clear recommendations for what the trust can do to improve safety relating to overall maternity care, maternal deaths, obstetric anaesthesia and neonatal services.

The report also sets out actions that can make a difference to the safe provision of maternity services everywhere. They include recommendations on enhancing patient safety and how we can best listen to women and families, developing more effective staff training and ways of working, managing complex pregnancies and risk assessments throughout pregnancies, monitoring foetal wellbeing, and ensuring that patients have enough information to give informed consent. I welcome those recommendations and the others in the report. We will be working closely with NHS England, NHS Improvement and Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, which have accepted each of the recommendations and will take them forward. We learn from these tragic cases so that we can give patients the safe and high-quality care that they deserve.

Patient safety is a big priority for me and the Government. We want the NHS to be the safest place in the world to give birth, and this report makes an important contribution towards that goal. Our ambition is to halve the 2010 rates of stillbirths, neonatal and maternal deaths, and brain injuries in babies occurring during or soon after birth by 2025. We have achieved early our ambition of a 20% decrease in stillbirths by 2020, but of course there is always more to do and we owe it to the families to get it right.

The Ockenden review is an important document that vividly shows the importance of patient safety. I assure the House that we will learn the lessons that must be learned so that the tragic stories found within these pages will never be repeated again. I commend this statement to the House.

12.52 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement and the personal commitment she has shown on this issue. I too thank Donna Ockenden and her team for their work to date.

Sadly, the report is not the first of its nature, and it is unlikely to be the last. We need to get ourselves into a place, sooner rather than later, where these systemic, almost cultural, failings become a thing of the past. The families have suffered unimaginable pain, and it must not be exacerbated by closed and defensive responses to the tragedies they have experienced.

[Justin Madders]

Today's statement comes only a fortnight after another damning report on maternity safety—Bill Kirkup's report "The Life and Death of Elizabeth Dixon". This is the latest in a long line of reports that show that, across large parts of the NHS, there is still a long way to go before we have the openness and transparency that patients deserve. That is not to do down the hundreds of thousands of staff who do a fantastic job day in, day out, but the report points to the wider problem—it is not a new problem—that when things go wrong, there is too little candour, too much defensiveness and a lack of leadership at the top of trusts; the leadership do not take personal responsibility and put right what has gone wrong.

Once again, we have got to this point only because of the persistence and resilience of the grieving families who have suffered such personal tragedy and refused to accept that what they were told was the end of the matter. I want to put on the record my appreciation of the courage and strength that they have shown throughout, but we really should not expect light to be shone on these issues only because individual families do not accept what they are told.

Senior leadership within trusts has to be much more candid and challenging with itself when faced with these concerns. These families just want answers and an assurance that nobody else will have to go through what they did, but, too often, they do not get them. The fact that we are now looking at more than 800 cases over a 40-year period, when the original investigation was tasked to look at just 23, must surely tell us that, for a very long time, those grieving families were not being listened to and the necessary lessons were not being learned. That in itself is as much a failure as the individual incidents. With so many more families coming forward and having to relive some of the most difficult experiences in their lives, it is vital that support is offered to them to deal with the consequences of that, so can the Minister assure us that appropriate support is available to all those who need it?

So that we will all be clear now, the Ockenden review will be far larger and take far longer than was originally intended. Can the Minister assure the House that the review has the resources necessary to complete the final report as soon as possible? I understand that the trust has not waited until today to take action, but, inevitably, further recommendations will emerge from the final report. There are also actions for the whole NHS, and a number of specific actions that can be taken across the board now, which the Minister indicated are in fact urgent. I would be grateful if she indicated whether she intends to set a deadline for implementation of the system-wide recommendations and whether she will provide regular updates to the House on their progress.

Strong leadership, challenging poor workplace culture and ring-fencing maternity funding are all key to improving safety. On tackling the poor workplace culture that exists in some trusts, it is clear that there is still a long way to go. It is concerning to see a report this morning that the review of bullying at West Suffolk Hospital, which was originally due to be published last April, is now not due until next spring. It is also clear that there is a pressing need to reinstate the NHS maternity safety training fund. That money was

vital for safety and makes a big difference to care, so can the Minister commit to reinstating that training fund?

Can the Minister also advise what action is being taken to ensure that we have enough staff in all maternity units, and will the Government commit to legislating for safe staffing levels? More widely, can she set out what is being done to tackle the estimated 3,000 midwife vacancies that we currently have? We cannot ignore the fact that some of the problems created by this culture will be exacerbated and will continue if we do not solve the staffing and resourcing crisis in the NHS, and these issues will continue to compromise patient safety.

Finally, it is understandable if families who are currently receiving care at the trust are anxious. Can the Minister provide them with some reassurance today that they will be safe and well looked after?

Ms Dorries: I thank the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) for the, as always, constructive and reasonable tone in his response. Yes, I can assure him that the resources are in place, and have been guaranteed to be in place. As for the deadline, it is 2021. I cannot give an exact month. It was really important to me—I believe that Donna Ockenden has mentioned this in her report a number of times—that the first 250 cases were evaluated so that we could take the learning from those cases and introduce it as quickly as possible. In that way, we could identify what had gone wrong so that we could prevent it from happening again in the future. That is why we have produced the report in two stages. We know the findings of this interim report and the recommendations that have been identified by Donna and her team can be put in place. The second stage of the report will appear before the end of next year—certainly in 2021. I will, as the hon. Gentleman requests, and personally if he requires it, update the House on what is happening with the report.

With regard to the maternity safety training fund, we secured £9.4 million in the spending review. It cannot be underestimated, in this time of covid, what a huge achievement that was. The money will not go into the old format of the maternity safety training fund, because we do not believe that that worked as well as it should have done. Much of that money was used to backfill the staff, who then, unfortunately, did not attend training. We did not get the best results—the biggest bang for the buck.

What we, as a Department, are doing now is directing that £9.4 million to where it is needed most and to where it can be spent in the most effective manner to produce results in maternity safety. That work is ongoing now in the Department, and I hope to be able to update the House and the hon. Gentleman very soon on how that money is being spent and what results we expect to see in return for the expenditure.

I did not anticipate the hon. Gentleman's question about midwives. I do not have the exact number, because the figure rises every day. None the less, we are recruiting new nurses—I think the figure was 12,000 when I last gave a statement to the House—some of whom will be recruited to become midwives. So, yes, work is under way on the workforce and on nurse recruitment.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): Babies' skulls were fractured and bones were broken in excruciatingly traumatic births that would never have

happened if mothers' wishes had been listened to. This is an utterly shocking report, and I think the whole House is immensely grateful to Donna Ockenden and her team for such a thorough report, and to the Minister for taking it so seriously, as she always does.

Although much has improved in maternity safety in recent years, does the Minister agree that it is time to stamp out the "normal births" ideology, which says that there can be a debate or compromise about the total importance of a baby's safety? That should always be paramount, and decisions on it should always be taken in consultation with the mother. The report team said they had

"the clear impression that there was a culture within The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust to keep caesarean section rates low".

That needs to stop—not just at Shrewsbury and Telford, but everywhere throughout the NHS. The biggest mistake in interpreting this report would be to think that what happened at Shrewsbury and Telford is a one-off, as it may well not be and we must not assume that it is.

Secondly, the report talks about the "injudicious use of oxytocin" to facilitate vaginal births that perhaps should not have been happening. Will the Minister look into that issue? Finally, this report happened because Rhiannon Davies and Richard Stanton, who lost their daughter Kate in 2009, and Kayleigh and Colin Griffiths, who lost their daughter Pippa in 2016, persuaded me that something needed to happen. Is it not shameful that we make it so hard for doctors, nurses and midwives in the NHS to speak out about tragedies that they see and that all the burden for change is left on the shoulders of grieving relatives? Is it not time, once and for all, to end the blame culture that we still have in parts of the NHS?

Ms Dorries: My right hon. Friend asked a number of questions that deserve answers, so please bear with me. His first point was about the number of caesarean sections and the thought or belief in the hospital that it was a good thing not to have them, which the report identifies.

The report shows us that there were years when C-sections at Shrewsbury and Telford were running at 11% and the national average was 24%, and at 13% when the national average was 26%. That demonstrates a lack of collegiate working between midwives, doctors and consultants. Most of the report's recommendations show that, fundamentally, that is the problem: a lack of communication and an unwillingness to work with people—the medics, doctors, obstetricians and midwives. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about intervention. There is the old saying, "Mother knows best", but every woman should own her birth plan and be in control of what is happening to her during her delivery.

I give all thanks to my right hon. Friend, because this report is fundamental in terms of how it is going to inform maternity services across the UK going forward, not least because the NHS is working on an early warning surveillance system. What happened at Shrewsbury and Telford was that it was an outlying trust. As with East Kent and others, including Morecambe Bay, where we have seen issues, there has been an issue culturally; they are outlying, without the same churn of doctors, nurses, training or expertise. The NHS is now developing a system where we can pick up this data and know quickly where failings are happening.

Oxytocin is a drug used in the induction of labour to control the length, quality and frequency of uterine contractions. There are strict National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on the use of that drug. My right hon. Friend is correct: every trust should follow the guidelines. By highlighting that in this report, we will ensure that trusts are aware of those guidelines and that they are followed in future.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Our heart goes out to all those who have suffered these tragic events and losses; those of us who are parents or grandparents suffer with these families. May I ask the hon. Lady a question as the Minister for Mental Health? The mental health of mothers during and after pregnancy is vital, not just in the tragic circumstance of baby loss or severe injuries during birth. Will she ensure that training in perinatal mental health becomes a strong focus for improving maternity services across the country?

Ms Dorries: I hope the hon. Lady will not mind my mentioning it, but I know that she is about to become a grandmother herself soon, so I understand the reason for her questioning. She raises a very important point. I know she is aware, because I believe we have had this conversation, that we are focusing on women in the Department at the moment, and of course the mental health of women is a big part of that. The post-natal depression services that have been rolled out across the UK in the past 18 months are a testament to the fact that we are focusing on mental health. I take her point on board, and she has made it before.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I very much thank the Minister for coming to the House so promptly and making this statement, and for her commitment to patient safety. I also pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) for initiating this very important review. Without that, we would not be here today.

The findings of the report are deeply harrowing. The scale of the deaths and injuries suffered are horrific, but so too was the response of the trust at the time. The report details this. Women at their most vulnerable could not get their voices heard. They were not listened to by those in positions of power, who normalised poor maternity care and also denied its existence. Instead of humility and empathy, what we saw was the harshness of bureaucratic defensiveness, with women at times "blamed for their loss"—that is in the report.

There is now a criminal investigation into this matter, but I would be grateful if the Minister would please ensure that nothing gets in the way of implementing the recommendations as soon as possible, so that families can see real change in maternity care, at this trust and also right across the country.

Ms Dorries: I thank my hon. Friend for her pursuance, her persistence and her dedication, both to her constituents and the hospital as a trust. I would also like to mention, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) did, the parents of Kate Stanton-Davies and Pippa Griffiths, who have been instrumental in getting us along the pathway to where we are today. Yes, my right hon. Friend commissioned the report, I pushed for it to happen now, and my hon. Friend has

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been pushing also, but it is down to those parents and their commitment. It should not have to be like this. Parents should not have to go through what they have gone through to get to where we are today.

As my hon. Friend is aware, I have visited the trust myself and have been round the midwifery unit and the consultant-led unit, and I think there is an anomaly there. Should we have a midwifery unit and a consultants' unit? Is that not where the problem is, with two separate disciplines not working together? Should there not be just one delivery unit? Does the culture not start there, and should we not look at how it works?

However, my hon. Friend has my absolute 100% assurance that, for as long as I am in this post, I will be driving forward the recommendations and findings of this report.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her understanding and compassion on the findings of the Ockenden report. With other right hon. and hon. Members, I wish to express my deepest sympathy to those families who have been grievously damaged by the failings of the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust.

But will the Minister emphasise that sympathy alone is not necessarily what is required? What is required is action, and an undertaking to review procedures not only in this trust, but UK-wide, to ensure that the Ockenden report recommendations are implemented in all maternity wards. Will she give a guarantee that that will be done?

Ms Dorries: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question; he is absolutely right, of course. The findings will be put in place, and in many trusts they already are. I was just looking for my data on the Morecambe Bay investigation, which I believe my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) also commissioned. If we look at the Morecambe Bay trust investigation, the predecessor to this, it is quite commonplace to say—I hear it all the time—“Well, we had Morecambe Bay and nothing has happened: the recommendations haven't been implemented there.”

Actually, the Morecambe Bay investigation made 44 recommendations, 18 of which have been completed within the Morecambe Bay trust. There were 26 wider NHS learnings and recommendations, of which 14 were accepted nationally and 11 are being worked on now in the Department, to be rolled out nationally. I use that as evidence that reports such as this have consequences: actions that are implemented and make a difference in maternity units.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con) [V]: I add my sympathy and condolences to all those who have suffered loss or damage to their baby or mother in childbirth under the care of the trust, and I also add my voice to thank Donna Ockenden and her large team for the important work that they have done to review so many cases over the past two decades and more. I hope this will help each and every family who have suffered to reach a better understanding of the tragedy of their own case. However, the principal motivation of my then constituents, the Stanton-Davies parents, in coming forward following

the loss of their baby daughter Kate, which prompted this review, was to ensure that other parents could be spared the trauma that they went through.

I am grateful to the Minister for her response to this report. In addition to what she has already said, can she tell the House, and the thousands of expectant mums whose babies are delivered by the committed clinicians at Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust every year, about the improvements in safety and standards that prevail now in the women's and children's unit? That might reassure them that some lessons have already been learned, that more will continue to be learned on the back of this review in implementing its recommendations, and that the maternity service in Shropshire and Telford provides a safe place for babies to be born.

Ms Dorries: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. As he is aware, I have visited the trust. We have a chief executive in place now who I personally, and the Department and NHS England, have been working closely with, as well as with the team in the hospital. The trust has accepted the findings of the report and will take each of the recommendations forward, so that we learn from these tragic cases of the past and can give patients the safe and high-quality care that they deserve. My right hon. Friend was a Minister himself, I think possibly in my role, in the Department when this report was commissioned, so he has been involved with it right from the beginning.

We want the NHS to be the safest place in the world to give birth—I know I say that often at the Dispatch Box—and this report makes a valuable and important contribution towards that goal. That starts in Shrewsbury and Telford, where as I stand here now the recommendations are being discussed within the trust, and ways found both to deliver and to implement the recommendations that have been made, so that from today onwards Shrewsbury and Telford will be a safe place—as it has been for some time, while it has been on our radar and in special measures—for women to give birth.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): We are discussing today the traumatic findings thus far of the Ockenden review about the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, and our hearts go out to the grieving parents and families. Until recently, the travesty of Morecambe Bay was considered the worst maternity scandal in the NHS, so why have there since been others, and what steps are the Government taking to implement findings of successive inquiries in maternity services across our country?

Ms Dorries: As I said, the vast majority of the recommendations on Morecambe Bay have been implemented. Of those that were for wider NHS consideration, 14 have been implemented and 11 have not. However, this is not a case of us overnight going out and saying, “Right, this is how you change”—it takes a vast amount of work in policy, process and delivery. Those 11 recommendations are being worked on and have been worked on since the report on Morecambe Bay happened. The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the fact that we do not have consistency across the NHS in terms of care or delivery. That is what we are working towards. We are currently developing a core curriculum

of training that will be multi-disciplinary and we hope will be rolled out next year. It will be undertaken by midwives, doctors, obstetricians and everybody working in the maternity unit so that they are all at a certain point of skill in terms of consistency, they are all aware of the lessons to be learned from the past in terms of safety, and they implement the recommendations that go across the UK in maternity units. Most maternity units in the UK operate well and deliver babies safely. We have fantastic maternity services in the UK. However, we do have difficult trusts. As in all disciplines, they are not all the same. This is about the outliers—the hospitals that we are working to identify early. With the core curriculum, we are making sure that everybody working in maternity units across the UK has the same standard and level of training.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con) [V]: I welcome the considered tone the Minister has taken today in responding to the difficult contents of this report and in promoting a clinically led response to the findings rather than allowing knee-jerk political reactions that often do not lead to the right results. Let me pick up on one thing. What we see throughout a number of reports, be it Mid Staffs, Morecambe Bay or now this one, is that management is often central to setting a culture that allows mistakes and deaths to occur. When a clinician is found to be negligent, they have a responsible body—the Nursing and Midwifery Council or the General Medical Council—that can take action against them, but what are we going to do to ensure that managers receive better training and that we stop the revolving door of bad managers who are responsible for poor care being employed elsewhere in the NHS?

Ms Dorries: I thank my hon. Friend, who, again, is a predecessor in my Department—a former Health Minister. He is absolutely right to talk about strong leadership. Strong leadership has been established across the system. In the context of maternity services, which is what we are talking about, we have the maternity safety champions who are being led by Dr Matthew Jolly, the national clinical director of maternity and women's health, and Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent OBE, the chief midwifery officer for England. There are lead clinicians who are leading clinically.

In terms of the management of the Shrewsbury and Telford trust, there have been eight chief executives in 10 years. That is not good. Good practice does not come from a revolving door of chief executives and board members who constantly rotate, because there is no continuation of learning, no loyalty, and no commitment to good outcomes at the hospital. We have to change this revolving door of boards and chief executives. The chief executive who is there now has our confidence, and we are assured that she will put in place the recommendations of the report, but my hon. Friend is right: it is crucial that we work on this revolving door of managers and those who are not clinically led, because that is part of the problem. He is right to identify that, and I want to reassure him that it is something we are aware of.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): First, our thoughts today must be with all the families who have been affected by this tragedy. The investigation found that an area of

concern was having the right staffing levels and the right skills mix. Will the Government look to legislate for safe staffing levels in the NHS and, in particular, midwifery?

Ms Dorries: It is probably in the Secretary of State's domain to make that kind of statement at the Dispatch Box, so I cannot give the hon. Lady that reassurance myself, but we are delighted about the huge number of new nurses and doctors that we have in training. Recruitment of our workforce in the NHS is going well, and I hope that that will be the ultimate goal.

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): Reading this report is utterly heartbreaking, and my heart goes out to the families who have been involved in this terrible situation. Leadership, workplace culture and patient safety clearly go hand in hand, so what steps is my hon. Friend taking to strengthen clinical leadership, in order to ensure that all maternity wards are the safest they can be?

Ms Dorries: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for not only his work at Watford General Hospital—he is probably there more often than some of the patients—but his commitment to mental health in his constituency. He has launched a programme of 1,000 mental health first aiders, which is a tremendous boost to his constituents. I am aware of his work, and I thank him for it.

My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. Midwifery leadership has been strengthened this year by the appointment of seven regional chief midwives, working with local maternity services to ensure the provision of safer and more personal care for women, babies and their families. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) had the same thoughts that I did on reading the report. There is a lack of collegiate working—“Let's not let the doctors have this. Let's keep this for the midwives”—and a lack of team working. The recommendations in the report put forward solutions to end that culture and to introduce one where doctors, nurses and midwifery champions work together, as a team, with the mother, who is in control of and owns her birth plan, because that is what it should be about.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is devastating to read about the families involved in this. We have been here so many times. I think back to the publication of the Robert Francis report in 2013, which particularly talked about the duty of candour and the way that those issues are addressed. Clearly the system is quite passive; it is dependent on people raising concerns. What is the Minister doing to ensure that it is more interrogative of families and those involved in order to draw out people's concerns at what is perhaps their most vulnerable time, as is the case for many women when giving birth?

Ms Dorries: The hon. Lady is right: there is a theme. Whether it is Paterson, the Cumberlege review or Morecambe Bay, central to all this are women, and so much of this report is familiar in that women are not listened to. The way some of those mothers were spoken to when they were delivering their babies or during the most tragic hours and days afterwards is just appalling. It is about women being downgraded almost, as though their complaints, their voices or their concerns, and the

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awful circumstances in which they find themselves are not worthy of the same consideration as patients in other hospitals in other situations.

The hon. Lady is absolutely right. We already have national guardians—they immediately spring to mind. We have 600 national guardians in hospitals. NHS workers wear lanyards and, when people want to highlight something that they have seen going wrong in terms of patient safety, they may speak to that person, who will assist them and raise their concerns. It is quite something when we need that, when patients need such assistance. It is also for staff to raise patient concerns. She is absolutely right—it is about listening and treating the complaints and issues of women seriously.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) [V]: My heart goes out to the families. I pay tribute to the Minister for her work on this. Although these tragic things go wrong in our national health service, does my hon. Friend note that many good things also happen across our hospitals? Our maternity ward in the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow has been described as “outstanding” by the Care Quality Commission, and is one of the most successful and important parts of our hospital. Will she pay tribute to and thank staff across the NHS, as well as in Harlow, who do so much? Will she also look at best practice around the country, in places like the Princess Alexandra Hospital for maternity, to see what can be done to learn from that best practice to ensure that such tragedies never happen again?

Ms Dorries: My right hon. Friend adds such a hopeful note. I thank him. He is absolutely right. We stand here to talk about reports, patient safety issues and where things have gone wrong, and yet so much of the NHS so much of the time goes absolutely right. The Princess Alexandra Hospital in his constituency is a shining light and an example of the best practice in maternity services. Of course, we use examples such as Harlow to inform us of how things go right and how well maternity units work. He is absolutely right, and we will of course look at Harlow, as we do at other examples of good service across the NHS, which is—I thank him for reminding us all of this today—in most hospitals most of the time. Our job is to reassure women. The UK is among the safest countries in the world in which to give birth, and most of the time it goes right.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): As questions 14 and 15 have been withdrawn, the final one is from Kerry McCarthy.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): In that case, I thank the Minister for what is clearly a very genuine response to the concerns expressed today. What has been said about the culture within the NHS, revealed in this review, has echoes of the Bristol heart babies scandal, and it is tragic that parents must still fight to have their voices heard now. One of the things mentioned by families contributing to the Ockenden review is the desperate need for longer-term support following experience of baby loss. I know from my constituents that the NHS has struggled to provide that during the current pandemic. What more can we do to ensure not just that parents are listened to at the time of losing their baby, but that they are supported from then onwards, too?

Ms Dorries: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, sincerely, and for her important question. Baby loss is something that we discuss in this House—rightly so—and we are discussing what happened at Shrewsbury and Telford, because many parents there lost their babies. The report makes a recommendation that the care and support that parents are given following a bereavement are strengthened, and that measures are put in place to ensure that the right package is there. Many charities work in this area across the UK—I will just mention Baby Lifeline, Sands and others—and have themselves put in place both practical and emotional measures to help parents at such a time. It is the worst time, in anyone’s life, losing a child. We say that so many times in here, and it is our responsibility, both in the Department and in society as a whole, to hold those parents and to help them through those awful times. I thank the hon. Lady for her question—this is something we take very seriously in the DHSC.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Minister for her statement and her full responses to all the issues that were raised by right hon. and hon. Members. We will now have a three-minute suspension for the safe entry and exit of right hon. and hon. Members.

1.29 pm

Sitting suspended.

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

United Kingdom Internal Market Bill

Consideration of Lords message

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We now come to consideration of the message from the House of Lords on the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, which is to be considered in accordance with the order of the House of 14 September.

I must draw the House's attention to the fact that financial privilege is engaged by Lords amendments 48B and 48C. If any Lords amendment engaging financial privilege is agreed to, I will cause the customary entry waiving Commons financial privilege to be entered in the *Journal*.

Before I call the Minister, I should say that hon. and right hon. Members will be aware that we have one hour for this debate, which means that I will impose an immediate five-minute time limit. However, that may end up being four minutes, depending on how long the Front Benchers take. I just want people to be aware of that.

After Clause 1

COMMON FRAMEWORKS PROCESS

1.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): I beg to move,

That this House disagrees with the Lords in their amendments 1B, 1C and 1D.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With this it will be convenient to consider the following:

That this House agrees with the Lords in their amendments 8B, 8C, 8D, 8F, 8G, 8H, 8J and 8K, but disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 8L, insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendments 13 and 56, and proposes amendment (a) to the Bill in lieu of Lords amendments 8L, 13 and 56.

That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendments 14 and 52 to 54 but does not insist on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 55.

That this House does not insist on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 44.

That this House does not insist on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 45, and proposes amendment (a) instead of the words left out by the Lords amendment.

That this House does not insist on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 47, and proposes amendment (a) to the Bill consequential upon the Lords amendment.

That this House disagrees with the Lords in their amendments 48B and 48C.

That this House agrees with the Lords in their amendment 50B, but disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 50C.

That this House agrees with the Lords in their amendment 51B.

Paul Scully: I will try to be brief in going through the amendments—but with some detail, Madam Deputy Speaker—to make sure that others can speak.

I am glad that, since our last debate on the Bill on Monday, there have been a number of very positive developments. I am delighted that the peers in the other place and the Government have worked together constructively to agree on a number of areas. However, it is clear that there are still a number of outstanding issues, which I will address today. I will set out the Government's rationale and I call on this House to support the Government's proposals.

I want to start with some of the positive developments, notably on part 5 and Lords reasons 14B, 45B, 52A, 53A, 54A and 55A. The Government have been clear throughout that they were committed to implementing the withdrawal agreement and the Northern Ireland protocol. We were also clear that as a responsible Government we could not allow the economic integrity of the UK's internal market to inadvertently be compromised by the unintended consequences of the protocol. That is why, through clauses in the Bill, we sought limited and reasonable steps to create a legal safety net by taking powers in reserve, whereby Ministers could guarantee the integrity of the United Kingdom and ensure that the Government were always able to deliver on their commitments to the people of Northern Ireland.

We sought those measures to guard against the possibility of not reaching agreement with the EU at the Joint Committee. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and his EU counterpart have reached an agreement in principle, I am pleased to say that the clauses that provided for the safety net are no longer needed and the Government are removing them from the Bill: that is, clauses 44, 45 and 47.

I am pleased that the other place has now also agreed to clauses 42, 43 and 46 and consequential amendments, which are purely about protecting Northern Ireland's place in the UK customs territory and internal market, delivering unfettered access in line with the Northern Ireland protocol and codifying in legislation existing practice in terms of the Foreign Secretary notifying the European Commission on state aid.

Alongside that, and in line with the agreement in principle, we have tabled a new clause that will require the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to set out guidance for public authorities on how the state aid provisions of the protocol will work in practice, as well as consequential amendments as a result of removing clauses 44, 45 and 47. Guidance must take account of any declarations made by the EU and the Joint Committee, which would include the proposed EU declaration that forms part of the package agreed in principle by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I call on the House to agree with the Government's approach in this area.

I turn now to amendments 1B, 1C and 1D. Yesterday, noble Lords in the other place once again commended the importance of the Government's continuing co-operation with the devolved Administrations on the common frameworks programme and reiterated their support for it. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the noble and learned Lord Hope for his considered intervention yesterday, and for all his thoughtful work on the Bill. However, while his new amendments would clarify the interaction between divergence agreed under common frameworks in the market access principles, they would still potentially undermine the certainty that

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the market access principles are designed to provide for business, because of the possibility of differing interpretations of what is permitted under an agreement. Moreover, as I set out on Monday, the amendments could create a broad exclusions regime. In itself, that denies businesses and consumers much needed clarity about the terms of trade within which they operate.

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind the House that common frameworks are processes for negotiation and reaching agreement, and are not in themselves a policy outcome. Wholesale exclusions from the market access principles of agreement reached through the common frameworks process could therefore lead to the unacceptable risk of harmful trade barriers being erected across the UK. Such barriers could not be erected under the EU system unless justified and notified to the Commission, and they are undesirable in our own UK internal market. For those reasons, I respectfully suggest that the approach put forward in the amendments is not appropriate.

I have said previously that the Government are committed to completing the delivery of the common frameworks programme and protecting these areas of co-operation to the benefit of jobs, people and livelihoods. We welcome the support of hon. and right hon. Members here in achieving that. However, amendments 1B, 1C and 1D have considerable drawbacks and I therefore call on the House to disagree with them.

Let me turn to Lords amendment 8L. I remind the House that, in drafting the Bill, and clause 10 specifically, the Government designed an exclusions approach that achieves a careful balance. It sits within the fundamental framework of the market access principles, which protect the UK's highly integrated internal market, but allows the Government to remove very targeted and specific policy areas from scope, so it can continue to operate for the particular conditions, where they are needed, under the bespoke constraints that are relevant to those circumstances. Let me repeat the point for emphasis: we agree that there is a need for an exclusions regime, but one that is carefully drafted and provides certainty for business.

I am therefore disappointed that the other place has again voted to upset that careful balance with an altered, but still fundamentally flawed, expansive list. It would render the protections and benefits of the internal market proposals under part 1 meaningless. This would allow unnecessary trade barriers and unjustifiable costs to businesses and consumers.

Amendment 8L captures all kinds of public policy objectives and only requires a new regulation to make a contribution to any of the aims in the list. That means that almost any regulation that the UK Government or the devolved Administrations propose in the future could be excluded from the scope of the market access principles. I therefore call on the House to disagree with amendments 8L, 13 and 56, and agree with the Government's amendments in lieu.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Minister refers to the Government amendment, which also refers to consultation and consent. Yesterday, the Senedd voted to withhold consent from the internal market Bill. Its provisions regarding consultation are

meaningless. When he says that Wales will be consulted, what we hear is contempt. Will he admit that to press ahead regardless, against the express will of the people of Wales and Welsh democracy, is to follow, as Lord Thomas put it in the other place, the "discredited principle of 'Westminster knows best'"?—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 25 November 2020; Vol. 808, c. 278.]

Paul Scully: We want to work with the Welsh Senedd. We want to work with the Welsh people. We want to work particularly to ensure that Welsh businesses have certainty, and English, Scottish and Northern Irish businesses as well. That is why we need to work at pace to ensure that we have an internal market that works for all come 1 January.

Let me turn to amendments 48B and 48C. It is right, as we leave the transition period, that the UK Government have the right tools to make sure the whole country can benefit from investment, which strengthens the communities, economies and connectivity within and between all parts of the UK. I emphasise once again that this power is in addition to the devolved Administrations' existing power. It does not take away responsibilities from the devolved Administrations; rather, the power will enable the UK Government to deliver investment more dynamically and in collaboration with the devolved Administrations and other partners.

The Government will work with the devolved Administrations to ensure we can complement their existing and continuing powers, used to support citizens in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We will also work collaboratively with other crucial partners, including local authorities and wider public and private sector organisations.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): If the desire is to work collaboratively, why on earth are the Government rejecting these amendments, which simply ask for consent from the devolved Administrations? That would be collaboration.

Paul Scully: I have talked about the fact that we have spoken with the Scottish Government and continue to do so and we are very open to that. What has been frustrating, in terms of collaboration, is that although we have collaborated on common frameworks, the Scottish Government have pulled away from discussions about the internal market, and that started to cause this detachment. But we do want to hold out our hand to make sure we can continue to collaborate in the future to complement, as I said, the existing powers.

I want to touch briefly on the UK shared prosperity fund. This power means that the UK Government can make good on our commitment to the UKSPF. The UK Government intend to work with the devolved Administrations and with local communities to ensure that this power is used to best effect and that the UK shared prosperity fund supports citizens across the UK. Indeed, we have confirmed that the devolved Administrations will be represented on the UK SPF governance structures. The Government will set out further details of the objectives and administration of the shared prosperity fund in the UK-wide investment framework, which will be published in the spring. We will continue to engage the devolved Administrations as we develop the investment framework in advance of its publication.

1.45 pm

On the governance of the fund, while the specific arrangements are still being developed there will be governance structures and the DAs will have a place within those structures. That is part of the further work we need to do, and it will go on in consultation with the devolved Administrations and others as we work to set out the framework that we will be publishing in the spring. The Government have been more than clear in their intention to work with the devolved Administrations and therefore do not think that Lords amendments 48B and 48C are necessary. Moreover, as these amendments also alter the financial arrangements made in this House, as we have heard, I call on the House to disagree with them.

I turn to Lords amendment 50C. We are grateful that the other place accepts the reservation of subsidy control. I think we all agree that we should continue the UK-wide approach to subsidy control, and this reservation confirms that in law. However, despite assurances from the Government and a commitment to consult the devolved Administrations on the outcome of our forthcoming consultation, the other place continues to have concerns about how we engage with the devolved Administrations on this particular policy issue. The amendment that it has put forward means that the reservation would not come into force until the Government had agreed a common framework or, if one could not be agreed, no earlier than in three years. This would undermine the reservation and would provide an unnecessary delay to the implementation of a future UK-wide subsidy control regime.

The common frameworks programme was designed to operate in policy areas where regulatory powers previously held at EU level intersect with devolved competence. State aid has never been devolved, and the devolved Administrations have never previously been able to set their own subsidy control rules, as this was covered by the EU state aid framework and it has never been included in the common frameworks programme. Therefore, the approach proposed in this amendment would not be appropriate. If the Government were to adopt the amendment, the UK would potentially have to wait three years to decide on a UK-wide approach to subsidy control. That delay would create unacceptable uncertainty for businesses and would damage our efforts to support the UK's economic recovery from the covid-19 pandemic.

We have listened to concerns regarding the role of the devolved Administrations in the development of proposals for the new subsidy control regime. The Government have tabled an amendment setting out our commitment to consult the devolved Administrations on the Government's response to the UK subsidy control consultation. I therefore call upon the House to disagree with Lords amendment 50C, as it is inappropriate to link the operation of the reservations proposed by clause 50 to common frameworks, and as we have also addressed the concerns in Lords amendments 50B and 51B. I appreciate the constructive approach that peers in the other place have been taking in discussions with the Government. While the Government cannot agree with the amendments put forward by the other place as they stand, I hope that the other place will reconsider and continue to work with the Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I appreciate that the Minister was as brief as he could be, given that he took interventions, but I think we will have to start with a time limit of four minutes rather than five minutes.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I will try to be as brief as I can, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to say to the Minister that we should note the progress made in the removal of the law-breaking clauses from part 5. What has essentially happened here is that the Joint Committee set up to deal with the outstanding issues on the Northern Ireland protocol has dealt with the issues on the Northern Ireland protocol. We are in a slightly through-the-looking-glass world here. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster this week described Maroš Šefčovič, the Vice President of the Commission, and his team as displaying

“pragmatism, collaborative spirit and determination to get a deal done that would work for both sides.”—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 685, c. 847.]

These are the same people the Prime Minister described in his Second Reading speech in September as being

“willing to go to extreme and unreasonable lengths”.—[*Official Report*, 14 September 2020; Vol. 680, c. 42.]

He also said that they had engaged in an “extraordinary threat” and refused to take the “revolver off the table”.

There are two conclusions we can draw from this sequence of events. The first is that Mr Šefčovič has changed his whole character, attitude and personality in three months; the other is the Prime Minister is a man who will make up any old nonsense for political advantage. I tend to the latter view.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: I am going to make some progress; lots of people want to speak and there is not much time.

With the law-breaking powers that undermined our reputation in the world gone, we are left with the legal but, I believe, deeply flawed proposals for undermining our shared governance at home. I am glad that the other place has, by large majorities, stuck with the insistence on upholding the devolution settlement, particularly in respect of common frameworks. I say to the Minister that this is absolutely critical to the kind of country we want to build post Brexit. We want a functioning UK internal market, but we believe that can be achieved in a way that upholds high standards and allows devolved Governments both to have a voice in setting those standards and to make choices in devolved areas appropriate for each nation. The principle is clear: we have a system of governance based not any more on power hoarded at Westminster but on power shared. That should be respected.

All of that brings me to Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D. I hope that in the course of the coming days the Minister, with his colleagues, will reflect on this: the Government say that they support common frameworks, that they are a great innovation and that they are proud of them—and they are a good innovation in many senses—so why not give them legislative backing?

This is quite an arcane debate, so I wish to make it as simple as I can and return the example of single-use plastics, which I mentioned on Monday, to show the difference between the common frameworks approach proposed by Lord Hope and others and the Government's

[*Edward Miliband*]

approach. Environmental policy, including on plastics, is a devolved question. Under the EU rules we currently have, the Welsh Government, for example, could ban the production and sale of single-use plastics in Wales; under the Bill as it stood when it went to the other place, the Government of Wales would not be able to ban their sale because the UK Government do not propose to ban such plastics themselves. Because of the market access principle and the way it is implemented, the lowest standard in one Parliament will be the standard for all, which means that Welsh shops will have to stock these plastics. I do not believe that that respects the devolution principle. The power may be formally devolved, but in essence it is rendered ineffective by the approach taken in the Bill, which takes control back to Westminster. If the Minister can explain why it does respect devolution, perhaps he should do so, but I have not heard a good explanation.

What is the alternative to that? The alternative is the common frameworks approach, which provides a different way forward by attempting to find consensus for high standards among the four nations while respecting devolved powers and the ability to diverge through agreement. That is what Lord Hope's amendments seek to do, which is why we support those amendments and will, indeed, seek a vote on them.

Lords amendments 8L, 13 and 56 also seek to preserve the ability for there to be higher standards in different nations, where they can be justified. Again, this is about our vision for the future. Instead of a race to the bottom, we want to see a race to the top on standards. We have seen this over the course of devolution: on the smoking ban, plastic bags and a whole range of issues, we have seen experimentation in different nations drive up standards. I say to the Minister that both sets of amendments are the right thing to do to respect the devolution principle, and I believe they are consistent with the internal market that we want to see.

I turn briefly to Lords amendments 48B and 48C, which would oblige agreement with the devolved Administrations before there was spending in devolved areas. If anything, this is a clearer and more simple test of the Government's real intentions. They say that they believe in devolution. The city deals are worked out jointly with the devolved Administrations; the Government are taking enormously wide powers in the Bill on spending in devolved areas. If this is not about hoarding power to Westminster, the Government can surely agree to the proposal that such spending should have the consent of devolved Administrations. This is about the principle of shared governance. I make the point that that was certainly the case in relation to EU structural funds. The Minister set out some proposals on the shared prosperity fund, but the Bill proposes much wider powers in relation to spending in devolved areas. If this is not a power grab and is not about hoarding power to Westminster, surely it is possible to say, "Yes, this spending should be agreed with the devolved nations." If the Government refuse to accept the amendment, they slightly give the game away.

I think there is a big picture here, which is that, as I said on Monday, all of us who believe in the United Kingdom must, I believe, go the extra mile to protect devolution. I think it is incredibly important. It is the key to keeping our United Kingdom together, in my

view. While we welcome the removal of the offending parts of part 5, this Bill just does a bad job of doing that, I am afraid, and I think the other place is telling the Government that loud and clear. I am very struck, by the way, that the Conservatives who voted for the amendments yesterday—Lord Mackay of Clashfern and Lord Dunlop, to take two examples—are people who are steeped in this issue as Conservatives and are incredibly keen to protect both the devolution settlements and the Union.

I say to the Minister that we want the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill to reach the statute book. It must happen, however, in a way that does not ride roughshod over the way we are governed. I hope very much, for the sake of the United Kingdom and for the sake of respecting the devolution settlements, that the Government will reflect on this over the coming days.

Sir William Cash: In a nutshell, I am concerned about the fact that the Government have not insisted on this disagreement with respect to the notwithstanding clauses. I do not have time to go into all the detail, but I would simply say this. They remain needed, and I have put down amendments this afternoon to the Taxation (Post-transition Period) Bill for next week for the same reason.

The first thing is that this is to do with sovereignty and with judicial powers. It is to do with the fact that the notwithstanding clauses, with the use of the words "notwithstanding" and "whatsoever", actually deal with the job effectively, and we should not take them away when we do not even know what the text from the Joint Committee is and we have just in effect been told that decisions are taken. There is this new clause talking about guidance. Guidance on what—on what agreement? We have not seen it, and we do not know what it means. I shall therefore almost certainly abstain on that at the very least.

The second thing is the question of what the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) said yesterday—he knew perfectly well when he used the word "Factortame" what he meant. It is what I have been talking about in respect of, for example, the quashing of Acts of Parliament: the ability of the courts under the rubric of European law to be able to take action to strike down UK law. Those principles may be retained—indeed, I believe it is more than possible that that would actually happen. There is a necessity to ensure that it does not happen when we have had a referendum, we have had Acts of Parliament and we have had section 38 of the European Union (Withdrawal Act) passed, all of which enables us to be able to provide for these notwithstanding clauses.

We should not remove these clauses on the basis of a *jeu d'esprit* or leave them out on the basis that everything is now all right in respect of these absurd allegations over breaches of international law, which are complete nonsense. Nobody has put forward a single argument in the House of Lords to substantiate the allegation that there is a breach of international law. In fact, the reality is that article 46 of the Vienna convention deals with these matters, and it is therefore perfectly proper for us to keep the clauses. I believe that we need to retain them not just as a safety net or as belt and braces, but because it may well turn out to be necessary to avoid, for example, either the House of Lords or the courts, in extremis, taking action whose effect would be to undermine

the Brexit process. That is the key issue. It is about sovereignty, which the British people have made clear is what they want—the same applies to the red wall seats, as the Labour party knows only too well.

The bottom line, therefore, is that I want an assurance from the Minister that measures will be taken in legislation—in primary legislation—to restore those notwithstanding clauses. I have discussed this with our team in the Whips Office today. I hope the Minister will simply say, “Yes, we will take note of what my hon. Friend has said, and indeed will give effect to it if we find that, at the end of this weekend, it is necessary to return those clauses to the taxation Bill and also, if necessary, to this Bill,” but without prejudicing the safety of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill in its entirety as it stands at the moment.

2 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): This shabby, shambolic, pernicious Bill should never have seen the light of day. It has already been delivered a historic defeat in the Lords—they rightly tore it apart—yet this Government overturned all their amendments and sent the Bill back. No sooner had they done that than there came the press release—as ever, bypassing this House—to say that the Government would be retreating from breaking international law with clauses that should never have been in the Bill in the first place, and that have only served further to diminish this Government and the UK’s already tattered international reputation. They are now reinstating these amendments.

Of course, it is not just the other place that this Tory Government ignore; it is almost everybody. When it comes to devolution and the nations of the UK, they are still determined to ignore the democratically elected Parliaments. As we have already heard, both the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senedd have voted to withhold legislative consent on this Bill, yet this Government say that it is about working with the devolved Governments. It is not.

Lords amendments 48B and 48C pretty much deal with the shared prosperity fund that we have heard about. Under these amendments, the Government would have to agree with the devolved Governments on the way in which and where funds would be spent for matters within the devolved competences—roads, health and education, for example. The Government have said that the devolved nations will be represented, but Lord Thomas did not fall for that smoke and mirrors approach from the UK Government. He noted that,

“the clause without my amendments would enable the UK Government to spend in devolved fields and bypass the devolved Governments and Parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who have been elected to be responsible for those fields. It would, in effect, hollow out the devolution settlements.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 808, c. 1293.]

It is disgraceful that we still do not have details of the shared prosperity fund, just weeks before we leave the EU. I was asking about this in 2017, and we have still not had anything from the Government.

Lords amendments 50B and 50C set out an attempt to agree a common framework, which is a regime that can govern the control of subsidies. Lord Thomas warned that, without this,

“Having changed the settlement for a policy that they have not yet devised, the Government then wish simply to consult...and then announce their decision. That is what I would call ‘way one’—the UK Government way.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 808, c. 1309.]

The SNP will not accept this brazen power grab. State aid must remain a devolved competence.

We welcome the changes through motion C1 in the Lords. The amendment removes the law-breaking clauses from part 5 of the Bill. Lord Judge said:

“They were constitutionally improper and a constitutional aberration. They subverted the rule of law.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 808, c. 1277.]

They have even been knocked down by former Tory leader, Lord Howard.

Sir William Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: I am not going to take interventions. We are very short on time, so I am going to press on; sorry.

Lords amendments 8B to 8L, 13A and 56A require the Secretary of State to seek the consent of the devolved Administrations before exercising the powers, setting a time limit for that and a process if consent is withheld. Lord Stevenson said:

“The purpose of our amendment is to preserve the potential for managed policy divergence that is central to the devolution settlement.”

Again, the UK Government just ignore that. Lord Stevenson also noted:

“The Government have failed to explain properly why their list of exceptions is so much more restrictive than that of the EU—well, we can probably work that one out”. —[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 808, c. 1268-69.]

Let us not forget that this covers a huge range of effects for people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:

“environmental standards and protection...animal welfare...consumer standards, including digital and artificial intelligence privacy rights...employment rights and protections...health and life of humans, animals or plants...protection of public health...equality entitlements, rights and protections.”

It has a massive impact on Scottish public society.

Lords amendments 1B, 1C and 1D seek to protect the role of the common frameworks in the Bill. The Minister thanked Lord Hope, but he was the one who pointed out that

“if there really is a will on the Government’s part to make this system work, a solution can be found.”

He also said:

“Traders from other parts of the UK who had no regard for the higher standard could simply ignore it, irrespective of how simple and easy it was to comply with. That is not where we should be going.”

He concluded:

“A balance needs to be struck here, if devolution is to be respected.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 808, c. 1249-50.]

Time after time after time, Members of the Lords pointed out the massive disrespect and contempt the Government have for the devolution settlement. Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town warned the Government

“to be very careful about clawing back decisions from our now quite long-established devolved settlements.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 808, c. 1256.]

[*Drew Hendry*]

The Scottish Government, by the way, remain fully committed to the common frameworks process, as this Minister knows. I cannot use the language I would like to use in this House about what the Minister repeated, but he knows that the Scottish Government have remained 100% committed to the agreement that was set up to take the process through, and he should correct the record.

This Bill is unwanted and unwarranted and unashamedly undermines devolution. It is an attack on the democratically elected Scottish Parliament and the vast majority of the Scottish public who value it. Since 2014, promises to them have been routinely broken in this place. Their votes and their views have been ignored over Brexit. Now, Scotland will be the only country not to get what it voted for in that referendum. They will in the next one. They know that. The only way to protect their rights and their Parliament is for them to take the next logical step and for Scotland to become an independent nation.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome the fact that the Government have accepted that it was unwise, if I can put it charitably, to have certain clauses in this Bill that might have impugned our international reputation for supporting the rule of law. I welcome the Minister's approach and that of his colleague Lord True in the other place. The Bill is better off without those clauses. I had sought at the very least to ensure there was a parliamentary lock should such clauses ever be needed, but I hope that through the agreement achieved in the Joint Committee, thanks to the work of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, they are not needed at all. It is better, therefore, to leave the Bill clean in that way to serve the other important purposes that it does have to achieve.

That is why, with all due respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I trust that the Minister and colleagues will firmly resist any temptation to try to reinstate such clauses, which would be unnecessary, provocative in more ways than one, and unhelpful to the purpose we all seek to achieve.

I read with care the speeches of two former Lord Chief Justices and the former leader of my party, my noble Friend Lord Howard of Lympne, who himself was a distinguished Queen's counsel with many years in practice before he came into this place. They certainly were not talking nonsense; they were making legitimate and fair points about areas of concern, even though I perhaps was more content to go with the view of David Wolfson QC, who was quoted by Lord Naseby, that the taking of such clauses into the Bill was not of itself a breach of international law until such time as they were brought into force. We are none the less better off not going down that route, so I hope the Minister will resist any temptation to put anything of that kind back into this Bill or into the Taxation (Post-transition Period) Bill, because that would muddy the waters needlessly, legally and politically.

We are going to require political goodwill on all sides to make the coming days and weeks work. Were it ever to be necessary to take such extreme measures in such extreme circumstances that might occur, immediate primary legislation on an emergency basis could of course be

done, and that would give the parliamentary lock that I was concerned should exist, but through another form. It is not necessary for us to go down that route now, because, frankly, to try to reinstate the clauses would be fatal to the progress of the Bill, and that would not be in the interests of the Government or anyone else. I thank the Minister for the way in which he and his colleagues have approached this matter.

Sir William Cash: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Robert Neill: Nobody else has been giving way, with every respect to my hon. Friend. Other people want to get in. I have said what I have to say. In fairness, he and I could happily go on all day about this in a friendly manner of disagreement, but I think possibly that is for outside the Chamber, rather than in it. I say that in the nicest possible way.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I will call Mr Scully to close the debate no later than 2.30 pm.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak today, having been unable to do so on Monday.

Because of the international law-breaking clauses, I believe that insufficient attention has been given to how this Bill affects the devolution settlements, which is a matter of great regret. Throughout its passage, my colleagues and I have been keen to work constructively on that aspect. Now that the law-breaking parts have been taken out of the legislation, I hope we can ensure that the voices of the devolved nations are listened to.

At earlier stages I tabled amendments to ensure that the devolved Administrations had input into the membership of the Competition and Markets Authority, following the precedent set by the Scotland Act 1998. The Lords have made amendments to the common framework and the functioning of the Office for the Internal Market, and on engagement with the devolved Administrations—amendments that build on the devolution settlement rather than undermine it.

I have found the Government's rationale for refusing these changes to be highly frustrating. A case in point is the interaction between the common frameworks and the UK internal market. Why do we need this legislation when the common market frameworks have buy-in from all the devolved nations? The Government tell us it is because the internal market deals with cross-sector issues, whereas the common frameworks deal with specific sectors. Yet when the Minister appeared before the Scottish Affairs Committee, I asked him whether he could give an example of a cross-sector issue that the Bill will help to solve. He could not. When he wrote to the Committee on this matter—I am grateful to him for doing so—he said:

“We would refer you to pages 81-83 of the White Paper, which sketch out a cross-sector example in the form of an illustrative supply chain in the agri-food area.”

I think that says it all. The Government cannot provide a real-life example of an affected product that is cross-sector. Indeed, the implication in the White Paper is that there are no common frameworks in those different sectors. I do not see how, if the common frameworks are in place, there should be an impact. Therefore, there is no need for the Bill's provisions.

The Government's refusal to support Lords amendments on common frameworks, in particular amendments 1B, 1C and 1D, is therefore frustrating, but I am also concerned by the Minister's response to the Committee on the role of the Office for the Internal Market, which will have huge powers. The worry is that parties involved in trade deals—the example I gave in the Committee was that of US investors—could sue the devolved Administrations or indeed the CMA. The Minister's response to that point was:

“The CMA is therefore able to accept reporting requests from bodies and individuals with relevant concerns connected to”

the operation of the internal market,

“including those from outside of the UK.”

Although the letter then suggests that such reports would not interfere in devolved competences, can the Minister confirm that, by submitting a request to the CMA, foreign investors could potentially interfere with devolved Administrations? If the CMA refuses such a request, could those foreign investors then challenge that in the court?

The Minister has insisted that is not a political Bill, but given that the Paymaster General just this morning was unable to confirm to me whether the Government would bring forward international law-breaching clauses in future business, such as the Taxation (Post-transition Period) Bill, which the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) referred to, if the outcome of the EU negotiations is no deal, then it is clearly nothing but.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): First, I welcome the fact that the provisions in clauses 42 and 43 safeguarding Northern Ireland's position within the internal market and its unfettered access to that internal market, and also within the customs union, have been maintained. I am not grateful to the Lords that they have not removed them; it would have been a scandal if they had decided to abandon Northern Ireland in that way.

However, I say to the Minister that if we are maintaining those clauses to safeguard Northern Ireland's position within the UK market, with unfettered access, and the UK customs territory, thereby ensuring no barriers to trade in the form of tariffs and so on, then the means to deliver that must be in place, because it is still under threat, regardless of the agreement reached in the Joint Committee. Some of these issues are under review. Some businesses in Northern Ireland will still be subject to EU tariffs; therefore, there is a tariff barrier between Northern Ireland and GB. The means of safeguarding and delivering on the commitments made in the Bill are therefore important. What I am surprised about, though, is that the Government have accepted the Lords' removal of the clauses on state aid.

2.15 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made it quite clear yesterday that the state aid rules contained in the Northern Ireland protocol will still apply to firms based in GB if, to use his words, they have a “genuine and direct link” to Northern Ireland. This applies to any firm that supplies goods to Northern Ireland, whether they be from Scotland, England or Wales, so all Members should be concerned about this. If it is deemed that any support to those firms falls foul of EU state aid rules, Brussels can challenge it and the European Court of

Justice can make the final decision as to whether that intervention and support by the UK Government is appropriate. Indeed, it can impose sanctions if it is not and demand that it be stopped. That covers a whole range of fiscal support: support under the industrial strategy; support under infrastructure spend; support for research and development, and so on.

How does the Minister intend to safeguard UK sovereignty in that particular case now that he has accepted that the Lords amendments to have those clauses removed are appropriate? From Northern Ireland's point of view, while we have some of the agreements through the Joint Committee and some of the protocol has been blunted, nevertheless there are still significant intrusions in Northern Ireland. We have to see how, in practice, some of the agreements that were announced yesterday will be applied, but the Minister has to deal with the issue that the EU still has a substantial foot in the door through the Northern Ireland protocol. Indeed, he has opened that door wider by accepting the Lords amendments.

Alan Brown: We all know the Prime Minister does not believe in devolution, and neither does the Leader of the House, who made more derogatory comments about it this morning. In fact, over the years, the Prime Minister's comments are nothing less than anti-Scottish. I accept that the Government do believe in an abstract of the Union, but more important to them is Westminster sovereignty and the fact that we in the devolved nations should do what we are told and be grateful. It is quite clear that there is a huge resentment that the people of Scotland and the people of Wales vote for Governments who are non-Tory.

If this Government have any scintilla of respect for the Union and for devolution, they would accept these regional amendments that have come back from the House of Lords. Instead, what we have heard from the Minister is platitudes about collaboration and working with the Government, but in actual fact the Government will not allow the devolved Administrations to have consent. They will ignore the legislative consent motion votes in other Parliaments, so, actually, that is Westminster imposing its will on the devolved nations yet again.

Amendment 48 seeks to ensure that any Westminster spend in devolved areas is undertaken with the consent of the devolved Governments. What is there to argue about in that? If we are talking collaboration, the Government should just accept this simple, reasonable amendment. The Scottish Tories always tell us that they want both Governments of Scotland to work together—as they call it. We were promised the best of both worlds in 2014. Well, this simple amendment would make a statement about the fact that the Tory Government are willing to work in collaboration with the devolved Administrations and show them the respect that they deserve.

If the Scottish and Welsh Tory MPs vote to strike out the amendment, they should hang their heads in shame, and it would show that it is all bluff and bluster when it comes to respecting devolution. In fact, doing so is confirmation of the Lords assessment that devolution is simply an inconvenience to the Tories and they are ignoring the advice from Lord Dunlop not to use their own votes to overturn these Lords amendments. It is absolutely disgraceful that we still do not know what the shared prosperity fund will look like. Again, the

[Alan Brown]

word “shared” seems a bit of a misnomer, given the attitude of the Tory Government. Why are we moving into a consultation phase after all these years? It is a disgrace that they have mucked about and mucked about, and nobody knows what will replace these vital European funds—funds that have helped many regions in Scotland to make up for a lack of spending from Westminster over the years.

If the Government do not agree to the formalisation of common frameworks, once again that shows there is no real intent to work collaboratively with the devolved Administrations. What is wrong with formalising common frameworks? The Minister saying that it will cause uncertainty beggars belief. It does the opposite of cause uncertainty—it provides a clear way forward for us to work together. It seems to me that, yet again, this is another way for Westminster to impose its will on the devolved Administrations.

We know that there are too many free marketeers in the Government, and the fact that they will not allow state aid to be devolved or to be part of common frameworks suggests to me that there will be a race to the bottom in the future, when this Tory Government pull subsidies. There is a pretence at the moment that the argument with the EU is about how the Government want to provide more state aid—who’s kidding who? We know that in the long run, free marketeer rules will win, so it has nothing to do with supporting industry.

We have had 313 years of the Union and Westminster rule. We have only had 20 years of devolution. It is now clear to more and more people what has had the biggest impact on inequality and holding Scotland back, and it is not the 20 years of devolution. We look forward to independence, because more and more people realise that it is the only way forward.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown). I rise to support the Lords amendments in respect of devolution. Northern Ireland is allegedly sorted out now, and the international lawbreaking parts of the Bill have gone, but what of Scotland? According to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, businesses in Northern Ireland will enjoy “the best of both worlds”: access to the single market and, at the same time, unfettered access to the rest of the UK market. Presumably this means that when Scotland becomes independent and a member of the European Union, Scotland too could have the best of both worlds: access to the single market and to the rest of the UK market, with no hard border and no infrastructure on the border. We shall see, but one thing is for sure: the Conservative party can never again be allowed to get away with claiming that Scottish independence means that a hard border with England is inevitable.

Scotland has yet to vote for independence, but that is only a matter of time. In the meantime, we want to protect what we have. Scotland did not vote for Brexit, but Scotland did vote for devolution in very significant numbers in 1997. This House should not use Brexit, which Scotland did not vote for, to undermine devolution, which we did vote for. The Lords amendments are designed to protect some of the essentials of the devolved settlement. It is very telling that Lord Hope, who I count as a friend and who is a former Lord President of

the Court of Session, former Deputy President of the UK Supreme Court and also a Unionist, said that initially, when he heard SNP politicians talking about a power grab, he thought it was an exaggeration, but after reading the Bill, he agreed with us. That is not a nationalist—that is a Unionist, so Government Members would be wise to listen up.

Others in the Lords did not fall for the Government’s sleight of hand in the Bill either. As my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) said, Lord Thomas said yesterday:

“the clause without my amendments would enable the UK Government to spend in devolved fields and bypass the devolved Governments and Parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who have been elected to be responsible for those fields. It would, in effect, hollow out the devolution settlements.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 808, c. 1294.]

Lord Adonis warned:

“This Bill is deliberately intended to cut across and undermine the devolution settlements because the Prime Minister does not agree with them.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 808, c. 1294.]

The game’s up, and Government Members should realise that the heads of voters in Scotland do not zip up the back. Devolution is very popular in Scotland across parties. It is supported by the vast majority of voters in Scotland. Even some Scottish Conservatives—some, not all—support the current devolved settlement. Donald Dewar set it out carefully, making a delineation between reserved and devolved powers, and that is what this Bill is driving a coach and horses through. We must not forget today that Scotland’s Parliament—the democratically elected voice of Scotland’s people—has voted against the Bill by a margin of 90 to 28 MSPs.

I say to the Minister that we are sick to the back teeth of the Government’s disingenuous words, saying that they listen to the Scottish Government. Listening is not enough; they have to have respect for the democratic voice of Scotland, which is expressed through our Parliament. Our Parliament has said it does not want this Bill, and if the Government do not listen, then a vote for independence is inevitable. I say, “Bring it on.”

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): To sit down no later than 2.30 pm, Mr Tim Farron.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). The Government’s position throughout this Bill, as it is on every other piece of legislation, is directed at an audience. The audience that was listening to their intentions to break international law was an international audience. While of course it is welcome that those clauses have been withdrawn, it is ludicrous that they were ever on the table in the first place. International opinion of the United Kingdom has been measurably affected by that as a consequence.

The fact that Britain is a country that is prepared to break its word and break international law so flagrantly—for whatever purpose Government Members might think they have behind that—is heard, noticed and remembered. As a consequence, Britain’s standing in the world is reduced, Britain’s influence in the world is reduced and Britain’s sovereignty is reduced. That is why the sovereignty myth being peddled by the Government at the moment is so far off the mark of reality.

I will focus my comments in the moments ahead of me on the issues to do with mutual recognition and the differences between the four nations of the United Kingdom. Mutual recognition is embedded in this Bill and we seek to remove it, because it is about setting the United Kingdom's formal negotiating position using the standards that are the lowest among the four nations. As we go and have a negotiation on food, farming and other trade issues with other countries, we will use the standards of whichever of the four nations has the lowest as the common standard across the United Kingdom.

That is appalling for two reasons. It is a race to the bottom when it comes to standards in agriculture and in other matters as well, and it is a threat to the integrity and the survival of the United Kingdom. Both those realities hurt my communities in Cumbria, first because of the impact on farming. The fact that the British Government continue to refuse to write into legislation minimum standards—particularly on animal welfare and environmental standards—leaves our farmers open to being undercut by cheap imports from other countries; people talk in particular about the United States, but there are other deals as well.

That is hugely damaging to our proud record of high-quality animal welfare and environmental standards and ethics in this country. Alongside that, the Government's decision in 28 days or so to start removing a vast chunk of farm incomes in England through the basic payment scheme undermines family farming in this country to the extent that it will reduce our capacity to feed ourselves and fundamentally change the landscape of places such as the Lake District. That is wrong, and we need to ensure that those standards—our proud, high British agricultural standards—are written into statute.

However, from my perspective and that of most people here, it is also massively regrettable in how it undermines the integrity of the United Kingdom. In Cumbria, we share a border with Scotland. Animals raised in Dumfriesshire are sold at market in Cumbria, and animals raised in Cumbria are sold at market in Dumfriesshire. The border is pretty meaningless to most of us on either side of it. To undermine the integrity of the United Kingdom in this way, and to play into the hands of those who would want the United Kingdom to be split up, is utter folly from the Government. Some 95% of Cumbrian farm exports are to the single market, but the single market that matters most to us is the United Kingdom single market. My great fear is that Conservative Members increasingly know little, and care less, about what it would take to keep the United Kingdom together.

I run the risk of offending some people around me, but I say this to the English nationalists on the Government Benches whose *modus operandi* to win the elections of the past few years has been to blame all the ills of the country on people outside our borders: that has done you a lot of good in terms of electoral results in recent years, but it can happen to you in reverse, as nationalists north of the border point to the nationalists on your Front Bench and decide to make a call that it is time to end the Union. That is why we need to uphold the Lords amendments: because we believe in the future of the United Kingdom.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): A few references to “you” there, Mr Farron—you should know better.

Tim Farron: I do, and I am sorry.

2.30 pm

Paul Scully: I appreciate everybody who has taken the time to speak today. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) spoke about the notwithstanding paragraphs in the Bill. Clearly, we have made the arrangements. We have found an agreement with the Joint Committee, and I sincerely hope that that will continue through to the next stage, which will be getting a free trade deal, on which the Prime Minister is working very hard with Lord Frost and his counterparts in Brussels. We will always make sure that we look after unfettered access for Northern Ireland into GB, which comes to the points that my hon. Friend made.

Sir William Cash: I did ask for an assurance in general terms that the necessary measures would be taken in primary legislation if things were to go wrong for the future. That is all I am asking for. It is not very much, but it is really important in relation to the potential striking down in legislation.

Paul Scully: I appreciate what my hon. Friend says. I think we will give the appropriate measures and protections, whatever form that comes as—if it is indeed needed; I hope that it is never needed in the first place. We will look to make sure that we protect Northern Ireland and its unfettered access.

My hon. Friend talked about state aid rules in Northern Ireland. They will apply to Northern Ireland as agreed under the withdrawal agreement and the Northern Ireland protocol, but they are not the same state aid rules that apply today, because there are new flexibilities of service providers. We welcome that agreement in principle in the Joint Committee, which was about managing the risk of reach-back into Great Britain and guards against the Commission taking an extreme or irrational interpretation of article 10 of the protocol. That means that there is no longer a need for the safety net.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) talked about the common frameworks and Scotland's involvement. I hope I was correct in saying that I believed that the Scottish Government pulled away from discussions about the internal market, not common frameworks. I hope that is clear; if I did mis-speak, that was exactly what I meant to say.

We have now had 90 hours of scrutiny of this Bill across both Houses. I reiterate that I am grateful for how right hon. and hon. Members in this place have debated, scrutinised and engaged on the Bill. I said on Monday and again emphasise that we have been and will continue to be reasonable in discussions on this Bill. Since Monday, we have had a lot of good, positive movement and agreement and we welcome that, but ultimately, Government need to balance this with the need to deliver a Bill that provides the certainty that business wants and needs to invest and create jobs.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Perhaps somebody from the SNP could inform the Chair privately who its Tellers might be, should they go afterwards.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 356, Noes 259.

Division No. 184]

[2.33 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Graham, Richard	Lockhart, Carla
Afolami, Bim	Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Grant, Mrs Helen	Loder, Chris
Ahmad Khan, Imran	Colburn, Elliot	Grayling, rh Chris	Logan, Mark
Aiken, Nickie	Collins, Damian	Green, Chris	Longhi, Marco
Aldous, Peter	Costa, Alberto	Green, rh Damian	Lopez, Julia
Allan, Lucy	Courts, Robert	Griffith, Andrew	Lopresti, Jack
Amess, Sir David	Coutinho, Claire	Griffiths, Kate	Lord, Mr Jonathan
Anderson, Lee	Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Grundy, James	Loughton, Tim
Anderson, Stuart	Crabb, rh Stephen	Gullis, Jonathan	Mackinlay, Craig
Andrew, Stuart	Crosbie, Virginia	Halfon, rh Robert	Mackrory, Cherilyn
Ansell, Caroline	Crouch, Tracey	Hall, Luke	Maclean, Rachel
Argar, Edward	Daly, James	Hammond, Stephen	Mak, Alan
Atherton, Sarah	Davies, David T. C.	Hancock, rh Matt	Malthouse, Kit
Atkins, Victoria	Davies, Gareth	Hands, rh Greg	Mangnall, Anthony
Bacon, Gareth	Davies, Dr James	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Mann, Scott
Bacon, Mr Richard	Davies, Mims	Harris, Rebecca	Marson, Julie
Badenoch, Kemi	Davies, Philip	Harrison, Trudy	May, rh Mrs Theresa
Bailey, Shaun	Davis, rh Mr David	Hart, Sally-Ann	Mayhew, Jerome
Baillie, Siobhan	Davison, Dehenna	Hart, rh Simon	Maynard, Paul
Baker, Duncan	Dinenage, Caroline	Hayes, rh Sir John	McCartney, Jason
Baker, Mr Steve	Dines, Miss Sarah	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	McCartney, Karl
Baldwin, Harriett	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Heapey, James	McPartland, Stephen
Barclay, rh Steve	Docherty, Leo	Heaton-Harris, Chris	McVey, rh Esther
Baron, Mr John	Donelan, Michelle	Henderson, Gordon	Menzies, Mark
Baynes, Simon	Dorries, Ms Nadine	Henry, Darren	Mercer, Johnny
Bell, Aaron	Double, Steve	Higginbotham, Antony	Merriman, Huw
Benton, Scott	Dowden, rh Oliver	Hinds, rh Damian	Metcalfe, Stephen
Beresford, Sir Paul	Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hoare, Simon	Millar, Robin
Berry, rh Jake	Drax, Richard	Holden, Mr Richard	Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Bhatti, Saqib	Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hollinrake, Kevin	Milling, rh Amanda
Blackman, Bob	Duddridge, James	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Mills, Nigel
Blunt, Crispin	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Holloway, Adam	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Bone, Mr Peter	Dunne, rh Philip	Holmes, Paul	Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Eastwood, Mark	Howell, John	Moore, Damien
Bowie, Andrew	Edwards, Ruth	Howell, Paul	Moore, Robbie
Bradley, Ben	Ellis, rh Michael	Huddleston, Nigel	Mordaunt, rh Penny
Bradley, rh Karen	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Hudson, Dr Neil	Morris, Anne Marie
Braverman, rh Suella	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Hughes, Eddie	Morris, David
Brereton, Jack	Eustice, rh George	Hunt, Jane	Morris, James
Bridgen, Andrew	Evans, Dr Luke	Hunt, rh Jeremy	Morrissey, Joy
Brine, Steve	Evennett, rh Sir David	Hunt, Tom	Morton, Wendy
Bristow, Paul	Everitt, Ben	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Britcliffe, Sara	Fabricant, Michael	Javid, rh Sajid	Mumby-Croft, Holly
Brokenshire, rh James	Farris, Laura	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Mundell, rh David
Browne, Anthony	Fell, Simon	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Bruce, Fiona	Fletcher, Katherine	Jenkinson, Mark	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Buchan, Felicity	Fletcher, Mark	Jenkyns, Andrea	Neill, Sir Robert
Buckland, rh Robert	Fletcher, Nick	Jenrick, rh Robert	Nici, Lia
Burghart, Alex	Ford, Vicky	Johnson, rh Boris	Nokes, rh Caroline
Burns, rh Conor	Foster, Kevin	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Norman, rh Jesse
Butler, Rob	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Johnson, Gareth	O'Brien, Neil
Cairns, rh Alun	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Jones, Andrew	Offord, Dr Matthew
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Frazer, Lucy	Jones, rh Mr David	Opperman, Guy
Carter, Andy	Freeman, George	Jones, Fay	Paisley, Ian
Cartlidge, James	Freer, Mike	Jones, Mr Marcus	Parish, Neil
Cash, Sir William	Fuller, Richard	Jupp, Simon	Patel, rh Priti
Cates, Miriam	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Kawczynski, Daniel	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Caulfield, Maria	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Kearns, Alicia	Pawsey, Mark
Chalk, Alex	Garnier, Mark	Keegan, Gillian	Penning, rh Sir Mike
Chishti, Rehman	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Penrose, John
Churchill, Jo	Gibb, rh Nick	Knight, Julian	Percy, Andrew
Clark, rh Greg	Gibson, Peter	Kruger, Danny	Philip, Chris
Clarke, Mr Simon	Gideon, Jo	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Pincher, rh Christopher
Clarke, Theo	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Lamont, John	Poulter, Dr Dan
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Glen, John	Largan, Robert	Pow, Rebecca
Clarkson, Chris	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Prentis, Victoria
Cleverly, rh James	Gove, rh Michael	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Pritchard, Mark
		Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Pursglove, Tom
		Levy, Ian	Quin, Jeremy
		Lewer, Andrew	Quince, Will
		Lewis, rh Brandon	Raab, rh Dominic
		Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Randall, Tom

Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 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, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 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
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
David Duguid and
Maggie Throup

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Buck, Ms Karen

Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet

Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana

Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget

Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes

Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Jeff Smith and
Jessica Morden**

Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinagen, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan

Docherty, Leo
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House disagrees with the Lords in their Amendments Nos. 1B, 1C and 1D.

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.

2.44 pm

More than one hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Lords message, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, 14 September).

The Deputy Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83G).

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House agrees with the Lords in their amendments 8B, 8C, 8D, 8F, 8G, 8H, 8J and 8K, but disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 8L, insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendments 13 and 56, and proposes amendment (a) to the Bill in lieu of Lords amendments 8L, 13 and 56.—(*David Duguid.*)

The House divided: Ayes 357, Noes 259.

Division No. 185]

[2.45 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi

Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen

Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda

Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 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

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos

Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 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
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
David Duguid and
Maggie Throup

NOES

Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion

Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana

Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Ady, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris

Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz

Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

Jeff Smith and
 Jessica Morden

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House agrees with the Lords in their amendments 8B, 8C, 8D, 8F, 8G, 8H, 8J and 8K, but disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 8L, insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendments 13 and 56, and proposes amendment (a) to the Bill in lieu of Lords amendments 8L, 13 and 56.

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.

Resolved,

That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their Amendments Nos. 14 and 52 to 54 but does not insist on its disagreement with the Lords in their Amendment No. 55.—(*David Duguid.*)

Resolved,

That this House does not insist on its disagreement with the Lords in their Amendment No. 44.—(*David Duguid.*)

Resolved,

That this House does not insist on its disagreement with the Lords in their Amendment No. 45, and proposes amendment (a) instead of the words left out by the Lords Amendment.—(*David Duguid.*)

Resolved,

That this House does not insist on its disagreement with the Lords in their Amendment No. 47, and proposes Amendment (a) to the Bill consequential upon the Lords Amendment.—(*David Duguid.*)

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House disagrees with the Lords in their Amendments Nos. 48B and 48C.—(*David Duguid.*)

The House divided: Ayes 358, Noes 260.

Division No. 186]

[2.59 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah

Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott

Beresford, Sir Paul	Dunne, rh Philip	Hughes, Eddie	Morris, David
Berry, rh Jake	Eastwood, Mark	Hunt, Jane	Morris, James
Bhatti, Saqib	Edwards, Ruth	Hunt, rh Jeremy	Morrissey, Joy
Blackman, Bob	Ellis, rh Michael	Hunt, Tom	Morton, Wendy
Blunt, Crispin	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Bone, Mr Peter	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Javid, rh Sajid	Mumby-Croft, Holly
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Eustice, rh George	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Mundell, rh David
Bowie, Andrew	Evans, Dr Luke	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Bradley, Ben	Evennett, rh Sir David	Jenkinson, Mark	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Bradley, rh Karen	Everitt, Ben	Jenkyns, Andrea	Neill, Sir Robert
Braverman, rh Suella	Fabricant, Michael	Jenrick, rh Robert	Nici, Lia
Brereton, Jack	Farris, Laura	Johnson, rh Boris	Nokes, rh Caroline
Bridgen, Andrew	Fell, Simon	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Norman, rh Jesse
Brine, Steve	Fletcher, Katherine	Johnson, Gareth	O'Brien, Neil
Bristow, Paul	Fletcher, Mark	Jones, Andrew	Offord, Dr Matthew
Britcliffe, Sara	Fletcher, Nick	Jones, rh Mr David	Opperman, Guy
Brokenshire, rh James	Ford, Vicky	Jones, Fay	Paisley, Ian
Browne, Anthony	Foster, Kevin	Jones, Mr Marcus	Parish, Neil
Bruce, Fiona	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Jupp, Simon	Patel, rh Priti
Buchan, Felicity	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Kawczynski, Daniel	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Buckland, rh Robert	Frazer, Lucy	Kearns, Alicia	Pawsey, Mark
Burghart, Alex	Freeman, George	Keegan, Gillian	Penning, rh Sir Mike
Burns, rh Conor	Freer, Mike	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Penrose, John
Butler, Rob	Fuller, Richard	Knight, Julian	Percy, Andrew
Cairns, rh Alun	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Kruger, Danny	Philp, Chris
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Pincher, rh Christopher
Carter, Andy	Garnier, Mark	Lamont, John	Poulter, Dr Dan
Cartlidge, James	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Largan, Robert	Pow, Rebecca
Cash, Sir William	Gibb, rh Nick	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Prentis, Victoria
Cates, Miriam	Gibson, Peter	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Pritchard, Mark
Caulfield, Maria	Gideon, Jo	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Pursglove, Tom
Chalk, Alex	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Levy, Ian	Quin, Jeremy
Chishti, Rehman	Glen, John	Lewer, Andrew	Quince, Will
Churchill, Jo	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Lewis, rh Brandon	Raab, rh Dominic
Clark, rh Greg	Gove, rh Michael	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Randall, Tom
Clarke, Mr Simon	Graham, Richard	Lockhart, Carla	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Clarke, Theo	Grant, Mrs Helen	Loder, Chris	Richards, Nicola
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Grayling, rh Chris	Logan, Mark	Richardson, Angela
Clarkson, Chris	Green, Chris	Longhi, Marco	Roberts, Rob
Cleverly, rh James	Green, rh Damian	Lopez, Julia	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Griffith, Andrew	Lopresti, Jack	Robinson, Gavin
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Griffiths, Kate	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Robinson, Mary
Colburn, Elliot	Grundy, James	Loughton, Tim	Ross, Douglas
Collins, Damian	Gullis, Jonathan	Mackinlay, Craig	Rowley, Lee
Costa, Alberto	Halfon, rh Robert	Mackrory, Cherilyn	Russell, Dean
Courts, Robert	Hall, Luke	Maclean, Rachel	Rutley, David
Coutinho, Claire	Hammond, Stephen	Mak, Alan	Sambrook, Gary
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Hancock, rh Matt	Malthouse, Kit	Saxby, Selaine
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hands, rh Greg	Mangnall, Anthony	Scully, Paul
Crosbie, Virginia	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Mann, Scott	Seely, Bob
Crouch, Tracey	Harris, Rebecca	Marson, Julie	Selous, Andrew
Daly, James	Harrison, Trudy	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Shannon, Jim
Davies, David T. C.	Hart, Sally-Ann	Mayhew, Jerome	Shapps, rh Grant
Davies, Gareth	Hart, rh Simon	Maynard, Paul	Sharma, rh Alok
Davies, Dr James	Hayes, rh Sir John	McCartney, Jason	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Davies, Mims	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	McCartney, Karl	Simmonds, David
Davies, Philip	Heapey, James	McPartland, Stephen	Skidmore, rh Chris
Davis, rh Mr David	Heaton-Harris, Chris	McVey, rh Esther	Smith, Chloe
Davison, Dehenna	Henderson, Gordon	Menzies, Mark	Smith, Greg
Dinenage, Caroline	Henry, Darren	Mercer, Johnny	Smith, Henry
Dines, Miss Sarah	Higginbotham, Antony	Merriman, Huw	Smith, Royston
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hinds, rh Damian	Metcalfe, Stephen	Solloway, Amanda
Docherty, Leo	Hoare, Simon	Millar, Robin	Spencer, Dr Ben
Donelan, Michelle	Holden, Mr Richard	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Spencer, rh Mark
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hollinrake, Kevin	Milling, rh Amanda	Stafford, Alexander
Double, Steve	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Mills, Nigel	Stephenson, Andrew
Dowden, rh Oliver	Holloway, Adam	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Stevenson, Jane
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Holmes, Paul	Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Stevenson, John
Drax, Richard	Howell, John	Moore, Damien	Stewart, Bob
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Howell, Paul	Moore, Robbie	Stewart, Iain
Duddridge, James	Huddleston, Nigel	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Streeter, Sir Gary
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Hudson, Dr Neil	Morris, Anne Marie	Stride, rh Mel

Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 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
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben

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
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

David Duguid and
 Maggie Throup

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie

Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry

Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.

McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam

Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt

Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Richard Thomson and
Drew Hendry

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House disagrees with the Lords in their Amendments Nos. 48B and 48C.

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.

Resolved,

That this House agrees with the Lords in their amendment 50B, but disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 50C.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Remaining Lords amendment agreed to.

Ordered, That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments 1B, 1C and 1D; insisting on the Commons disagreement with the Lords in their amendments 14, 52, 53 and 54; and disagreeing with the Lords in their amendments 48B, 48C and 50C.

That Paul Scully, Eddie Hughes, Jo Gideon, Mark Fletcher, Jessica Morden, Gill Furniss and Drew Hendry be members of the Committee.

That Paul Scully be the Chair of the Committee.

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): In order to observe social distancing, the Reasons Committee will meet in Committee Room 11.

We will not be suspending, because the Dispatch Boxes were sanitised during one of the Divisions.

The Future of the High Street

3.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Kelly Tolhurst): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the high street.

There is no shying away from the fact that this pandemic has clearly had a devastating impact on the great British high street and on the businesses that occupy it. I have great sympathy with anyone whose business or job has been endangered by this pandemic, and I want to reassure the House that this Government are unwavering in our commitment to support our high streets and town centres in the weeks and months ahead. I am personally very passionate about our high streets and town centres. They are so much more than places to shop. They are where we meet our families, friends and neighbours, and where communities come together to work and to socialise. They are a focal point within our local areas. They are, of course, also home to thousands of people who are just as keen as the local businesses that occupy them to see their high streets bustling and thriving.

Prior to the pandemic, our high streets were already going through a significant evolution, with changing consumer habits and changes to what people are wanting to see on their high streets. People are shopping online more frequently, and our high streets are having to adapt to the 21st century to become more than just retail hubs. Since March, we have seen an acceleration in the trends that our high streets were facing. Online shopping has risen from pre-pandemic levels of about 20% to a high of 33% of total retail sales in May. Footfall has also decreased as a necessary consequence of the effort to protect public health, which is why businesses have been unable to trade as they normally would. We are proud to see so many businesses and communities coming together to support their local high streets. In my own constituency, independent retailers, businesses and local groups have come together in co-ordination with the business-led Rochester city centre forum to provide a covid-safe experience in the run-up to Christmas. Although closed, some outlets have created fantastic window displays and decorations and are offering click-and-collect services and working together to support the high street.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con) *rose*—

Kelly Tolhurst: I know that a lot of people are keen to speak, so I should perhaps continue a bit further.

We value the support of trade bodies and representative organisations that are working with their members and the Government to plan for recovery. It is clear that covid-19 has dealt a major blow to the high street, as evidenced all too clearly by the well-known retail chains—including Debenhams and Arcadia Group Ltd—that have gone into administration.

The Government have put in place a range of support measures to assist businesses on the high street. We have provided a comprehensive package of support worth £200 billion, including the eat out to help out initiative to help to protect 2 million jobs in hospitality. We have also provided cash grants of up to £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with a rateable value

[*Kelly Tolhurst*]

of between £15,000 and £51,000; more than £50 billion in business loans; the coronavirus job retention scheme; and the deferral of income tax payments.

Sir William Cash: My constituency is extremely grateful for the moneys that have been provided for the high street, but does my hon. Friend agree that when consultations are taking place and project developments are being created, people in the high street in places like Cheadle in my constituency require proper consultation and should get proper consultation before matters are taken any further?

Kelly Tolhurst: I agree with my hon. Friend that local high streets are a valuable asset in our local communities and it is absolutely right that local businesses and stakeholders should be consulted and that we should get their buy-in. Any high street development should always be supported by local businesses and stakeholders.

We have acted quickly and our package of economic support is one of the most generous and comprehensive in the world. The Government announced in the spring that the business rates retail discount would be increased to 100% and expanded to all eligible properties across the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors for 12 months. We have sought to bring a much needed breathing space to business tenants by bringing forward a moratorium on commercial evictions and restrictions on statutory demands, and by winding up petitions.

The use of commercial rent arrears recovery has provided landlords and tenants with time and space to agree reasonable adjustments to rents and lease terms, including terms for the payment of accumulated rent arrears. I am pleased that so many stakeholder bodies have signed up to the voluntary code of practice to encourage constructive dialogue between tenants and landlords. We will continue to work urgently to identify further measures of support that can be put in place to assist them during this time.

We recognise that our high streets and the businesses located on them need to adapt to the changing way in which consumers are using high streets, so we are supporting areas by funding investment in infrastructure and place. Our £3.6 billion towns fund and the future high streets fund competition will create jobs and build more resilient local economies and communities as we begin to recover from the impact of coronavirus. We are now in the final stages of assessing the proposals from the shortlisted future high streets fund applicants and expect to announce the outcome of the competition soon. We have brought forward £81.5 million from the towns fund for investment in capital projects that will have an immediate impact. Each of the 101 towns selected to work towards a town deal has received accelerated funding dependent on their population.

The new £4 billion levelling-up fund for England that was announced in the spending review will be open to all local areas and allocated competitively. To support levelling-up opportunity across the country, we will prioritise bids to drive growth and regeneration in places in need—those facing particular local challenges and areas that have received less Government investment in the past.

A call for evidence was published on 21 July for the fundamental review of business rates, inviting stakeholders to contribute their views on ideas for reform in all elements of the business rates system, including future reliefs. Government are now considering the responses to the call for evidence, and the review will conclude in the spring.

We are also ensuring that our planning system is ready to support our high streets and communities in recovering from this pandemic and changing consumer habits. We have introduced reforms that create a new “commercial, business and service” use class, which encompasses a wide range of purposes, allowing businesses to attract people to high streets and town centres. That includes offices, shops, cafés, gyms and other uses that are suitable in town centres. The new class also allows for mixed use, to reflect changing retail and business models. The reforms also create new “learning and non-residential institutions” and “local community” use classes, ensuring that valued local assets such as community shops and libraries are protected. Businesses will have greater flexibility to adapt and diversify more quickly to meet changing needs and circumstances.

However, the success of a high street is about more than just funding. It requires local people to be empowered with the tools and resources they need to help their town centres and high streets adapt for the future. It is about having an ambitious vision for the future that the whole community can buy into. That is why Government are supporting local leadership through the high streets taskforce, which is doing this in four ways: building local authority capacity by providing on-the-ground experts; improving place-making skills through access to training; improving co-ordination nationally and locally, to ensure that high street plans reflect the needs of their communities; and improving the use of data and best practice.

The taskforce is being run by a consortium led by the Institute of Place Management. Over the next four years, it will provide expert guidance to those working in local authorities and business improvement districts, while supporting town centre managers and community groups to help their high streets adapt. In response to the pandemic, the taskforce published a covid recovery framework to inform local places in planning their response to the pandemic. I know that a number of high streets have found this useful and that St Helens, Norwich and Solihull have been among the early users of the framework. The taskforce will be providing in-person expert support to those high streets that need it most, offering expertise on subjects such as planning, design and place making. We continue to explore what more can be done to help our high streets and town centres quickly recover and adapt.

While covid-19 has posed huge challenges for our high streets, we have also seen some inspiring examples of businesses adapting and communities rallying round to support their local independent shops through the pandemic. For some communities, this lockdown has led to a reconnection with the local. We know that footfall has returned to our district centres at a quicker rate than it has in our larger town and city centres, with people wanting to shop and socialise closer to home. Research from PwC and the Local Data Company also suggests that independent shops have fared better than chain stores over the course of the pandemic. That may

give a glimpse into the future of our high streets as places of commerce but also unique spaces that reflect the needs of the local community.

That has been underscored by my Department's experience of running the Great British High Street awards. What linked all our winners was a unique offering and sense of belonging, and it is this sense of local community—this intrinsic link between our high streets, our town centres and our society—that we will re-establish and strengthen as we emerge from this pandemic. I believe that we can renew our mission to help our high streets adapt, not only to support their recovery from the effects of covid-19 but to help them continue to evolve and flourish for generations to come.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): A considerable number of Members have put in to speak, so I am afraid that we will start with a time limit of three minutes for all Back Benchers. If any Back Benchers who are on the call list wish to withdraw, they should get a message to the Speaker's Office or come to the Chair and inform me. Please do not assume that the list is exactly as it was, as a number of Members have withdrawn already, and if you miss your place, you will be put to the very bottom. I call Steve Reed.

3.24 pm

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): As today is the first day of Hanukkah, I would like to wish everyone in the Jewish community *chag sameach*.

I am afraid that the Government are standing by as Britain's high streets decline. Footfall on our high streets was down by 10% under the Conservatives even before the coronavirus hit, and about one in 10 high street shops were already standing empty. Since 2010, the Conservative Government have presided over the closure of 773 libraries, 750 youth centres, 1,300 children's centres, and 835 public toilets. This Government are devastating the vibrant high streets that are the heart of our communities and of our British way of life.

Mary Portas, who led a Government review of the future of British high streets, now has this to say about the Government:

"They need to wake up. It's shameful that they have still not readjusted their thinking on how Amazon and the delivery giants should be paying equivalent rates of tax online. It's shameful they're not doing anything about it. Their slowness in understanding, their tardiness, is ridiculous."

She is angry because the Government have done nothing to address the massive disadvantage that high street businesses face compared with online retailers. Labour has repeatedly called for a root-and-branch review of business rates to make the system fairer and help high street shops to compete with online tech giants. Debenhams has recently gone into liquidation, with a potential loss of 13,000 jobs. Arcadia has gone the same way, putting 12,000 jobs at risk, with the loss of leading brands like Topshop, Burton and Dorothy Perkins from our high streets. Retail is clearly changing as shopping moves online—a process speeded up by the pandemic—so it is all the more astonishing that the Government have done so little to level the playing field between bricks-and-mortar shops and online retailers.

We all owe a debt of thanks to retail workers for all they have done to keep the country going through the pandemic. They have put themselves at risk to keep our shops open and the shelves well stocked, so what a

disgrace it is that the Government are rewarding so many of them with job insecurity and job losses. The covid-19 pandemic has deepened the emergency on our high streets. Since the economic crisis began in March, up to 20,000 shops have closed and 200,000 people have lost their jobs in retail and hospitality, but instead of offering the help that is needed, the Government are refusing to properly support businesses under the highest tiers of covid restrictions.

Hospitality businesses and their supply chains are in particular trouble. Some 5,500 pubs and bars have already closed in the 10 years since the Conservatives came to power—that is one pub gone every 14 hours that they have been in government, for a full decade. This sector now urgently needs support to survive; otherwise our high streets will be further blighted with the closure of more pubs, bars and restaurants. After struggling to survive the pandemic for nine months, businesses are now in a far weaker financial position. For many that rely on the Christmas period, trade is dramatically down this year.

It is astonishing that in these circumstances the Government have chosen to cut business support compared with what was available earlier this year. Analysis by the House of Commons Library shows that 99% of hair and beauty salons are receiving less support than in March, along with 95% of cafés, 92% of gyms, and 77% of pubs and restaurants. Do we really want to emerge from this crisis with so many of these vital small businesses closed down or boarded up?

The Government's planning reforms further threaten the viability of our high streets. Earlier this year, they forced through changes that give developers sweeping powers to permanently remove shops from our high streets, creating dead zones by converting retail units into low-quality flats that can then never reopen again as shops or community spaces. Back in March, the Government promised to fully compensate councils for getting communities through the pandemic, but they broke that promise. That breach of trust leaves councils less able to support the economic recovery in our high streets. According to the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies, councils face a £1.1 billion covid funding gap, leading to in-year cuts and job losses right now, and there is worse to come next April, with a £4 billion funding gap that means more cuts, more job losses, and less support for economic recovery for struggling businesses and struggling high streets.

If that was not bad enough, the Government appear to be on the brink of the greatest act of vandalism ever inflicted on the British economy in peacetime, with the chaos and catastrophe of a no-deal Brexit pushing up costs, cutting off supplies, and closing down exports. The abiding image of this Government will be a boarded-up shop on a rundown high street. The Prime Minister was not joking when he said "eff business", because that sums up this Government's entire approach. The Conservative-led Local Government Association estimates that the Government have cut £15 billion from council budgets over the past decade. The towns fund puts back less than a quarter of that devastating loss. It is better than nothing, and we welcome the funding for towns that have received it, but what is less welcome is that many deserving towns have not benefited at all. Those high streets, and there are hundreds of them, have been left to slide further into decline because Conservative

[*Steve Reed*]

Ministers deliberately carved them out of receiving any funding. Towns such as Heywood, Halifax and Sunderland surely deserve better than this.

There is a better future for our high streets if only the Government would seize it. The British people want their high streets to be vibrant, lively and thriving places that they can feel proud of. There is a better future where high streets can take advantage of the change in shopping habits to break free of the straitjacket of uniformity. We could encourage more small local businesses by levelling the playing field on business rates. We could create more community spaces, instead of forcing the closure of libraries and community centres by continually slashing council funding. We could work with developers to create more shared work spaces and touchdown desk spaces that reduce the need for commuting, instead of creating dead zones where the shops used to be.

In all the darkness of the pandemic, one of the bright spots for many people has been the rediscovery of a strong sense of community. What an opportunity we have to build back better, to reinvent our high streets for the future as the beating heart of those communities, but instead we are stuck in a cycle of levelling down under an incompetent Government without a vision that matches the ambition of the people of this great country.

3.31 pm

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. Such is the depth of feeling on this issue of my right hon. and hon. Members that it has been well over-subscribed. Many may get up to talk about their high streets, but no high street has the international repute of my main high street, Lord Street in Southport, which was the basis on which the Champs Elysées was built—the most glamorous street in the world.

Before I go into further detail on that, may I just add that we have great shopping high streets: Ainsdale, Churchdown and Birkdale. You know that, Mr Deputy Speaker, because you have shopped there yourself and took away some great gifts for the people whom you know.

I would just like to thank the Minister and the Government for all the support that has been given throughout the covid crisis. It has been invaluable to many businesses in enabling them to stay open, and we need to move into the future with more sustained support. One thing that we all know—this is absolutely clear—is that the internet is the biggest challenge to our high street. It has already been said that a fifth of sales and a third of retail sales during the pandemic have been online. If we were to reverse that trend, there are things that we need to do. We need to have a look at business rates. Business rates need recalibration because it is absolutely clear that, under the current model, businesses will not be sustainable. If we get to grips with business rates, that will give businesses on our high streets a thriving chance.

When we look at the future of our high streets, we have not only to look at business rates, but to increase footfall. Getting people into our towns, villages and cities is absolutely vital to their survival. The mess that

we see in London, where roads are closed and people are prohibited from going down some streets, is happening elsewhere. It is happening in my local area as well. I point out to the hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) that my local Labour council is stopping people going down some streets, getting to the high street and getting into the places that they want to get to. People want ease of access. Having worked in retail for 20 years, I know that ease of access is the best way to get people into our towns and cities.

I say to the Minister that we need to intervene when it comes to parking charges. The biggest issue for every retailer in my town is parking charges. The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 says that parking charges should be proportionate, and not undermine the vitality of our towns. In my town, those charges do just that, and I want this Government to intervene on that.

We have a town deal, which is great. Not just Conservative towns, but Labour towns, too, will benefit from this significant funding stream. In our town, this will be matched by the private sector, which has committed more than £300 million if we get the £50 million that we put in for.

Last week, we all went out, I hope, to celebrate Small Business Saturday. That should not be an annual celebration; it should be a way of life, and we should all support our local businesses weekly.

3.34 pm

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): I do not think there can be any doubt that high street businesses and workers have suffered immensely throughout this pandemic. Despite support, many businesses have sadly gone under. We have already heard about the calamity that has befallen the Arcadia Group and Debenhams, and I might also mention the Edinburgh Woollen Mill, where 21,000 jobs are at risk. Those collapses have knock-on effects—the supply companies will lose an estimated £250 million in business from the collapse of Arcadia alone—so the vitality of our high streets is crucial to all of us.

It is a truism to say that many aspects of our lives have gone online during the pandemic—working from home and shopping from home, most obviously. That has given those who have been fortunate enough to do that a better work-life balance, and perhaps it has simply accelerated trends that were already in evidence in how we use our high streets and town and city centres. The pace has been quickened.

The change presents a number of challenges for our infrastructure—most notably, how the transport network is configured—and for the footfall in our town and urban centres. We can expect a great deal of upheaval as the way we use those centres to work, rest and play changes in the time ahead of us. It is therefore imperative that we allow the inevitable transitions that are about to take place to happen in a way that does not leave the centres of our towns, cities and smaller communities entirely at the mercy of market forces, with property assets stranded in the hands of those who are unable to develop them or adapt what they own, or who find themselves hide-bound by planning and development objectives that prevent them from responding appropriately to the new reality.

Direct investment from the Government is one way that we can try to facilitate some of those changes. The Scottish Government have invested £4 million for towns,

smaller settlements and business improvement districts, and a further £18 million from its economic stimulus package to add to existing funds in the town centre capital fund. Business improvement districts, which bring local small businesses to work together in the common interest and improve the overall urban environment, have had a tremendous impact. To bring footfall back, we need to bring people back, create a vibrant streetscape and ensure our towns, villages and city centres are as accessible as they possibly can be for absolutely everyone. We must ensure that the services that we desire to access physically are within easy reach of all, whether they own a car or however they get about. Everything must be within easy reach and as accessible as it possibly can be.

If we want vibrant urban centres, we need a vibrant economy. The UK economy grew by just 0.4% in October. The SNP has today called for a £98 billion fiscal stimulus to match the scale of those that other equivalent European countries have already put in place. The best way to ensure that businesses recover is to allow them to do what they would ordinarily seek to do, so we need to do all we can to help them survive, thrive, adapt and emerge on the other side.

I will talk about some of the measures that we need. We need to stop money leaving businesses. Business rates have been mentioned already. That is what has allowed many retail, leisure and hospitality businesses to cling on at this time. It is absolutely imperative, notwithstanding the review that the Minister spoke about, that that sort of relief for business costs is allowed to continue.

The Scottish Government are absolutely committed to carrying on with that, but because of the fiscal framework, an equivalent commitment needs to happen in England before that money feeds its way through the Barnett formula to Scotland to allow that to happen. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance in Scotland has written to the Chancellor about that to seek clarity about the approach to non-domestic rates in England and future reliefs. I do not believe that a response has arrived yet, but I hope that a favourable response is forthcoming very soon.

We also need to ensure that money goes to people to maintain demand. It was only after immense pressure and the need for a lockdown right across England that the furlough scheme was extended. Although we obviously all have great hopes for the vaccine, the Government must be absolutely clear that if, heaven forbid, further lockdowns are needed, that support will remain for individuals. The £20 uplift to universal credit must be made permanent. We should also look at increasing statutory sick pay to enable people to buy the things they need and keep that demand in the economy.

I have mentioned the vaccine, which will obviously be key to giving people the confidence to come back into our urban centres. I know that the Government have shown a marked aversion to level playing fields over the last few days, weeks and even hours, but we certainly need one in our retail environment. Online retail has certainly brought many benefits to people, particularly through the pandemic, through home shopping, and it has allowed lifestyle businesses to thrive in better times. However, if we get this wrong and do not rebalance taxation between physical and online retail, it will hollow out our town centres. My party has consistently campaigned

to close tax loopholes and end corporate tax avoidance. If we can close those loopholes and get a better balance, we could pay for the consequences of the pandemic without burdening and punishing workers, while also maintaining the health of our high streets.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Given the hon. Gentleman's concerns about online retail giants not paying their fair share of tax, does he welcome the extensive action that this Conservative Government have taken, introducing a world-leading digital services tax and leading the international work in the OECD that we need to ensure a long-term resolution to make sure the internet giants pay their fair share of taxes?

Richard Thomson: I absolutely welcome anything that ensures a better balance of taxation, and that example shows the importance of co-operating internationally. Much time has been taken up in this House pursuing a theoretical sovereignty, but we may be about to find some of the limits of the practical sovereignty we can get. However, certainly I am all in favour of making people pay what they can in taxation and doing so on a collaborative international basis.

That brings me neatly on to my next point, which is about tax-free shopping. The Government have announced their intention to withdraw tax-free shopping. That will have a deleterious impact on our airports, particularly our regional airports, and also have a massive impact on tourism. Much of the tourism traffic that comes into all parts of the UK is led, at least in part, by the opportunities for tax-free shopping.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a very important point, which I intend to follow up in my speech. Does he agree that the withdrawal of the VAT rebate will affect all parts of the United Kingdom, particularly in Scotland, including firms such as Johnstons of Elgin, where manufacturing and retailing will be affected?

Richard Thomson: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I look forward to hearing that aspect of his speech. I believe the change could affect anything up to about 33% of sales for the company he mentions, but overall, as well as imperilling the opportunity to develop routes from regional airports, a total of about 40,000 jobs and over £1 billion of investment could be at risk. It is little wonder that the French financial newspaper *Les Echos* has argued that the UK is in danger of shooting itself in the foot here.

Earlier I talked about business rates, and wholesalers have also been missed out. They are absolutely critical to the supply chain for many of our smaller communities. They have been given some direct support from the Scottish Government, but have missed out on support from the UK Government. I encourage the UK Government to look at including wholesalers in the support available to that part of the sector.

In conclusion, high streets in communities of all sizes face challenges on a number of fronts. We have heard some from the speakers so far; no doubt we will hear new aspects as the debate continues. But with the right Government support, at local government and national Government levels, our town centres have the opportunity to thrive as places where we work, rest and play, and

[Richard Thomson]

effect the necessary transitions in how land and buildings are used. In Scotland, we would obviously rather the Scottish Government were able to do all that is necessary in that regard, rather than just some. Following some of our earlier debates, it would be far better if, instead of grabbing powers from Holyrood through the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, the UK Government were instead transferring powers to the Scottish Government, particularly financial powers and borrowing powers, so that they can get on with doing all that is necessary, instead of having to wait for it to happen elsewhere.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. There will now be a three-minute limit on all remaining Back-Bench contributions.

3.44 pm

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Lockdown has given us all a preview of life without our high street shops, and has brought that shuttered vision closer to becoming our permanent reality. The pandemic has accelerated pressures that were already threatening the future of high street retail, in particular small independent shops. It has also demonstrated that we cannot simply replace high street shops with online commerce; it is self-evident that we cannot get a haircut online.

Online shopping does not have the capacity in storage or delivery to carry the entire retail sector on its back, but we must address its competitive advantage. The digital services tax introduced earlier this year has helped level the playing field, but it does not rebalance the burden of business rates, and although relief has been helpful, businesses in Cheadle would welcome it if the Minister considered a more permanent solution.

To truly thrive, high streets need local communities and local involvement to build the right infrastructure and plan for the future. The future high streets fund and the towns fund, through which Cheadle has already been allocated £500,000 in the accelerated scheme, will help. High streets should be accessible, with parking and electric charging points for the cars of the future and good public transport links. That is why Cheadle's towns fund bid includes a new station connecting it with nearby communities.

Covid forced businesses and employees to do things differently; by moving out of the office and into home working, communities have rediscovered their local high streets. For many, the shift to home working will be permanent. That presents an opportunity for future high streets and businesses in the Zoom towns of the future to do things differently too.

I do not believe that we should rush to restore the pre-pandemic status quo, as it was not working before for many of our high streets, but we need to build back better and reimagine them for the future. Retail expert Bill Grimsey has used his 45 years of retail experience to offer thought-provoking ideas for making our high streets succeed amid the tech revolution. His reviews have informed the reports of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, of which I am a member. They highlight the importance of local authorities,

viewing high streets as community hubs bringing together not just retail but entertainment, the arts, leisure, health and education. That will require support for our arts and culture sectors, and the funding we have already given must be followed up as we emerge from the pandemic.

It is important that we get behind our local high streets, our local high street shops and our businesses. Without them, the vision of closed-down communities and closed-down high streets will be a permanent feature of our local economies, and we must avoid that.

3.48 pm

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson).

Over the past 10—even 20—years, we have seen the rise of out-of-town retail parks, supermarket superstores and, of course, internet shopping. As we have heard from several other Members, now is the time to look at business rates, at potentially introducing an internet sales tax and at addressing parking charges around high streets.

One solution for creating demand on our high streets is to have more people living around them. In the Black Country, there is a real need to protect our green spaces as we build the extra homes that we require. We can achieve that with a brownfield-first policy, but also by getting more developments and converting the upper floors of retail spaces around our high streets. It is very sad that in Wolverhampton our beautiful department store Beatties will soon close its doors, but it will survive as mixed retail and residential accommodation.

To future-proof our high streets, they need to offer things we cannot access from other retail options. Service industries continue to prosper—beauty salons, hairdressers, pubs and cafés—and I would like to see the service offer expanded. Modern consumers are more likely to spend their money on experiences and socialising, perhaps learning a skill or attending an event. I would like to see bakeries offering cake decorating classes and people heading to the high street for music lessons or choir practices. They can evolve as community hubs, as well as retail spaces.

This Small Business Saturday, I met Andy Street at Three Tuns in Oxley to talk about regeneration and the need for high streets to be attractive places to spend time in. I warmly welcome the Government's towns fund, which will help to regenerate our cities; Wednesfield in my constituency should benefit. I would like to especially thank Jay, Nicola and Max at Elegant Frames, Lavandula Blu and Juicy Fruits—local businesses in Wednesfield—for giving up their time to contribute to the high street fund debate. They are typical of our fantastic small businesses.

Surrounding such existing businesses with an increased leisure, retail and social opportunity will protect them for the future. They offer us a level of customer service we do not find in large retailers. I thank many of my small businesses, which were absolute heroes during the pandemic. They innovated with telephone orders and home delivery to vulnerable people who needed to stay at home. If this year has taught us anything, it is the need for human contact and interaction. I am hopeful that, as we recover, we will value our high streets as community spaces and that they will prosper in future.

3.51 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Ballymena in my constituency has for years traded under the strapline of the best shopping town in the country. I have the pleasure of sitting on the town centre committee with many retailers from the town centre, and I cannot help but be enthused by their undiminishable spirit and desire to make sure that, no matter what crisis is thrown at them, they will rise above it. They have demonstrated that throughout the crisis period faced by the retailers on our high streets. We have to salute them for that spirit of optimism and for keeping going on, no matter what.

Those retailers tell me very clearly, however, that there is a huge crisis; we have already heard from other Members about footfall being down considerably. I am told by 80% of the businesses in the town centre in my constituency that takings are down by over 70% during this period. Put simply, traders cannot afford to continue if that trend is allowed to continue. Our town centre has turned very quickly into a place where we have empty shop units, which look like missing teeth from a sad face. Whenever we see that, it shows there is a huge crisis in the town centre.

We also see the Government spending money on gimmicks. I drove up a street in Belfast the other day. Huge roadworks were going on, with a road sign saying, "New road layout in operation for social distancing traffic". I kid you not. I have retailers in my constituency saying, "Spend the money, but spend it sensibly. Don't put it into rubbish like that." Let us see this money being invested properly in our high street.

There is absolutely no doubt that covid has had many unintended consequences. Unfortunately, it has, in many ways, turbo-charged the potential demise of the high street. People have moved on to the virtual high street and are spending their money there. We want to make sure that our high streets get back their café culture: that culture of being able to shop there, of allowing charities to collect money, and of being a real part of the community and having that social interaction.

I therefore ask the Minister to put in place a strategy, a plan that puts banks behind the eight ball and makes them wish to help retailers; addresses the issue of rate relief long term; encourages and champions the development of our high street; promotes people living in our town centres, as has already been said; and sees their growth once again. We stood and said, "Let's save the NHS." Retailers want to hear the Government now saying, "Let's save our high streets."

3.54 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I wish to devote the bulk of my speech to dealing with the decision by the Treasury to withdraw duty-free shopping in this country and VAT rebates, the so-called VAT RES, or, as some in the popular press have dubbed it, the "tourist tax". I fully support the Chairman of the Treasury Committee's call for a comprehensive reassessment of the matter. Indeed, in its hearing on 1 December, the OBR said it had given the policy its highest possible uncertainty rating.

The OBR also said it had no confidence in the Treasury numbers, that HMRC had no data of its own on the cost of VAT RES, that HMRC was wrong to

assume that introducing a 20% tax would have no impact on visitor behaviour and that the OBR had assumed a price inelasticity of 1.9. Finally, the OBR said that there had been no consideration of the knock-on impact on associated sectors such as hotels, and no taking into account of any falls in VAT from fewer and shorter trips from wealthy visitors to this country. We must be crazy to want to deter wealthy overseas visitors from coming here to stay in our hostels and from spending a lot in our shops.

There is a common perception that this measure only affects Oxford Street and Bond Street; in fact, as I said to the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson), it affects the entire United Kingdom. It will affect companies such as Mulberry, Burberry, Church's, Johnstons of Elgin in his constituency and, in fact, the whisky industry in Scotland. That is losing jobs. It is estimated, as he said, that up to 40,000 jobs across the UK could be lost by this decision, which will affect regional airports, manufacturing in Blyth, Yorkshire and Somerset, and high-value shopping areas such as Edinburgh, Dundee, London, Manchester and Leeds.

I call on the Treasury to think very hard about this decision. Even if the hon. Member for Gordon and I are wrong, and the decision does not cost 40,000 jobs, it may still cost half that—20,000 jobs. The Red Book states that the decision may cost half a billion pounds—the industry does not think it will—but that is chickenfeed compared with the loss of those jobs.

In the second part of my speech, I will speak to my constituency. In Cirencester, the biggest town in my constituency, 41 shops have closed or are about to close. In all my small town centres, half a dozen shops are going to close because of covid—that is about 60 shops, at least. As I did in a question in the House last week, I call upon the Minister and all tiers of central and local government to come together to have a massive exodus on to our streets when it is covid-safe to do so. That can be done through a range of measures. The Minister was right. We are pleased that the Government have put so much money into our high streets through the towns fund, but we also want other measures such as car parking, broadband and rates reform.

3.57 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): This has been a terrible year for our high streets, with covid-19 restrictions affecting over 95% of the UK, and many people working from home and choosing to shop online. A perfect storm has formed, which has forced many high street shops, pubs, restaurants and cafés to close and has left others to struggle. We should remember that our high streets were struggling even before anyone had ever heard of covid-19. In the seven years up to the end of 2019, footfall on our high streets had fallen by 10%. Over the past decade, there has been a 21% rise in online retail sales, which have soared to 33% of all sales during the pandemic.

Last Friday, I visited a florist, a fishmonger and a delicatessen—all small independent businesses in my constituency of Enfield, Southgate—and they told me they were struggling. Some of their concerns, aside from accessing the covid-19 business grants, included business rates, high rents, unfair competition from online competitors and the physical state of high streets.

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

We should remember that going to the local high street to shop or eat was never just a transactional activity; it also had a social side to it. It was a focal point for the local community, and it needs to become that once again. The whole high street experience needs to be radically different from online shopping. I am a big fan of pop-up shops, but they often have to overcome bureaucratic obstacles to set up. The state of the high street also needs to be improved. Local councils are best placed to deliver both those asks.

I heard the Minister talk about the local high streets taskforce. The £3.6 billion towns fund is welcome, although it will not help all towns, but when compared to the £15 billion that the Local Government Association estimates has been cut from local authority budgets in the past decade, it is a case of putting a sticking plaster over a gaping wound.

As consumer habits evolve and change, the high street also needs the flexibility to change, too. That is why I urge the Government to rethink any relaxation of planning laws and permitted development rights to make it easier to convert retail and office space into accommodation. To make our high streets sustainable, there needs to be a critical mass in footfall. By reducing the number of retail units, that critical mass hits a tipping point beyond which there is no return. The Government have said much about levelling up, but unless they level up taxation for online transactions, the high street will forever be at a disadvantage, unable to compete with the online tech giants.

In conclusion, our high streets are struggling and we need urgent action to support them, not only through the covid pandemic but beyond. To do that, we need to support not only our small retailers and the hospitality sector, but local councils and communities. We need to have a long-term vision for our high streets, and make sure that the one in 10 empty shopfronts is open and ready for business, allowing our high streets to thrive once again.

4 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Cheadle, in my constituency, also falls within Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. I asked for Cheadle to be included in the Government high street project, and I am glad that was agreed. However, SMDC has decided to package an additional set of contentious objectives into the mix outlined in its Cheadle town centre projects report to its cabinet on 6 October. This includes many of our main community assets, with the prospective closure of the South Moorlands leisure centre and of the community Cheadle Hospital, and prospective housing on our town centre car parks. I asked before the cabinet meeting for proper consultation, but my request to have a statement read out was refused. I proposed a local referendum on all this. The district council commissioned two sets of consultants in 2016, without discussion or engagement with the affected community. The lack of transparency on the brief and objectives used to commission these reports and on the full reports themselves is of great concern.

What is clear is that a plan from 2016, predating the reports, does not align with Cheadle's community aspirations. The reports have cost £60,000, without proper

consultation, and it is taxpayers' and my voters' money that has paid for them. The cabinet at SMDC has produced a stakeholder panel and delivery board within the prescribed set of limited options. The reports prescribe a stakeholder panel that omits key users of the facilities and is subservient to the delivery board; it contains only one member of the stakeholder panel, so the outnumbering is at least three to one. The delivery board has priority over the stakeholders. There is a set of prescribed options extracted from the yet-to-be-seen full reports. There is no assessment of the costs or environmental impact of demolition. There is already a petition of 4,400 signatures for the retention of the leisure centre. I ask the Minister to take appropriate steps to ensure and guarantee proper consultation for my constituents, and to hold SMDC to account. It is part of my constituency. I have two other councils in my area, Stafford Borough and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, and I have not had difficulty with them in this respect. I ask the Minister to take note and ensure that value for taxpayers' money is properly achieved and that we have proper consultation. That is what we are asking for, because if we can have proper consultation, these projects—this levelling up—will all work, because people will know that they are getting the results that they have expected. It is terribly simple; it is just called proper consultation. Can we make sure we get it?

4.3 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Let me take a moment to praise those of my constituents and elsewhere who are in the frontline of retail and our high streets; it is a rewarding job but it can be tough. I spent many years as a retail employee on the shop floor, but I cannot imagine the difficulties they have had to face this year.

Without doubt it has been an incredibly difficult time for those working on the high street, and for businesses there. In the highlands, some 90% of registered businesses are small businesses. They are not just places we go to shop, be entertained and enjoy ourselves; they are absolutely part of the fabric of what we have in our high streets, towns and villages, and in the city they are much loved institutions. We are talking about innovative people who develop businesses that always give us a warm welcome. Obviously, they are joined by national retailers on the high streets, but with the recent demise of some of the big players they lose the opportunity for additional footfall. So we need in future to concentrate heavily on what we do to provide support. This has now become an urgent issue for us all to pay attention to.

We have heard time and again in the Chamber that the demise of the high street is not new and that it is something that we have seen coming, but it has been accelerated to the nth degree. I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson), who spoke about the Scottish Government having done everything they can to provide necessary support. There is a madness in cancelling the duty free allowances from the UK Government, and they must take more measures so that we can take more action ourselves, especially over simple changes to the borrowing rules to help those who need it.

The high street is not dead. It simply needs to evolve. In my constituency, independent retailers are some of the best examples of innovation, and they are reaching

out to their customers—many through their own websites now. I urge us all to do what we can. I hope that the light at the end of the tunnel will be us becoming more conscious consumers. We want to support the right businesses doing the right thing. Ethical and local purchasing, and an increased awareness of our own carbon footprint, should naturally drive us to our own independent retailers. There is lots that the UK Government can do. The Scottish Government must do more. Local authorities must work together with business communities, developers and residents to redesign our high streets, and businesses themselves should be recommending each other to other businesses.

There is much more I could say, but three minutes is not enough to cover this subject in detail. We must all do more to support the high street and retailers in our local communities.

4.6 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): As everyone has acknowledged, high streets have had a tough time for several years because of the shift to online shopping, and that trend has been intensified by the covid outbreak. Throughout my time in Parliament, I have tried to campaign in support of local town centres such as High Barnet, New Barnet, East Barnet, Hampden Square, Whetstone, Friern Barnet and all the other small shopping parades in my constituency. I pressed for reductions in business rates, and was pleased to be able to help persuade the previous Chancellor, Philip Hammond, to do that in two successive Budgets. But I do think that the Government need to go further to reform the system in order to reduce business rates for small independent retailers, and to ensure that the big online retailers pay their fair share of tax.

I welcome the introduction of the digital services tax and the international work being led by the UK Government on this important issue, but if our high streets are to survive and thrive, we need urgently to get to the end of this covid crisis. The Government's programme of covid support has been bigger than anything ever attempted in our nation's history, including an 18-month business rates holiday, furlough for 9.6 million jobs and £11 billion in business grants. But the only way to safeguard the future of our high streets is to get hospitality businesses fully reopened, especially the wet pubs, which have suffered the greatest restrictions over the longest period. We now have rapid mass testing and the delivery of the vaccine, so I urge Ministers to get covid restrictions lifted the moment that it is safe to do so, including the controversial 10 pm curfew. Let people get back to the pub for a few drinks with their friends and family once again—and please, please, please do not put London into tier 3.

If our high streets and town centres go into terminal decline, it would be a huge loss to our society and our communities. If we value them, we need to use them. Therefore, I encourage everyone, in a covid-secure way, to head out to their local shops, restaurants and pubs, both in the run-up to Christmas and in the months to follow. Our local businesses and high streets need us. It is time to back Barnet and give them our support.

4.9 pm

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and I thank my union, the Union of

Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, for campaigning so powerfully to support our high streets, particularly the retail workers, who are all too often among the lowest paid and employed on precarious contracts. As a former retail worker on the shop floor, I take a great deal of interest in the future of Britain's high streets and the health and prosperity of our town and city centres.

This is a crucial debate, at a time when our high streets have been stretched to breaking point by the latest lockdown and by the failure of this Government to provide meaningful financial support, resulting in the closure of tens of thousands of businesses, millions being forced into unemployment and the deepest recession in our history. The unique character of the high street is important to our communities, and its survival is vital for our local and regional economies.

Let us take Stockport market in my constituency, where people have been trading for more than 750 years, and which can trace its history back to the middle ages. It is part of the fabric of our town; if hon. Members are ever in Stockport, it is well worth visiting the beautiful Market Hall when it is in full flow on trading days, and taking time to speak to the traders who make the town tick. I often stop by O'Mara's café to speak to the owner, John, when I am out and about in the constituency, as well as those working so hard in Stockport's Market Hall.

Indoor markets such as the one in Stockport are full of small, independent traders, who make our communities unique and offer a diverse alternative to the clone towns that we have seen spring up across the UK in recent years. Stockport Council has an exciting vision for our town centre, with a £1 billion investment programme that will see new homes, new forms of transport, leisure outlets and jobs. I pay tribute to the council staff who have worked so hard to make that a reality. If hon. Members are not aware of the Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation, they should look it up; it is a blueprint for the future of town centres, with mixed retail and housing.

Unfortunately, the reality is that without meaningful support, the efforts of council staff will only delay the inevitable. The lack of support for these traders from this Government since the start of the covid pandemic is nothing short of scandalous. The grants and furlough scheme have proved to be little more than a drop in the ocean, leaving the vast majority of small businesses and traders struggling with rent payments and fixed costs. It should come as little surprise, then, that USDAW researchers revealed that there have been more than 200,000 job losses and 20,000 store closures this year alone in the retail sector.

The sad demise of the high street is the result of an unlevel playing field rigged in favour of online retailers, who have little in the way of overhead costs such as shop rents and are able to undercut high street retailers. The recent collapse of Arcadia Group put 12,000 jobs at risk and further hollowed out our high street. That followed the closure of Sainsbury's on Warren Street in my constituency, which saw a further 87 hard-working staff put at risk just days before Christmas and the new year, despite Sainsbury's having announced record profits in recent months. I am pleased to hear other hon. Members suggest an online sales levy, which could be set at 1% of online sales and would raise around £1.5 billion. The money generated by that could help to offset a cut in retail business rates of around 20%.

4.12 pm

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): The need to rejuvenate our high streets is an issue that I am sure unites this House across party and across regions, whether we represent small towns or a major metropolis. I also think there is probably a fair amount of consensus about how to do that. I will talk briefly about my vision for high streets and about business rates and the VAT RES.

The reality, as many colleagues have said, is that the high street is changing and there are many shops that, sadly, will not be viable going forward, so we need to recreate the concept of the high street. That will mean more leisure, more hospitality and, indeed, even more housing. The high street needs to become a destination and an experience, rather than simply a shopping event.

Turning to business rates, I believe we need fundamental reform—indeed, I believe we need a significant reduction in business rates. If we look back to 1990, business rates and corporation tax were both at 35%. Corporation tax is now at 19%, but business rates are at 51%. There is no rationale for that discrepancy. If we think about it, business rates are a fixed cost; they have nothing to do with the profitability of a business. I strongly recommend that the Treasury review business rates, and I think doing so would be in the Treasury's long-term interests, because we need to preserve jobs on our high street. As the Chancellor says, it is all about “jobs, jobs, jobs”.

In my own constituency, we are particularly affected by business rates. The one tiny borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the neighbouring borough of Westminster make up 10% of the entire country's business rates, just because our property values are so high. However, the cash flows in our shops are basically the same as the cash flows in shops all around the country, so we need that review. I have only 20 seconds left, so I just want to say that I strongly urge the Government to review the VAT retail export scheme. At a time when we are global Britain looking out, we need to be attracting international visitors to our high streets, our hotels and our restaurants. Our high streets have hope, but they need our support.

4.15 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The town and village centres in South Lakeland, in the lakes and in the dales and the communities around, them are spectacular places. They are part of our hospitality and tourism offer, as well as serving the communities that are permanently with us, but the impact on hospitality and tourism in the last nine months has been colossal, and the impact on the town and village centres of the south lakes has also been colossal.

The health of the retail, hospitality and tourism sectors in those towns and villages is absolutely essential, and as we move through the next few months towards what is hopefully the conclusion of the covid crisis, I want to urge the Government to be far more generous towards those businesses, because many of them are at risk and many have already gone out of business. I have seen a sixfold increase in unemployment in my constituency. At one stage, we were the furlough capital of the United Kingdom. Those businesses in our town and village centres throughout South Lakeland are healthy and have a future, and I would like the Government to back them so that when the recovery comes, we have not dead

businesses that are empty and unable to step up to the plate, but lively, vibrant businesses that are ready to lead the recovery.

I join those who are saying that business rates are crucial. They really are, and the Government should not pat themselves on the back too much over the digital sales tax. Business rates net £25 billion a year. The digital sales tax, according to the Government's best estimate, will raise £0.5 billion a year. What we need is the full-scale abolition of business rates, their replacement by taxes on revenue and sales, and measures to ensure that the online giants are no longer being subsidised by independent shops in our communities up and down this country. I was talking to a constituent of mine, a business person who owns a number of businesses. He told me that the rateable value of one of his premises, which he is having to close, was £250,000. The rent that he pays on that business is a fifth of that. This distorts the price of operating physically in our town and village centres. That is why business rates must be abolished, and this is the moment to do it.

I also want to make the point that while the independents are crucial—we have loads of them in the south lakes—so are the chains. When Beales closed down in Kendal, it removed footfall from the rest of the community as well, so let us make sure we support our high streets and town and village centres for our independents, but also for our chains.

Finally, in rural communities such as mine, where one in four people work for themselves, the economy is like an ecosystem. The health of the town and village centres—their poor health at times—is made worse by the fact that 4,500 people in my community are being excluded from support by this Government. The Government's failure to back those people, many of whom run their own businesses and who should be the backbone of any recovery, is costing them and their families, and it is also costing our town and village centres.

4.18 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): We used to be a nation of small shopkeepers. I no longer think that is the case, but thank goodness for our wonderful Asian community who keep all our little shops going.

When I was the Member of Parliament for Basildon, we had the largest covered shopping centre in Europe. Then that accolade moved to Thurrock Lakeside. Then it went to Bluewater, and then to Gateshead, but it is no longer really cool to have covered shopping centres.

In our household, I tend to do the supermarket shopping, and the reason for that is that I like to see what I am buying and I like my bargains. But like everyone else, we have been hit by the double whammy of online retail shopping and the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Amazon flights come into Southend airport. We have five of them during the night, so they are not doing local residents much good because they are disturbing them. They are wonderful for Amazon, of course, but Amazon, along with other large online retailers, has taken advantage of the pandemic to grow its business while still avoiding paying taxes or just paying a fraction of the taxes it should, based on the money generated by its UK sales. Our Government should certainly see if they can apply a bit more pressure. High streets, Southend included, have more and more empty shops—we cannot

exist just on charity shops—and although the business rates holiday has helped, it needs to be extended beyond March.

Independent retailers should be at the heart of any high street, and I am privileged to have the Broadway in Leigh in my constituency. My predecessor Paul Channon, and his father Chips Channon, used to shop regularly in Leigh Broadway with the late Princess Margaret. We have a wonderful range of quirky, creative and unusual shops and galleries, which attract visitors from all over Essex. As in other colleagues' constituencies, however, department stores are difficult to sustain now, and our high street was hit when we lost Keddies. Losing Debenhams is another big blow.

Local councils need to do more to assist the retail industry. Southend council has led the way by offering free parking for shoppers in the run-up to Christmas. Convenient parking in high streets is vital to continued success, as the majority of shoppers who visit those businesses physically tend to be older people who do not wish to shop online—we cannot all shop online, frankly. Their needs should be recognised, and the drive to ban the car from shopping centres should be reversed.

In order to maintain a thriving local retail economy, the Government and local councils should work together to ensure that the business climate and the infrastructure are there to support it. In Southend, there are plans to concentrate the retail outlets in a smaller area, and to have some high-quality housing, but the best thing that the House of Commons can do is to join together and shop locally.

4.21 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Like many other hon. Members, earlier this year on Independents' Day, I spent the day visiting local shops in my community: businesses such as Stobo's fruit and vegetable shop in Crawcrook, Simply Local in Sunnyside or the Paris Dress House in the Metrocentre—a whole range of them. Last Friday and Saturday, Small Business Saturday, I visited places such as TLC Laundry Services on the high street in Birtley. Unlike many constituencies, Blaydon has many small towns and many small parades of shops. It is vital that we do not forget those smaller groups of shops when we talk about our high streets, because they are the centre of our local communities.

I am particularly keen to talk about retail and shopping in the high street, because in my constituency of Blaydon, 28% of jobs are in the retail sector—I used to say that it was about a quarter, but the latest figure from the Library shows that it has increased as a proportion—and there are many more than that in hospitality on our high streets. So our smaller retail centres are hugely important, although in Blaydon we also have the Metrocentre, which, if I may correct the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), I believe is still the largest covered shopping centre. That, too, is hugely important to us for jobs, although it is going through some difficult times, like the rest of retail.

In fact, the House of Commons Library tells me that there are 520 retail sites across Blaydon, centred in Blaydon, Birtley, Whickham, Ryton, Crawcrook and Sunnyside, each with a range of retail, leisure and hospitality. As we have heard, all of them face challenges from the internet and covid-19. It is vital that we support those businesses to keep going. I also want to say something

in support of charity shops, because they are now an important part of our high street and themselves face difficult times because of covid-19.

Finally, the retail workers who work in those shops are key workers. They are the people who were on the frontline, ensuring that we got the food. They stocked the shelves so that we were able to carry on during the lockdown, and that was often without recognition or a lot of safety features. Today, I hope that we will recognise the work of those shop workers in keeping our communities going.

4.24 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): As the Minister so rightly said, our high streets are not just economic units that provide much-needed prosperity and create valuable jobs; they are at the heart of our communities. They are key to local identities and they bring people together. When our high streets and town centres are strong, our communities are stronger. When our high streets struggle, it puts additional pressures on our communities. We see this in high streets around my constituency, whether it is in Kingswinford, Brockmoor, Pensnett or Netherton, but perhaps the struggles facing our high streets and town centres can best be seen in Brierley Hill, the largest town centre in Dudley South.

When Brierley Hill high street grew and thrived either side of the second world war, the local economy was based largely around the Marsh & Baxter sausage factory in Brierley Hill and the Round Oak steelworks. As those two major employers declined through the '70s—the steelworks was replaced by the intu Merry Hill shopping centre in the mid-1980s—instead of there being a large customer base, there was suddenly competition on the doorstep, which again provided enormous numbers of jobs but put further pressures on high streets. Since then, even Merry Hill has faced increasing competition from the move to online retail and the pressures that that has brought.

If high streets such as Brierley Hill are going to succeed, they need to be able to adapt to modern shopping trends and the realities of the economy in the 21st century, not what we might wish we could turn our local economies back to. This is where the future high streets fund is so important, and it is why I think that Brierley Hill's bid for that fund is such a strong one. I very much hope that the Minister will be able to visit Brierley Hill with me to see why it is such a strong bid and so desperately needed.

Our high streets will need to be able to offer something that online retail cannot. That means an experience. A large part of that is hospitality, and, as the Minister knows and has heard, hospitality has faced particular problems through this pandemic. It is important that it is allowed to reopen as soon as it safely can, but short-term support is needed. In particular, as we look at Christmas, it seems ludicrous that we are sending families together, in bubbles of three households, into the most dangerous places—private homes—instead of allowing them to mix in those three household bubbles in well regulated hospitality venues.

4.27 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I spent Small Business Saturday celebrating small businesses in Bath, but this is a very challenging time for our high streets. Many landlords

[*Wera Hobhouse*]

are trying their best. British Land, which owns the SouthGate shopping centre in Bath, has deferred £40 million of rent and cancelled £3 million in rent owed by its smaller retailers and restaurateurs, but the council, which is also a major landlord, cannot do the same. The money that it receives from rents helps to pay for social care, bin collections and investing to make Bath a net zero city.

The truth is that covid-19 has merely accelerated changes that were already taking place, and if we want to give shops and high streets a future and are serious about saving retail jobs, we must fix what is not working. The problem is overhead cost differences between running a high street business and running an out-of-town online business. It is cheaper to sell online or, to put it another way, there is not a level playing field, and that needs fixing.

The pandemic has shown us the great social value of our shared spaces. The report “Health on the High Street”, which was co-authored by the NHS, says that our experience since covid has galvanised the idea of the high street returning as a community hub. We need to think differently about how we design and create vibrant, thriving high streets. Not only do we need, therefore, an immediate reset of a level playing field between the high street and online businesses, but Government must start to recognise the community benefit of our high street. There has been a lot of discussion about the mental health damage from the pandemic, and I am sure that high streets will play an important part in the future wellbeing of our citizens.

In Bath, the council has done everything it can to support small businesses, but there is a limit to what is possible without further support from central Government. I ask once again for the Government to follow through with their promise to local authorities, so that they do not have to choose between supporting their high street and providing essential services.

4.30 pm

Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): This Government must continue to expand the agenda for our high streets. Having left the EU and, soon, the transition period, we have a unique opportunity to frame a radical new agenda regarding reform of the planning system, the rate system and VAT and encouraging innovation. I know that the Government are focusing closely on what they can do to provide better opportunities for our small independent businesses, but I want them to do more. I want to see the Government broaden the focus of their levelling-up commitments to consider how best to support smaller towns and high streets, such as Ashbourne, Bakewell, Matlock and Wirksworth in my constituency. It is important that the areas that do not benefit from the Government’s excellent headline schemes, such as the towns fund, are still considered in their plans and objectives.

On the high streets of Derbyshire Dales, we have a fantastic, diverse range of businesses such as Hambridges Butchers in Matlock, the Bakewell Cheese Shop, Quirky Antiques in Matlock, Peak District Yarns in Tideswell, the Green Man complex in Ashbourne and, last but not least, Carly Hair in Wirksworth. These businesses are the backbone of the high street and need our backing. These are hard-working entrepreneurs. They need to be

free of red tape, and they need to be encouraged to thrive. We need to abolish car parking fees in this sort of town environment, and we need broadband everywhere, even in rural high streets.

Following our departure from the EU, it is our responsibility here to help our small businesses, because they need to be free to help themselves. I hope that this Government and this House will take a lead in encouraging national support for British foods, services and products. I have stuck to my time limit this time, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I have one final plea: please can we get Derbyshire Dales out of tier 3 soon?

4.32 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): My home city of Coventry was placed in the most restrictive tier, tier 3. That news came after weeks of steadily declining transmission rates, and my constituents cannot understand why their high street businesses are suffering from financially crushing restrictions when in places such as London, where covid rates have risen steadily for weeks, businesses are only under tier 2. Coventry’s high street matters just as much as Oxford Street, and that truth must be reflected in how the Government choose to apply covid-19 restrictions, instead of the last-minute, non-uniform way they have done it so far.

While it is true that the high street faces difficulties due to a long-term shift in the way that people shop, many high street businesses are in less immediate danger of being supplanted by modernising trends than they are by the lack of pandemic-related support. As Coventry has opened more museums, restaurants and other high street businesses, the Telegraph Hotel was meant to open in October to accommodate an expected increase in tourism. After lockdown-related delays in its opening, it had to stay closed because of tier 3 restrictions and cancel the hundreds of reservations already made through Christmas. The Telegraph spent millions of pounds to not only preserve the beautiful post-war newspaper building it occupies but to construct outdoor terrace space to make it covid-safe. Concerned about the uncertainty of future guidelines and unable to access covid funds, its business is suffering.

Businesses such as the Telegraph are not just part of the high street; they attract customers to their neighbour businesses as well. We must do what we can to support them and not hang them out to dry. An antique sleigh ride outside the Transport Museum is an annual Coventry high street attraction. Because of the pandemic, sleigh rides will not be feasible this year. However, one businessman in Coventry invested £50,000 in a virtual reality sleigh, so that people out shopping could take covid-safe turns on the VR sleigh ride. Unfortunately, under tier 3 restrictions, he was told to cancel the operation.

It is of course crucial to ask what we can do to ensure the future of our high streets. However, in my city, resilient business owners with dedicated business improvement districts and networks of supportive neighbours have already been coming together to find ways to preserve the experience-driven businesses that keep high streets at the centre of our community. Perhaps one of the most important things we can do to help them is not to stifle them in their efforts. Moving forward, I call on the Government to provide a business support package that reflects the level of business need and the severity of restrictions in different areas.

4.35 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): Coventry city centre is the beating heart of the city—a place that provides community, culture and character—but, like other city centres, it is struggling. Long-running trends of empty high streets have been exacerbated by this pandemic. Just before it hit, IKEA announced the closure of its flagship store in the city, and now it has been joined by the likes of Debenhams in facing closure. Across the country, more than one in eight high street shops now stand empty. Last year, 57,000 retail jobs were lost; this year, the figure is 200,000. While Coventry City Council is investing heavily in the city centre, right now shops, pubs and restaurants are struggling under tier 3 restrictions. I voted against the Government's measures, in part because the economic support is totally inadequate. So again, I say to the Government: give businesses and people in tier 3 the financial support they need to weather this storm.

While this pandemic has pushed workers into poverty and forced small businesses to close, for mega-corporations and their super-rich owners it has been an opportunity to exploit. They are using this public health crisis to entrench their dominance, drive out competition and grow their obscene wealth. Take, for example, Amazon and its billionaire owner, Jeff Bezos. Now with a corporation worth more than \$1.5 trillion, Bezos's wealth has soared since March. It is up \$66 billion in the last eight months, meaning that he could give every single Amazon worker a bonus of \$105,000 and he would still be as rich as he was at the start of this pandemic.

This grotesque wealth and Amazon's growing dominance are of course connected with our struggling high streets, because Amazon has not got where it is by playing fair—quite the opposite, in fact. While workers and small businesses pay their tax, Amazon's tax dodging is pretty legendary. Just last year, on revenues in excess of £13 billion, Amazon paid just £14 million in corporation tax. Its profits are up 35%, but its tax bill just by 3%. This is not a level playing field, so it is no surprise that small businesses and high streets cannot compete. Its employment practices are no better. From being forced to urinate in bottles to meet targets to almost daily calls to the emergency services to treat exhausted staff, Amazon's workers describe being treated like "robots". It is their labour that makes the company's wealth, but it is Bezos who takes the wealth. To level the playing field, it is time we put an end to these unfair practices. It is time Amazon paid its fair share of tax, respected workers' rights and paid a fair share. For the sake of our small businesses, workers and the public purse, it is time to make Amazon pay.

4.38 pm

Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con): I would like to thank retail workers across the country who, while the rest of us retreated to the safety of our own homes, rolled up their sleeves, went out there, applied the restrictions and got on with it.

I earned my spurs at Woolworths, and I am only too well aware of the fall of our high street giants. I have the honour of co-chairing the all-party parliamentary group on the future of retail, and, having met some of the retailers, I have seen at first hand the challenges they

face, but also the incredible passion they have to find solutions to these problems. Our high streets and town centres are changing, but continue to have an important role at the heart of our communities. They are a focal point that brings people together and gives our settlements identity, and are the place where many youngsters get their first job.

There is no denying that our high streets need to adapt, change and be repurposed, and I am glad that the future high streets fund and the town deals are allowing this to happen. Retailers across the country have welcomed the incredible package of support available during the crisis. I am glad that the Government have committed to a fundamental review of the age-old, all-consuming issue of business rates. The business rates holiday has been a lifeline for many retailers, and we must not whack them with the full pelt of business rates in April. We need to act now to assure retailers about what will happen next year, but also look at how we fundamentally reduce the long-term burden on our high streets. We need to be ambitious in the review, we need a significant reduction and we perhaps need to differentiate sectors and geographies.

A lot has changed in the past five years, but the valuations that we use to determine business rates have not. We cannot go on taxing people based on historical rental values; at the very least we must ensure that any levy is based on current and regularly assessed values. Business rates deter investment, and businesses are forced to consider them alongside the viability of any extension or improvement to their premises. Let us reduce the burden, encourage investment and go for growth.

Our high streets are changing, not dying: there are great examples of innovation that must be celebrated and encouraged. I recently met the Booksellers Association and heard about its growing membership as more independent bookstores, such as the amazing Drake in Stockton, open throughout the country. I have seen at first hand the emergence of a micropub scene in Stockton, going against the grain, filling empty shops and bringing life to the town centre, and the emergence of enterprise arcades such as the Pop Up shop in Yarm or the Fountain shopping centre in Stockton—emporiums of amazing independents, offering up their goods and having a go to see where their retailing dreams lead.

Shopping cannot be replaced by clicking—you cannot feel it, touch it, see it or smell it—and there is no replacement for customer service, expertise or banter. Let us support our nation of shopkeepers, back our high streets and shop local.

4.41 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Our identity is drawn from the places where we live and our high streets are very much part of that, so the eerie emptiness of our high streets at this time must present a new opportunity to re-imagine our high streets.

York has the worst-hit high street in the country, so we are really feeling the pain. Some 65% of York is made up of independent businesses, and Indie York is calling on the Government to do more to support them—not least because of the high rateable value in our city. I say to everyone in my community: please shop local this Christmas and visit our virtual high street.

[*Rachael Maskell*]

In a nutshell, this is where the problem sits: where property is owned by private landlords, many are more interested in their investment portfolios than the location and in maintaining high property values and a high investment return for themselves. That really damages our high streets because the high rents only top up their balances, in turn pushing up the value of high streets through rents, rateable values and business rates. This false economy must be challenged if we are to build back better.

One frustration is that the covid grants and loans have slipped through the hands of businesses to landlords—and often straight into their offshore bank accounts, as they are overseas investors. This has neither helped our communities nor brought value to the taxpayer. How much taxpayers' money is now sitting in tax havens as a result of these payments? There are no obligations to help local shops and businesses through this difficult time—not least when overseas investors are twice as likely to have vacant premises on our high streets. The Government should not only review this scandal but legislate to address it.

So many colleagues have mentioned business rates today, and I have held debates on how we can reform business rates. The fairest way is to move to a turnover tax or a profit-related tax that would include all businesses.

Let me turn to the issue of how we should move our high streets from business improvement districts to community improvement districts. Bishopthorpe Road in York has had the secret of growth and has created a really vibrant high street because it has been about community first. That model is being replicated elsewhere across York.

We also need to look at the opportunity to put into our city more places for families, such as Explore York, our library, where people are not allowed to whisper but can certainly enjoy the Lego table, the craft table and knitting in the corner—and even reading a book. As we see in York, our entrepreneurs and business owners are really keeping our high streets alive.

4.44 pm

Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con): The recent Small Business Saturday best-dressed shop window competition and wonderful Christmas lights in Loughborough have provided the vital publicity needed to encourage local residents to support small local businesses at this difficult time. Having been out and about last Saturday, it is clear to me that the town is a safe place in which to shop and that residents are doing the right thing to keep everyone safe. The Loughborough BID has established an online shopping service called shop.loveloughborough.co.uk for all the small independent shops in the town centre so that they can trade online in a professional manner.

Many high street businesses were struggling even before the start of the covid-19 outbreak, so we must all work together to keep our high streets alive. There is no better example of this than in my constituency, where a range of partners have come together to increase footfall, backed by an application for £32 million of town deal funding from the Government. All the proposals that have been put forward in the town deal are intended to create a destination. I raised the importance of this in

revitalising our high streets in my response to the Government's "Planning for the future" White Paper, which set out a number of positive proposals to ensure that the planning system adapts to the new realities of consumer behaviour. I particularly welcome the proposals to make it easier for commercial properties to include residential space to create a greater vibrancy in towns, and the desire to use brownfield sites in development. It is clear that a great deal of work is already under way to benefit our major towns.

As an MP, I am committed to supporting all the high streets in my local area, not just Loughborough town. Given that Office for National Statistics data has identified that high street hubs in towns are 36% composed of retail addresses, compared with just 29% in the rest of the country, I would welcome the Minister's comments on what more can be done to ensure that even our smallest high streets have the support they need—and of course business rates need to be reduced.

4.46 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): As we have heard, this debate is not just about the economics of business. Our high streets are about more than just pounds and pence and GDP. As we have heard from many hon. Members across the House, including my hon. Friends the Members for Stockport (Navendu Mishra), for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi), for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) and for York Central (Rachael Maskell), this debate is about the importance of the idea of place—identity—to communities up and down this country. Our high streets are not just the locations that employ our workers, build our economy and provide goods and services; they are embedded in the very culture and heritage of this nation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) eloquently pointed out, high streets are not just about transactional value but social value. They are part and parcel of all our lives. Whether we live in South Shields or Bradford West, growing up and visiting the high street is part of our way of life.

Of course, much of this debate has been about the economic health of our high street, as hon. Members across the Chamber have discussed. The coronavirus crisis has had a unique impact on many aspects of life globally by speeding things up that were happening already, and the high street is no different. Covid's chilling effect on physical retail has dealt a further blow to a sector that was already under threat, and, in turn, has accelerated decline on high streets that were already struggling because of the neglect by consecutive Conservative Governments. As Members have said, since 2012, footfall on the high street has been down by 10%, and one in 10 high street shops were standing empty even before the pandemic. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) pointed out that since 2010 the Government have presided over the closure of 773 libraries, 750 youth centres, 1,300 children's centres, and 835 public toilets.

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Naz Shah: Due to time limits I will not give way—I will make progress.

Some 5,500 pubs and bars have closed in the past 10 years, since this Government have been in office. Because of the Government's neglect, our high streets were already standing on the edge of a cliff, so why are they surprised that a crisis like the covid-19 pandemic pushed them over? As we have seen in the past few weeks, high street stalwarts like Debenhams and brands like Topshop, Burton and Dorothy Perkins have gone into administration or liquidation, putting more than 14,000 jobs at risk. Since March, up to 20,000 shops have closed and 200,000 people have been put out of work, but despite all this, the Government are refusing the levels of support they gave in March. As has been highlighted, 99% of beauty salons, 95% of cafes, 92% of gyms and 77% of pubs and restaurants are receiving less than they were in March.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North pointed to the challenges that small businesses are facing from the threat posed by online retail and the Government's total failure to level the playing field through addressing business rates. As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South pointed out repeatedly, this is about levelling the playing field. The Government talk a lot about levelling up, so perhaps the Minister will reflect on the fact that the business rates burden is hitting the north and the midlands hardest, as a report by WPI Strategy, written by former Treasury economists, found in October. The report told us that 77% of constituencies in the top 10% with the highest business rates burden are in the north and the midlands, compared with just 18% in London and the south. That is because the tax rate does not mirror economic performance, so for areas facing economic challenges, the burden is much higher.

Back in March, the Government promised to compensate councils fully for getting through the pandemic. They broke that promise, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies now estimates that the covid funding gap is £1.1 billion this year and £4.4 billion next year. That means more job losses, more cuts, and in turn less spending and less support for businesses. We know that there is light at the end of the tunnel with the arrival of the first new vaccine, but the reality is that businesses face a long and bleak winter unless the Government provide the support that they need now. That could mean that there are fewer high streets for people to visit, vaccine or no.

It is important that the Government learn the lessons from the past. Rather than neglect the sectors that need support, they must act now. The lessons from 2010 will be forgotten if the Government's austerity drive chokes off business recovery. Since 2010, we have seen not only a physical decimation of the high street but significantly lower levels of growth. The Government are in danger of repeating the mistakes of the past. Just this week, Laurence Boone, the chief economist at the OECD, said:

"We made the mistake in 2010; we need to learn from the mistake. We need to keep up the support for the people and those in and out of jobs. We must make sure income is supported... When you're in a battle and you know the cavalry is coming, you don't stop fighting. In fact you keep fighting until the cavalry is around. In fact you keep fighting while the cavalry is there."

The country is fighting. Retailers on our high streets are fighting. The pubs on the corner, the restaurants in the highest tiers that have closed, the small, family-run businesses that have been part and parcel of our local

towns and are struggling to keep their doors open—they are all fighting. They are all waiting for the cavalry to arrive, but the Government are leaving them to fight alone on the battlefield.

4.52 pm

Kelly Tolhurst: It has been an absolute pleasure to listen to the passion that Members from across the House displayed when talking about the needs of their high streets and their hopes for them to flourish at a local level. Our high streets have a solid future, which will be born from the ambition and innovation that is taken forward by the diversity and strength of our local retailers, local businesses, local authorities and elected Members, who will work together in order to see their areas flourish and their high streets survive. They will provide community hubs and places where consumers, shoppers, visitors and residents want to spend their time. I believe that our high streets have a very prosperous future.

There is no doubt that the covid-19 pandemic has had a crippling effect on our high streets, small businesses and many sectors of our economy. It is only right that the Government have supported many of those retailers and businesses—particularly those on our high streets—in their endeavour to survive the pandemic.

I want to highlight a few things that the hon. Members for Croydon North (Steve Reed) and for Bradford West (Naz Shah) addressed. There was a lot of bluster and criticism of what the Government have done throughout the pandemic. The hon. Member for Croydon North talks about the fundamental business rate review, but it is this Government who have issued the call for evidence to look at the business rate review. That was not done by the Labour Government. This is not a new issue. Business rates are a perennial issue, and this Government are taking action. We will review that and listen to business up and down the country.

The hon. Gentleman talked about grants and money for local authorities to support our high streets, but the grants to local authorities given by this Government, representing nearly £12 billion, have supported just under 1 million SMEs. He talked about our not supporting councils. He knows that I respect him, as I have mentioned before, but it is a shame he did not take that attitude towards his own council's reckless borrowing of £1.5 billion, which has put it in such a mess. That cannot be blamed on covid.

I want to quickly reflect on many of the points that my hon. Friends and hon. Members across the House have made. Business support has been a lifeline for many businesses and SMEs on our high streets during the pandemic. The Government gave a 100% rate relief for 12 months. I know that the Chancellor and the Treasury will be looking at what happens after that over the coming months, but businesses were being given—and are being given—a £3,000 per month grant, with an extra £1,000 for pubs this Christmas.

The £1.1 billion of additional restrictions grants for local authorities was also mentioned. Where that money is required has been down to the discretion of local authorities. Where that support is necessary, it is being delivered, and that is exactly what we want. We want high streets in thriving communities that are driven by the people who use them, and that is what we are doing.

[Kelly Tolhurst]

This Government are giving that flexibility and discretion, supporting our local communities to drive their centres forward.

That brings me to the Government investment that we are making through the future high streets fund and the town deals: 101 of the high streets that applied have got through to the next stage of the future high streets fund. That would represent an investment of potentially £831 million that this Conservative Government will be delivering through that competition, driven—I make the point again—by local people, local plans, and their ideas and dreams for their local communities to survive. That is what I want as a Conservative Member of Parliament and a Minister: to support local communities to deliver exactly what they want on their doorsteps. Through the towns fund, this Government are again making a significant investment—more so than any Labour Government, and certainly more in my area since I have been involved in politics.

I want to highlight a few other things that have been mentioned. I absolutely understand Members' concerns about parking charges. I look forward to coming to the Champs Élysées of the north in the future, in my role as high streets Minister. I am also happy to meet with my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), and other interested MPs, to discuss some of the issues that he has raised in today's debate.

We are absolutely ready and prepared, and will continue to work with stakeholders, businesses and local representatives, to ensure that our high streets and our economy can bounce back as soon as we can move out of restrictions, which is something the Government are working very hard to deliver.

I want to pick up on a very important point that my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) made about the VAT retail export scheme. The Government recognise the contribution that VAT RES had made to international tourism retail in the UK. However, there was not a choice of maintaining the VAT RES as it is today. The choice was between extending the scheme to EU residents or removing them completely under World Trade Organisation rules. HMRC has estimated that refunds cost around £0.5 billion, for

around 1.2 million non-EU visitors, which puts the issue into context, in that only one in 10 non-EU visitors is using the VAT RES system.

We will survive this pandemic, and our high streets will survive with the determination and dedication of all the men and women who are working in our businesses and shops. [Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Do you know, I have never heard that before, in all these years. It was a very good debate on all sides, and all the better for short speeches—to the point, and many of them.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the future of the high street.

PETITION

Redirecting traffic from Cleveland Bridge

5 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of Bath regarding Cleveland Bridge and the importance of protecting that historic structure. Online, this petition received 1,278 signatures.

The petition states:

The petition of the residents of Bath,

Declares that Cleveland Bridge, a Grade II* listed structure, is unable to withstand vehicles over 18 tonnes as part of its function on the Primary Road Network; further that interventions are now increasingly needed to preserve the structure for future generations, as the law requires; and further that the Government has set out in its Road Investment Strategy that the A350 corridor could be used as the main north-south strategic route from the south coast to the M4.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to bring forward urgent work to adopt the A350 corridor as the main route from the south coast to the M4, and to consider redirecting east-west traffic from the A4 and Bristol, to the A420 north of the city, thereby protecting Cleveland Bridge from heavy freight traffic and enabling a reduced weight limit.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002637]

Encouragement of Terrorism Offences

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

5.2 pm

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): At the outset, I feel that it is only right that I set out the motivation behind my request for this debate. I want this evening to take the House to the townland of Legananny, five miles outside Castlewellan in the parliamentary constituency of South Down in Northern Ireland—to a quiet, rural location, where both traditions lived together in relative harmony throughout much of the time now described by many as the troubles.

On 3 May 1985, William Heenan, a 52-year-old widower, went outside to feed some livestock in the yard. This was his home, along with his 12-year-old son, Sammy; sadly, William's wife had passed away two years previous. It was the last morning that William would ever feed his animals. Sammy Heenan, William's son, is now a grown man with his own family. I have known him for some time. He is a man of great character, great resolve and very strong faith. If his late father had grown old to see his son grow up, Sammy would have made him very proud. As a 12-year-old, Sammy's life changed forever. This is his account of that morning in 1985:

“When I was a 12 year old child, I lived 5 miles north of rural Castlewellan. On that fateful morning on the 3rd May 1985 at 7am, I went out to find my father brutally murdered after I heard his final haunting and dying screams. He had been forced to his knees and shot twice in the top of the head at point blank range by a South Down PIRA gunman. The image of his face bloodied and unrecognisable as he lay on the ground that morning will be etched on my mind forever. After which I had to run to a neighbour's house half a mile away to raise the alarm sobbing and in a state of utter despair.”

Sammy Heenan's life story is replicated for many across Northern Ireland—mothers and fathers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, grandparents, friends: murdered by terrorists. The broken-hearted remain, to live a life with psychological and physical scars that will never heal, and it is for those victims that I have asked for this debate today. Despite the scars, despite the lifetime of grief and of anguish, despite the trauma inflicted on them that no one should face, there are those within our society who glorify the terror that caused that pain, and who revel in the actions of those who planted bombs or shot people in the head. Sadly, Madam Deputy Speaker, some of them are Members of this House.

A little over five miles from the very spot where the IRA murdered William Heenan, in the town of Castlewellan sits the McNulty-Magorrian advice centre. It operates as the constituency office of the Member of this House for South Down (Chris Hazzard). For your information, Madam Deputy Speaker, McNulty was killed in a premature bomb explosion during an IRA attack on Castlewellan RUC station in January 1972, while Magorrian died after being shot by the Army in August 1974; both were Provisional IRA terrorists.

Given that an office has been named after two terrorists and a Member of this House is performing his role from that office, one would think that this Parliament—the bastion of democratic principles, the very place where parliamentary democracy was founded—would stop such an affront to democracy. This House knows only too well the barbaric actions of terrorists: Airey Neave,

Ian Gow and Reverend Robert Bradford were serving Members of this House murdered by members of the same terrorist organisation that we have a parliamentary constituency office named after in South Down. Yet action is not taken.

I have raised this issue with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, who has responded by saying she has no grounds to investigate, and, likewise, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority says it is not a matter for it. By doing nothing, we facilitate—indeed, financially support—an MP who daily glorifies terrorists. I urge the Minister this evening to undertake to address this issue at the earliest possible opportunity.

In this instance, it is a case of doing what is right—of recognising the hurt and pain this causes innocent victims and saying, “This House will not facilitate or allow this to happen any longer.”

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. I know that the Minister in particular understands this issue.

I know Sammy Heenan as well, so I understand the matter that my hon. Friend raises. Does she share the concerns of many others outside that family circle that the local council in Newry, Mourne and Down has named a playpark after Raymond McCreech, one of the hunger strikers who gave their life—or committed suicide, depending on how we want to put it—at the Kesh, and who was a convicted terrorist? Does my hon. Friend agree that there is something wrong if Newry, Mourne and Down can name a playpark after a convicted terrorist? Should the House not take action against the Member for South Down?

Carla Lockhart: My remarks are larger than the Heenan family and the hurt caused to them. My hon. Friend is right that the glorification of terrorism anywhere is wrong and has repercussions for innocent victims.

When I told Sammy Heenan that I had secured this debate, he asked me to make this plea on behalf of him and the many victims of terrorism in South Down:

“How can we as a progressive society in 2020 continue to countenance the repugnant naming of an MP's constituency office in the United Kingdom after two dead IRA terrorists? The symbolism attached to this office-naming is massive and morally obscene, thus inadvertently legitimising every terrorist act perpetrated against UK citizens. I implore this Parliament to exhaust every avenue in righting this grievous wrong, which continues to cause affliction to the innocent of our country. As a Parliament, please be cognisant of our traumatism and use whatever means necessary to ensure terrorist revisionism such as this ceases to be funded and tolerated.”

I cannot add any more to that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is important that, as we in Northern Ireland look to the future, those who want to revel in the evil deeds of the past, to seek to re-write that past and make acceptable the murder and mayhem terrorists imposed on our country, are not aided and abetted by our accommodation of such a perversion of what actually happened. To enable that in any way will only serve to bring about a generation who believe such heinous crimes to have been justified, acceptable and worthy of celebration.

Only this week, members of the County Armagh ladies camogie team—a Gaelic game, for those unfamiliar with the term—were videoed celebrating success on the pitch with repeated chants of, “Ooh ah, up the Ra!”:

[Carla Lockhart]

a clear reference to the IRA, a proscribed terrorist organisation responsible for the killing of some 1,700 people. How utterly depressing. None of those girls was alive during the worst years of IRA terrorism, yet this chanting was part and parcel of their celebrations.

Closer to this place, earlier this year, London Young Labour tweeted a picture of the Falls Road mural dedicated to the IRA man, Bobby Sands. They wrote:

“On this day in 1981, socialist and republican Bobby Sands died as a PoW following a hunger strike during which he became an elected MP. We remember him and continue to fight for an end to imperialism and for a free and united Ireland.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, Bobby Sands was a bomber. Bobby Sands was not a prisoner of war. He was a terrorist—a man so consumed with hatred that he killed himself. Yet here we have a youth wing of the official Opposition in this place lauding this man. What does that say to victims?

There are many, many other examples of how this encouragement and glorification of terrorism happens in our society: the Policing Board member who describes the shooting of a prison officer in the head as one of the “best ops”; the Gaelic football grounds and competitions named after IRA men; and the Northern Ireland Executive Ministers who attend glorification events. Madam Deputy Speaker, if Members of any other party in this House were to do that for any terrorist event or organisation, it would not be accepted.

I have a young son, Charlie. I want him to grow up in a society that has values, that has respect for the rule of law, and where people are at peace with one another. Yet I look at a society today where the very encouragement and glorification of terrorism goes largely unchallenged. In such a society, real reconciliation cannot happen. For in such a society, those who suffer most, our victims, are not respected—they are insulted. Until this stops, until those who engage in this behaviour cease and recognise the hurt and the wrongs they do and have done, we will never have that real peace we crave.

5.13 pm

The Minister for Security (James Brokenshire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart) on securing the debate, and on the very powerful and poignant speech she delivered to the House this evening. Her comments on the brutal murder of William Heenan will have struck a chord with all who have heard the debate tonight. The loss and impact on his son Sammy Heenan, and on the rest of the family, is lifelong. I am sure that all in this House would wish to convey our deepest and sincerest condolences for his and their loss, and for all the pain that they continue to suffer.

Certainly, as a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I have met too many who continue to suffer that pain and that loss. We still collectively need to do much more to be able to look to Northern Ireland’s future with a positive sense of the amazing place that it is and the incredible people there who make it such a special place, while equally knowing that the legacy of the troubles and of the past still runs very deep and knowing the pain that it continues to cause. Therefore I understand and hear that sense of the need for us to be able to look to a future beyond all of those troubling issues.

I speak as the Security Minister, and therefore look to these issues of national security across all parts of our United Kingdom. I was struck by the emphasis that the hon. Lady gave to issues relating to this House, which brought to mind the response that she received from the Leader of the House recently during business questions when she highlighted this point. The Leader of the House underlined that very clear message, saying:

“We should remember and commemorate those who were killed”,—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2020; Vol. 684, c. 993.]

drawing to mind the shields within this House to remember Airey Neave and Ian Gow, and stating that commemorating those who committed murder is absolutely not what we as a House should do. I understand that it is in that sense that the hon. Member for Upper Bann approaches all of this.

I want to look at the work that we do as a Government across the United Kingdom, and I am sure that the hon. Lady would join me in recognising the work that happens here and now. What do I mean by that? I mean the work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, MI5 and others who work tirelessly to keep people safe and have our full support for the immense contribution they make on a daily basis. I commend all those who, sometimes quietly, sometimes out of sight, help to deliver safety and security for the public in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. That ongoing work by the police and MI5 means that most people in Northern Ireland, mercifully, are not directly affected by the severe terrorist threat that endures.

It remains unacceptable that, decades on from the Good Friday agreement, there are still groups who are using and hiding bombs and bullets in residential areas, putting their own agendas above the rights of the community who want to live and thrive in peace. Where terrorism, paramilitary-style attacks and attacks on the community endure, so, too, will our efforts to tackle them. We will always do everything in our power to ensure they do not succeed.

I take this opportunity to commend the recent successes of Operation Arbacia, an ongoing Police Service of Northern Ireland-led operation into the activities of the New IRA, which has involved collaboration with partners such as MI5, Police Scotland, An Garda Síochána and the Metropolitan Police Service. In August, the Police Service of Northern Ireland arrested 10 people, all of whom have now been charged with a range of terrorism offences under the Terrorism Act 2006. Violent dissident republicans cause substantial harm to communities and the fabric of society. These arrests, I believe, are a welcome step in maintaining peace in Northern Ireland and keeping people safe from criminality and violence.

We have robust UK-wide legislation to counter the threat of terrorism and protect the public. The legislative framework was established in the Terrorism Act 2000; it was updated and strengthened in the post-9/11 era, again more recently to respond to the threat connected with the Syrian conflict and individuals travelling from this country to join terrorist groups, and then again following the attacks in the UK in 2017. Our framework provides a coherent approach, including an ideology-neutral definition of terrorism, which determines the scope of other terrorism powers and offences.

On the particular issue raised in this debate today, the Government are clear that statements that encourage or glorify terrorism are unacceptable and that individuals

who make such statements should be liable for prosecution. It is an offence under section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2006 for an individual to intentionally encourage members of the public to engage in terrorism or be reckless as to whether their statements will encourage it. That applies whether or not any person is in fact encouraged or induced to engage in terrorism as a result of the individual's statements.

The Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019 updated the section 1 encouragement offence in three ways: closing a gap that existed whereby the offence would not necessarily be committed in a case where someone radicalised or sought to encourage a child or vulnerable adult to carry out an act of terrorism; ensuring extra-territorial jurisdiction applies fully to the encouragement of any act of terrorism, meaning that a person may be prosecuted in the UK for conduct that took place outside the UK that would have been unlawful had it taken place here; and increasing the maximum penalty available following a conviction from seven to 15 years' imprisonment to reflect the seriousness of the offence. That is an appropriately broad offence of encouragement, which also covers the glorification of terrorism and ensures that perpetrators can be prosecuted appropriately.

In addition, our counter-terrorism legislative framework includes the separate offence under section 12 of the Terrorism Act 2000 of inviting support for a proscribed organisation. The 2019 Act extended the offence by making it clear that it is illegal to make statements in support of a terrorist organisation or to be reckless as to whether others will be encouraged to support the organisation.

Jim Shannon: I am always mindful of the Minister's exceptional contribution when he was the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and I thank him for that. The council that represents my area is Ards and North Down Borough Council. It wanted to name a leisure grounds and playground after Blair Mayne, who is a hero of the second world war. It was called in because of the legal process in Northern Ireland, yet Newry, Mourne and Down District Council was able to name its play park, where children play, after a convicted terrorist who died by his own hand in the Maze. Is that right? Is that council not accountable under what the Minister has said, and can it not be made to change that name and remove it?

James Brokenshire: I appreciate and respect the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. He will understand that I am not familiar with all the circumstances or indeed whether it would be appropriate for me as a Minister to try to determine what a particular community would do, but obviously he makes an important point on how we reflect on the issue of building strong communities and looking beyond division and that sense of difference. Indeed, we should not be looking backward to the issues of the past, but looking forward to what I believe can be a positive, outward-looking, exciting future for Northern Ireland and all the young people who have not been touched directly by those

issues of the past that sadly still, through family and through the impact of things such as paramilitarism and separation, touch Northern Ireland in this way.

Carla Lockhart *rose*—

James Brokenshire: I can see the hon. Lady wishes to intervene, and I will give way to her.

Carla Lockhart: I genuinely thank the Minister for his efforts in Northern Ireland; he did a sterling job when he was Secretary of State. The crux of this, in my mind, is the victims of South Down, where I believe this House has a responsibility, while councils sit within the Northern Ireland remit. This House needs to take action against a Member of this House who has an office named after two convicted IRA terrorists. I know that the Minister is bringing his remarks to a close, but could he clarify how we can have this investigated and, ultimately, overturned?

James Brokenshire: A number of the issues of which the hon. Lady speaks are, in essence, matters for the House and equally for some of the external bodies that maintain standards in relation to the House. I do not have direct oversight or responsibility for those particular organisations. I think I am correct in saying that the Leader of the House has that relationship on issues of policy. I will certainly draw her comments to the attention of the Leader of the House, which is probably the most appropriate way that I can approach this.

I hope the hon. Lady will have heard from me the emphasis that we give to confronting terrorism in all its forms and its glorification. Our approach to terrorism makes it illegal to make statements in support of a terrorist organisation, or to be reckless as to whether others will be encouraged to support such an organisation. It is rightly for the police and relevant prosecution services to decide whether any offence has been committed and whether it would be appropriate to bring charges in the circumstances. That is rightly a matter for the independent law enforcement agencies, not this House.

In conclusion, I would like again to sincerely thank the hon. Lady for raising these issues and all those who are working to tackle the threat of terrorism across the United Kingdom—all of the United Kingdom. Whatever their ideology or motivation, terrorists seek to undermine our way of life, but our message is clear: we will never compromise on the values that they hate. We will not allow them to encourage or glorify terrorism and push their warped view of the world on others, and we will maintain our relentless determination to tackle terrorism in all its forms.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): For clarification, I will ensure that this matter, in so far as it relates to a person who has been elected to this House and is therefore perhaps a matter for Mr Speaker, is drawn to Mr Speaker's attention.

Question put and agreed to.

5.26 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	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Gavin Robinson
		Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
		James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Rachel Hopkins
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Rebecca Harris	Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Patrick Grady
John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami	George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
		Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wendy Chamberlain	Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Grundy (Leigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Jonathan Edwards	Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Rebecca Harris
Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Liz Saville Roberts
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Mark Tami
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	James Heapey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami	Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Anthony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Maria Caulfield
Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Mark Tami		

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Mark Tami	John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Ian Paisley
Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con)	Anthony Mangnall
Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Mark Tami	John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew		
Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Mark Tami		
Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Mark Tami		

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Mark Tami	David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jim McMahan (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Mark Tami	James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Mark Tami	John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Rebecca Harris
Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Rachel Hopkins
Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	David T.C. Davies	Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Patrick Grady	Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con)	Anthony Mangnall	Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Mark Tami
		Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith (Lab))	Mark Tami
Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Peter Aldous	Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami	Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami	Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)	Mark Tami	John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami	Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab)	Stuart Andrew	Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Rebecca Harris	Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami	Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Mark Tami	John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Ben Lake
Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew	Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Rachel Hopkins
Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Mark Tami	Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Westminster Hall

Thursday 10 December 2020

[CHRISTINA REES *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

UK Relations with Qatar

1.30 pm

Christina Rees (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new call list system and to ensure that social distancing can be respected. I remind Members that they must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall. Members are expected to remain for the wind-ups, provided there is space in the room. Members are also asked to respect the one-way system around the room. Please exit by the door on the left. Members should sanitise their microphones using the cleaning materials provided before they use them, and dispose of those materials as they leave the room.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK relations with Qatar.

It is a pleasure to serve with you charring, Ms Rees. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for making time available for this 90-minute debate. I should, of course, as others doubtless will, refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary British-Qatar group, and in February of this year I was privileged to lead a delegation to Qatar. A number of my fellow delegates are present today. I place on record the appreciation of the APPG for the assistance that had been given to it over the years in running those delegations, especially from the UK embassy in Doha. Ajay Sharma, the ambassador, left in the course of this year and will be replaced by Jon Wilks. The assistance that the embassy has given in facilitating meetings outside the programme prepared for us by the Qatari Government over the years has always been exemplary.

We will certainly miss the relationship that we have had with Ajay, now that he has moved on. I very much hope that we will have an equally profitable and warm relationship with his successor; I am pretty sure that we will. Also, the group appreciates the assistance given to it throughout the year, especially during the delegation, by the Qatari embassy in London. His Excellency Yousef Al-Khater, the ambassador, and his staff are staunch in their support, and always willing to go the extra mile, which is appreciated by the group's members.

Shortly after we returned from Doha, we went into lockdown. It feels like an awful lot longer ago now than it was, but the start of the lockdown period illustrated rather well, in one nice little vignette, the importance of the relationship that we have with Qatar. Qatar Airways facilitated the repatriation of 100,000 UK citizens at the start of lockdown. That illustrates, at a micro level, the importance of what is, at the macro level, a very important relationship, both strategically and economically, for the United Kingdom.

It is well documented that in December 2017, Qatar purchased a number of Typhoon strike aircraft in a contract worth £5.1 billion. That is a lot of jobs in different parts of the country, and good-quality engineering jobs at that. As part of that deal, the RAF and the Qatar Emiri air force have established a joint squadron, based in this country, which is in fact the first that we have had with any other nation since the end of the second world war.

It is therefore not just a transactional relationship; we now have a growing partnership with Qatar that is enormously important. Of course, it should be remembered that in Qatar there are the RAF operational headquarters for the middle east at the Al Udeid airbase, and that RAF operatives there often run joint operations with the Emiri air force. Importantly, Qatar is part of the global coalition against Daesh. In that corner of the world, it is an important strategic ally for us.

Economically, the United Kingdom is the single largest destination for Qatari investment in Europe—something in the region of £40 billion to date. It is worth noting that more than 1,134 United Kingdom companies now operate in Qatar, 993 of which are joint ventures with Qatari business interests. We heard from a number of the people who we met during the delegation about some of the difficulties experienced in furthering those business interests with visas in this country. I know that it is not the Minister's responsibility, but to facilitate good business relations, I hope that the Home Office will hear and listen to that. Of course, this would not be a speech from the MP for Orkney and Shetland if it did not have something to say about energy. Some 80% of liquefied natural gas imports to this country in the second quarter of 2020 came from Qatar.

Several universities now have established campuses in Doha. The British Council continues to work to build links and co-ordinate the higher education presence and, indeed, partnerships such as that with the British Museum in the various cultural enterprises where we work jointly.

Of the universities that operate in Doha, probably the best known with the largest presence is University College London, but I hope hon. Members will forgive me if I mention the presence of Scotland's premier seat of higher education, the University of Aberdeen, which also has a campus there. I took myself away from the rest of the delegation for an afternoon and I was privileged to meet the management and some of those studying at that campus. It is a very impressive operation and a good example of what can be done by a university seeking to expand and reach beyond its conventional confines. A week or two after we left, the university inaugurated a new master of laws—an LLM course. Nothing makes someone feel old like realising that somebody they were an undergraduate with is now the professor of Scots law inaugurating the new course, as Professor Greg Gordon did a couple of weeks after we left.

For those myriad reasons, it is clear that over the years, the relationship between Qatar and the United Kingdom, which has historically been an important one, has grown at a remarkable rate. The growth has been organic. It is not just the state-to-state relationship that we would expect to find with the defence interests; it is the commercial interests, the energy-related contracts, and the cultural and educational institutions that are building the relationship.

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

That is where we have got to, but the focus of today's debate ought to be on considering the issues facing that relationship. Most importantly, we should look at the continuing blockade of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt which has been running for three and a half years. At the start, allegations were made about Qatar's conduct in relation to the funding of terror and some of its other foreign policy efforts. If those allegations were true, they would be very serious indeed. As the chair of an APPG in this House, I am not here to be an advocate for Qatar; it can do that for itself. I identify an important and strategic relationship, but if Qatar and any other state actor goes beyond the bounds of what is acceptable, it has to explain that for itself. However, despite numerous calls for evidence, three and a half years later we have not seen substantial evidence about the funding of terror and other things, which were used to justify the blockade.

I would be interested to know what the Minister makes of the recent restarting of the Kuwaiti-sponsored process to get the blockade resolved. I do not think it is in anybody's interests and I think we have kind of lost sight of any of the reasons why it might have started in the first place. It is certainly in the interests of the United Kingdom and the European Union that we should have a functioning Gulf Co-operation Council. As long as the blockade persists, we will not have that.

We saw one illustration of the impact on UK interests when we were able to visit the beIN Sports studios in Doha. BeIN is a global broadcasting corporation, which has purchased many of the broadcast rights for UK Premiership teams. Its product is basically being pirated by interests in Saudi Arabia, who then re-broadcast it with a very small time delay and different badging. If we ignore that and just turn a blind eye, we risk doing serious damage to the whole idea of intellectual property, especially in broadcast rights. I was pleased when, in June this year, the World Trade Organisation ruled that not investigating or prosecuting that act of piracy was a breach on the part of Saudi Arabia of its duties as a member of the WTO, because that is something that will very much come home to roost here.

It is difficult to think that the situation is not in some way associated with the now looming World cup in 2022. Members of the delegation were able to see a number of the stadiums that have been constructed, which are a remarkable achievement. It is great to see them up and ready to go. Had we not had lockdown, we would have been able to host an event in the House of Commons—I hope we will still find a way to do so—for Hassan Al Thawadi from the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy to brief Members on the first World cup in an Arab country—an exciting opportunity.

The road to getting here has not been without difficulties. Very serious breaches of labour standards and workers' conditions in the construction of World cup sites were widely reported some years ago. There was never any excusing those breaches, but it is significant to note that since the sunlight was shone on them, the old line that sunlight is the best disinfectant was shown to be a pretty true one. The construction of workers' villages has continued and has worked very effectively; the standard of accommodation has improved. The access of workers to healthcare while they are working on World cup projects has also significantly improved.

I have no doubt that an awful lot more still needs to be done. I think it is a feature of all our enterprises there that, in recognising what has been achieved, we always encourage them to do more. With the abolition of the kafala system and new laws introducing a minimum wage for the first time in a Gulf country, it is good to see that sort of progress being made in labour rights. Of course, there is much more to be done. I fervently wish to see the right of workers in Qatar to organise themselves. Our delegation were able to meet a small group of those who organise workers' rights, and it is significant that the International Labour Organisation has its office now in Doha. That is one area where I would want progress, and we continue to encourage progress in those ways.

It is worth remembering that today is international Human Rights Day. There is clearly still a great deal of progress on human rights to be made in Qatar, but in dealing with those matters, and when we complain about aspects of Qatar's human rights record, it is always important to remember the way that many such things—LGBT rights, for example—were treated in our own country. Even within my lifetime those things were illegal. The Minister has heard me say that in the past.

The purpose of engagement has to be to encourage progress. What pleases me about engagement with Qatar is that it has been repaid in progress, with improving labour rights and human rights. Of course we want more improvements and we have always wanted those things to happen faster; that is the nature of politics. However, whereas in some areas of the Gulf we engage and things just seem to get worse, the process of engagement—and I think, interestingly, this comes right from the very top, from His Highness the Emir himself—is one by which Qatar is continuing to look outwards, and doing so more rapidly, and taking its obligations on human rights and democracy seriously.

The final piece of progress that I want to mention and welcome, as I want to let others speak, is that I am delighted that the Shura Council itself is now to have direct elections, which will happen next year. That is important and it is an area where progress is probably as meaningful as we could hope. The relationship is important, and I hope that it will continue to progress. It is clearly in our commercial and strategic interest to have a strong relationship with Qatar. It is also in the strategic and economic interest of Qatar to have that strong relationship, and if, as a consequence of that, the rights of Qatari people and those who work in the country continue to improve, surely that is a pretty textbook model of what diplomacy and engagement are supposed to be about.

Christina Rees (in the Chair): If Back Benchers could speak for eight to nine minutes or less, we should get everyone in before the winding-up speeches.

1.47 pm

Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) because he has said most of the things that I was going to say, so I will not be boring anyone for very long. I entirely agree that the state of relations is truly excellent. The flying back of our people; the joint squadron—how cool is that? Of course there is now a first-class ambassador in the

shape of Yousef Al-Khater. There are perhaps more opportunities in connection with the World cup and a partnership thereafter.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned progress on workers' rights. We had a fascinating visit—I should say that I was on the same visit—and visited a large complex, where it was really interesting to see how the Qataris have cracked down on rogue employers and, indeed, have put in a minimum wage.

Finally, on the blockade of Qatar, it is clearly in everyone's interest to make sure that the Gulf Co-operation Council starts to work properly again. I know that the Americans are doing that, and I hope that we shall redouble our effort.

2.49 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I am going to bore everyone, with a coarse Essex voice, even though the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) has said everything I wanted to say. I will begin by drawing my attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I echo everything that the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said about our wonderful trip. I think he left out the name of Ibrahim. In terms of the hands-on organisation, Ibrahim was a real star. By the time I have finished, my right hon. Friend the Minister will wish that he had been with us on our hard-working trip.

I welcome the strong bilateral ties that the United Kingdom has with Qatar, especially in terms of energy, our economic partnership, and our educational and cultural ties. Historically, as we have heard, Qatar has had human rights issues, but I am pleased that the Government there have announced democratically positive initiatives to further develop the population's quality of life. I welcome those recent announcements and encourage the Qatari Government to continue on that path, and our own Government to maintain and develop our important relationship with Qatar. I say to my right hon. Friend the Minister, this is a really good time to deepen those ties.

The chattering classes talk about the trips that Members of Parliament go on. As far as I am concerned, when we go on these trips we get to know much more about our colleagues than would otherwise have been the case. My right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) learned a little bit more about me many years ago when we went on a trip to Israel.

I have to say, our trip to Qatar was rather special. The highlight was undoubtedly our riding of camels. The House might be interested to know that the Emir took me at my word, and a few weeks later two camels were delivered to the Amess household, and they are grazing very nicely in our back garden. My wife occasionally invites them into the house. The Emir was as good as his word; very generous. There was a wonderful moment when we were in Land Rovers, going up and down sand dunes. It brought home to us all that it is not just about the desert, camels and all that, but, underlying it all, Qatar is a magnificent country that is truly underrated.

As vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary British-Qatar group, we work closely with the ambassador, who is absolutely first class, and relevant organisations to develop and foster good relations between our country and Qatar. The visit that I refer to was in February 2018.

It does not seem possible, but we went again on one of the very last trips before lockdown, in February this year; it seems a long time ago.

I am a sponsor of early-day motion 1093, which was tabled by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. That welcomed the announcement by the Emir of Qatar that the country will hold elections for its advisory Shura Council next October, which is an important step on the road to democracy. Three years ago, I felt very strongly that Qatar had an unfair political and diplomatic blockade. I know the Minister has to dance very carefully, as those in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office always have to do. He would not want to upset any of the neighbours in the region, and oil is all-important. I am not constrained by any of that, even though I have been to most of those countries.

I thought the blockade was very unfair. It was placed upon Qatar by a Saudi-led group of Gulf countries. I am pleased that our Government have called for all sides to de-escalate and have pledged our firm commitment to our strategic partnership with the Gulf Co-operation Council. It is positive news that Saudi Arabia and Qatar have confirmed their commitment to reaching a solution and protecting Gulf solidarity. However, that is not a breakthrough, but at least it is a step in the right direction.

Peaceful talks need to be successfully accomplished in the Gulf. The United Kingdom should have an active interest in ending the blockade and protecting Qatar so it can continue to improve the lives of workers and women, and promote democracy. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) will have much to say about her engagement in terms of women's rights.

Workers' rights have been a big issue in Qatar, with poor working conditions and problems with immigrant labour and human trafficking. I am very pleased that the Government announced a non-discriminatory minimum wage, which is one of the highest in the developing world and the first of its kind in the middle east—that is really good. The Government have also announced the removal of the "no objection" certificate requirement, which means that employees in Qatar can now move between jobs after serving a short notice period. That will undoubtedly inject competition into the job market, incentivise employers to respect the rights of their workforce, and increase job satisfaction.

The workers' right reforms are linked especially to the 2022 World cup, which will be hosted in Qatar. I must say that our trip to the new stadium was absolutely out of this world. I have never been in a stadium where the doors magically open and it is all air-conditioned—it was state-of-the-art stuff. I was in the royal gallery for the visit of the Emir. One of his wives—they tend to have more than one wife, and I think he has three or five—jumped into the air with great excitement. I thought, "It is utter madness to have the World cup in Qatar," but I was so wrong. They have really thought of everything, and I think it will be an absolutely fantastic competition. I said to the Emir, "I hope the final will be between Qatar and England." Of course, I would expect England to win the match. *[Interruption.]* I know that Scotland is doing a bit better at the moment.

I am pleased that the UK is involved in Qatar's sporting events. UK-based companies have exported £940 million-worth of goods to Qatar already, supporting projects that are underpinning Qatar's development and its preparations for the 2022 World cup. If the

[Sir David Amess]

Minister ratchets up the conversations with the relevant Department—the World cup is under two years away—perhaps we could do even more trade than we are doing at the moment.

The English Football Association has signed an agreement with the Qatar Football Association to promote grassroots football, youth development and women's football, among other things. I feel strongly about women's football—I know that as an accomplished athlete, Ms Rees, you feel very strongly about it too—because my youngest daughter once played for Arsenal Ladies. The Amess household is very keen on women's football. It is welcome to see the United Kingdom play such a crucial role in the development of equal access to sport in Qatar, and hopefully in the rest of the middle east.

The economic partnership between the UK and Qatar is very strong, and hopefully it will continue to develop. It is a mutual relationship, as both countries benefit from the other's financial investments. As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland has already said—I will repeat it, but in an Essex accent—the UK is the most popular destination in Europe for Qatari investment, with £40 billion invested to date in sectors such as commercial property, banking and finance. Just like we are involved in supporting the 2022 World cup in Qatar, investment from Qatar funded the London 2012 Olympic village. I was privileged to chair the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Bill Committee—coming from the east end of London, my goodness, what a wonderful celebration of sporting activity the games was! Our companies and businesses benefit from operating in the Qatari market as new opportunities become available. As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland has already said, 1,134 UK companies operate in the Qatari market, and 993 are joint Qatari and British ventures. I hope the strong economic partnership continues.

As we all know—I will not upset the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock—Southend is the most important part of Essex, which is why we are going to become a city at the time of Her Majesty the Queen's platinum jubilee, so I was delighted to welcome Ambassador Al-Khater and representatives of Qatar's biggest bank and Qatar Airways to Southend in March last year. They were absolutely wowed by the place, particularly the pier. Without upsetting local residents, they are keen—I hope they are still keen—to be involved in some sort of joint venture for a marina. There are many exciting opportunities for investment and development in Southend. As we leave the European Union, I hope that the visit will go some way to strengthening our ties.

Possibly the most well-known opportunity, as the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said, is energy and oil. Qatar accounted for 80% of the United Kingdom's liquefied natural gas imports in the second quarter of this year, which represented 51% of total energy imports for the UK between April and June 2020. My goodness, they are important! Qatar is an important energy partner for us and there is an opportunity for co-operation on hydrogen, specifically green hydrogen, which the Government—and I support them—are keen on. Hydrogen is part of the Prime Minister's 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution and Qatar has an abundance of hydrocarbons.

In the long run, all industries need to decarbonise and there is a potential pathway for that involving sustainable energy. The UK-Qatari energy relationship could be strengthened further as we import green hydrogen to develop the first town heated entirely by hydrogen by the end of the decade—such is the Prime Minister's goal, detailed in his 10-point plan.

Our relationship with Qatar does not just revolve around business and economic opportunities. It also focuses on education and culture. As has been said, several UK universities have campuses in Qatar. We saw some of them. For example, University College London has signed a 10-year agreement to deliver courses to more than 2,500 students. Similarly, around 3,000 Qatari students are studying in the UK—we want more of them—who benefit from our educational systems and learn about our culture.

As well as encouraging mutual relations in the education sector, there is also collaboration in the air force. The Royal Air Force's operational headquarters in the middle east is in Qatar, and a joint UK-Qatari squadron has been established so personnel from both air forces can train together. The generous work of Qatar Airways, which is among the best in the world, has helped 100,000 British citizens reunite with their families during the early stages of the pandemic. We should not forget that.

I am very pleased that we have such a strong relationship with Qatar in many aspects of life and business. I welcome the Defence Secretary's meeting with his Qatari counterpart in October this year to strengthen UK-Qatari defence relationships. I hope our relations with the country continue to grow. Qatar's energy and financial investments are important to our economy and we should explore trade opportunities for green hydrogen. With our assistance, Qatar can continue to promote democratic practices and human rights advances in a country that has already recognised the importance of its population's freedom and quality of life.

Christina Rees (in the Chair): I do not think I will ever be able to forget the vision of the two camels. Shall we now call you “Two-Camels” Amess? [Laughter.]

2.3 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on bringing this debate. He and I have been together in a few Westminster Hall debates and Qatar has come up on several occasions. It is an absolute pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), whose constituency town is soon to become a city. I think those two camels he has will come in handy for the camel rides on the beach at Southend. Perhaps that is a new business idea. It is always a pleasure to be in a debate with him, because I can always put my heart into it.

Qatar and the United Kingdom's diplomatic relations stretch back some 100 years. We have been friends, partners and business partners for a long time. The annual Qatar-UK strategic dialogue is an important mechanism in aiding the development of bilateral relations between Qatar and the UK. It is not all one-way traffic; it is two-way traffic. We gain and they gain, and we can all work better together. The meetings follow up on decisions and projects, support the bilateral track and explore opportunities for further co-operation that benefits

both countries, economically, socially and physically. It is the kind of meeting and co-operation that it is great to see. The UK is the single largest destination for Qatari investment in Europe with, as others have said, £40 billion invested to date. Total bilateral trade between Qatar and the UK was £6.7 billion in 2019—an increase of 21% year on year. More growth is expected and hoped for. UK exports to Qatar include industrial machinery and equipment, electrical machinery, vehicles, aircraft engines, luxury goods, textiles and power generation equipment.

Qatari gas supplies now account for 31% of all UK gas demand and 79% of all UK gas imports. I am not being churlish by any means—I realise that the relationship is very important—but I ask the Minister whether it is always good to have all our eggs in one basket. We do not have all our eggs in one basket for gas supplies at this moment in time, but we perhaps do not trade with the USA or Nigeria as we did in the past. I am not saying we should not do it, but I wonder if it is the best idea.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): The gas supplies that the hon. Member is talking about come through my constituency in Preseli Pembrokeshire, which I will refer to in my remarks later on. The point about opening up that facility was not about putting all our energy eggs in one basket. It was to give the United Kingdom new sources of energy supply, thereby diversifying our energy supplies into the country, thereby enhancing our energy security. I believe that is the correct way of looking at it.

Jim Shannon: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's intervention, but no matter what, we need to have other suppliers and we need to make sure that they are as important. If something were to happen and we had neglected Nigeria and the United States, that would be a very backward step. We just need to make sure that we are doing it right.

There are 1,134 UK companies operating in the Qatari market and some 993 are joint Qatari/British ventures. Defence-wise, Al Udeid airbase is the nerve centre in the fight against terrorism in the middle east and host to the Royal Air Force's Operation Shader. The RAF's operational headquarters in the middle east is at that airbase; I was told there were 30 British officers there but, according to the Library pack, there are 160-plus there. Whatever the number may be, it underlines a close relationship, which is critically important.

Qatari and UK forces often participate in joint training exercises, which is a testament to our strong and enduring partnership. Joint training exercises take place regularly between the Qatari Emiri air force and the Royal Air Force, the latest being a joint exercise in early December 2020, in Doha, where the joint UK/Qatari Typhoon squadron participated in an exercise. As part of an ongoing programme of co-operation with the British Royal Navy, Qatari naval forces and the Royal Navy conducted joint exercises in Qatari waters in spring 2019.

In 2018, Qatar signed a letter of intent with the UK for co-operation in the field of combating terrorism, which is so important and vital. I have another question to the Minister. I am not being churlish, but I am asking a question for the record, with the hope that we can clear this up; I am sure the Minister will be more than able to do that.

It has been indicated to me that Qatar has been described as “a big supporter” of Muslim Brotherhood-linked networks in Europe and that the financial vehicle for that is through the Nectar Trust in London. Perhaps the Minister will be able to indicate who is monitoring the relationship between Qatar's investment with the Muslim Brotherhood and projects that are happening there, to make sure that we are across all those things, when it comes to co-operating in the field of combating terrorism, so that we are all doing the same thing and working together. There is a physical and outward understanding, and working together, but I ask the question for the record and I hope we can get an answer. The letter outlines commitments on information and intelligence sharing—perhaps intelligence sharing is going on there, and perhaps that is what it is all about—as well as on law enforcement co-operation relating to terrorism activities, co-operation in tackling threats facing the transport sector, especially aviation, and co-operation in combating financial crimes. That is all good, positive stuff and what people like to see.

I am very thankful for these positive relations and for the steps taken by the Qatari Government to address labour issues such as those presented by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland about a year to a year and a half ago during a Westminster Hall debate in which I was pleased to participate. Since then, the Qatari Government have introduced several reforms. I cannot say that that was exactly a result of that debate, but I will tell the House one thing: it probably moved people to think about it. The right hon. Gentleman deserves every credit for that.

In 2017, a temporary minimum wage was set, a law for domestic workers was introduced and new dispute resolution committees were set up. In 2018, a workers' support and insurance fund was established and the requirement for most workers to get their employer's permission to leave the country, which was a key issue at that time, was ended. In 2019, the establishment of joint labour committees at companies employing more than 30 workers for collective bargaining was mandated and enhanced guidelines on heat stress aimed at employers and workers were disseminated—that was another issue highlighted in the debate. Although they are positive, those reforms have not gone far enough, and their implementation has been called uneven by Human Rights Watch, which we cannot ignore.

Once we solidify our relationship, I believe it will be appropriate to encourage continued improvement in those aspects while acknowledging that there is much more to be done. It is my belief that we in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—better together—should use our influence and friendships to make a difference throughout the world. I know that we can do that, and that we are doing that, and I know that the Minister will come back on that. It is important that our friends in Qatar take this in the spirit in which it was intended—as a gentle reminder that we do the best we can for our own families, and that we expect them to do the same for theirs.

2.11 pm

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing the debate and reminding us of those days, pre lockdown, when we could travel

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

and go on fact-finding visits. I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. That was a truly fascinating visit to a long-standing ally of this country, but I recognise that there are obviously still many issues about which there are ongoing discussions and challenges.

I highlight the issues that a number of colleagues raised regarding the blockade. It is, of course, illegal, and we strongly hope that those issues can be dealt with in the immediate future. The right hon. Gentleman was right to highlight that the reasons for it are very serious. I gently suggest that terror issues emanate from a number of states across the world, and that it would perhaps be more constructive to deal with them collaboratively, as Governments in dialogue with each other, rather than by taking illegal measures designed to inflict economic damage.

As it happens, the country has responded extremely positively in the wake of the blockade. It is a case of "What does not destroy me makes me stronger." During our visit, we visited the new port that the Government constructed in order to import supplies directly, given that they cannot get them through their normal established trading routes. As the hon. Member for Thurrock, with the port of Tilbury in my constituency, I often describe my constituency as the ports capital of the UK. In that regard, I have to remind my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) that it is far more important than the so-called city of Southend. That new port was a hugely impressive operation. London built its wealth as a port city, but as trade became more sophisticated and ships ever bigger, ports had to become bigger, and so the port of London moved east to my constituency. We are very much constrained by the available space in delivering a modern port, so it was truly a revelation to see this fantastic new facility. I pay tribute to the engineering feat accomplished there. I look forward to that port building from strength to strength, as well as to some good shipping line links between Tilbury in my constituency and London Gateway, and indeed Qatar, so congratulations to them.

We have had a number of references to human rights issues surrounding Qatar. I tend to take the view that although it is absolutely important that this country, which prides itself on being liberal and having the rule of law, should be at the forefront of pushing for human rights and tackling discrimination and oppression wherever they occur around the world, equally, we need to be a bit less holier than thou about it. It takes a long time to foster cultural change, and the truth of the matter is we are not as perfect as we like to think we are. Some of the issues come down to how we really tackle behaviour and establish better human rights. It is very easy to pass a law and say, "This is now the law and this is the state of play." But for that to really filter down into changes of behaviour and good practice takes an awfully long time.

We must not be accused of looking the other way when there are human rights abuses, but we also need to give credit where it is due. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesend (Adam Holloway) mentioned the camp that we visited. It is true that the facilities were very good there. I have visited similar places in the Emirates, and I think we need to be real and say that lots of

countries rely on imported immigrant labour to deliver the jobs that they are not prepared to do. Some countries are better than others at ensuring that the rights of those people are protected. Although I am satisfied that the direction of travel in Qatar is extremely positive, there is clearly a way to go.

Obviously, we welcome the minimum wage legislation. At the instigation of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), we actually met some workers who clearly acknowledged that the opportunity to work in Qatar was life-changing and very good for them and their families. However, there were still some issues where perhaps their rights could have been enhanced, so that is very much still a work in progress.

I would also say that there are countries whose economies are entirely driven by sending workers overseas to repatriate money into those countries. Personally, I find that morally obscene. We, as a nation, should be encouraging them to become more sustainable. I consider those countries that benefit from such practice as talent-stripping developing countries. It is all very well to have a good record on dishing out international aid, but if, at the same time, we are taking their best talent to work here, I am afraid that becomes somewhat hypocritical. We need to acknowledge that when it comes to manning the NHS, we do the same to countries such as the Philippines as Qatar does to countries such as Nepal to get workers. We should be a bit more honest with ourselves about that.

We can also do better on some issues. I mentioned shipping. Again, we turn a blind eye to the fact that lots of the crews that work our ships and keep our supermarkets stocked are working in conditions far worse than those that we saw in Qatar. Let us acknowledge that this is a collective endeavour for the whole world to tackle in ensuring that all workers across the world are treated fairly and are given the rights that they are due to expect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) mentioned the question of women. When we went to see the Emir, I was very pleased to have the opportunity to discuss this. Again, I was the only woman in the room, but I am quite used to being the only woman in the room in this country in meetings to do with politics, as I am sure you are, Ms Rees. It is not peculiar to countries in the middle east. I said that we welcome the fact they are moving towards democratic elections, but I asked what the prospects were for seeing women elected. I was very pleased that the Emir said he was retaining a number of positions that would be directly appointed by him. He gave a very clear commitment that if a sufficient number of women were not directly elected, he would use his power of appointment to make sure women achieved representation. That is an extremely constructive position to take. I put that point to the Minister because I hope that that is something that we will hold the Emir to. Frankly, having women in politics civilises nations. I am sure everyone would agree, so let us make sure we do our bit to encourage that.

As we approach the World cup, everyone is very excited. I share the enthusiasm of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West for the football stadium. I am not the biggest fan of football, to be quite frank, but it is a major engineering feat and I do not think I have ever been so cool and relaxed sitting in a football

stadium, despite the heat outside. It is quite special. I know that a lot of concern has been expressed about the treatment of tourists who go to see the football, with particular concerns about gay rights. Again, these things were discussed and there was some understanding of the issues, but I reaffirm the point made by the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. In this country, it is only very recently that we have established gay rights in the way that we now take for granted. We can welcome the tone that has been taken about how tourists will be treated as part of the World cup, but we must recognise that there is much more to do.

I have little more to add. I again congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I look forward to strengthening Britain's relationship with Qatar and to Britain doing its best to make sure that relations within the GCC are returned to a more constructive position.

Christina Rees (in the Chair): I expect the wind-ups to start at 2.30 pm.

2.22 pm

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Rees. I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on securing this debate. It is the second debate this week in which I have come in on the coattails of the right hon. Gentleman. It is an important and timely moment in which to secure the debate and I appreciate the way that he talked about it. He said that he is not here just to be an advocate for Qatar. I am not sure whether he used the phrase "critical friend", but he certainly spoke in that spirit, and that is the spirit in which all right hon. and hon. Members have spoken this afternoon, which is right. The relationship between the UK and Qatar is a deepening and broad one. It is multi-dimensional and fascinating. It is a good thing that we are here this afternoon discussing that and looking in greater detail at it.

Various Members have referred to the energy relationship, the partnership, between the UK and Qatar, which will be the focus of my remarks. First, let me just say that in my time in this place over the past 15 years I have known and engaged with all of the Qatari ambassadors who have been in London, and I have found them and their teams to be excellent to work with. In my discussions with them, the point that hits home most strongly is their desire to see a genuine, deep partnership and friendship flourish between the United Kingdom and that have been Qatar. Yes, we point to the enormous sums of money that have been invested from Qatar into the United Kingdom, but the relationship should not just be about financial investment. It is cultural, educational and all of the other aspects that various Members have pointed to this afternoon.

As I said, I want to focus on the energy partnership. As I already said in my intervention on the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), the enormously important gas import relationship that we have with Qatar comes through Wales, through my constituency in Preseli Pembrokeshire. One of the first visits that I made as a brand-new Member of Parliament in 2005 was to the construction site in Milford Haven to see the enormous South Hook facility being built. It was one of the largest regassification projects in Europe and a partnership between Qatargas, ExxonMobil and Total, three of the world's largest and most experienced energy companies.

At that time I also had the opportunity to visit Qatar. Sadly, I was not on the delegation last February, which sounded like a lot of fun, but I have been to Qatar. At the time, I saw the other end of the gas supply chain and the enormous plants at Ras Laffan where the gas is turned into liquefied natural gas. It is a remarkable feat of engineering. That tiny country, Qatar, sits on an enormous energy resource, and engineers and scientists have been able to unlock it and turn it into a tradeable commodity that can be shipped by sea to countries around the world.

I strongly believe that the investment made 15 years ago in the South Hook plant in my constituency has enhanced our energy security. In the same way, the facilities built in Japan to import liquefied natural gas from Qatar, at a time when it had to wind down many of its nuclear plants, have enhanced Japan's energy security. The Qatar gas fields have enhanced energy security for numerous countries around the world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) talked about the sheer volume of gas that has been coming into the country through the terminal. Last year, it celebrated its 10th anniversary. Up to that point, it had processed more than 65 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas. If it were supplying London alone, that is enough natural gas to keep the capital going for a decade.

As an operation critical to national infrastructure, the South Hook terminal played an important role in our country's response to the coronavirus pandemic. During the initial lockdown earlier this year, from the end of March to the end of July, the terminal received 35 vessels and processed just under 3.5 million tonnes of LNG. To put that in context, South Hook provided 85% of the UK's LNG market and almost 20% of the UK's entire gas market throughout that first lockdown. On most days from mid-June, 100% of the LNG delivered to the grid came from South Hook. The team at the terminal are looking at projects potentially to increase capacity and further strengthen the resilience of the UK's energy system.

Thanks to the South Hook terminal, the positive benefits of UK-Qatari relations are felt throughout my constituency in not only the investment, skilled jobs and apprenticeships that the terminal provides, but the company's support for schools, community activities and numerous charities. The relationship is felt in real terms and greatly appreciated.

Another aspect of the UK-Qatari relationship that I would like to draw attention to relates to Cardiff airport, from which, since May 2018, Qatar Airways has run a direct route between Cardiff and Doha. The route was a moderate success in its first year and carried about 82,000 passengers. Since then, its popularity has grown and matured with steady growth, but then came the pandemic with its severe consequences for the aviation industry. I remain hopeful that we will see the redevelopment of the route and the resumption of growth.

I was delighted and encouraged when, in September, the new British ambassador to Qatar, Jon Wilks, visited Cardiff airport and met the interim CEO, Spencer Birns, and the chair to learn more about the exciting opportunities that lie between Wales and Qatar. I was pleased that, following that meeting, the ambassador said that he will be advocating for Wales in Qatar with extra knowledge and confidence in the months ahead.

[Stephen Crabb]

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

Several hon. Members have referred to the World cup in 2022. It is not just England that have already qualified—I understand that Scotland still have work to do—but Wales as well. Nothing would fill me with more pleasure and pride than to be on a flight from Cardiff to Doha to watch the Wales team conquer other nations in the World cup in 2022.

We are living in a time of enormous change in the Gulf region. Hon. Members have referred to some of the diplomatic challenges in the region. Of course, the United Kingdom has numerous strategic priorities and objectives there. It is a complicated region, but I hope that the UK-Qatar relationship goes from strength to strength and flourishes. It is a time of change. I sat in on a call with the Israeli ambassador, the Bahraini ambassador and the UAE ambassador a couple of weeks ago. The three of them were talking about their new co-operation and peace agreements, and it was thrilling and really encouraging. My hope is that that change will continue and that the United Kingdom will use its diplomatic strength and networks of relationships in the region to encourage more change; and nothing would fill me with more pleasure than to see Qatar sharing in some of those changes. There is lots of work to be done, but I remain hopeful that better days lie ahead, diplomatically, for all these countries and we will all benefit from the new investments and new co-operation that flow through such relationships.

2.30 pm

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in your place and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I warmly congratulate the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on bringing this debate before us today, and on a speech with which I am in almost total agreement, with the exception of the idea that Aberdeen is Scotland's premier university when everybody knows it is Stirling—it is important that we get that on the record. But on Qatar at least, we agree. Qatar is an important friend of Scotland and of the United Kingdom, an important player in the Gulf region and an important player, potentially, in building peace in the wider region.

Qatar is a friend and, as friends, we need a dialogue based on honesty and frankness. As we have heard, Qatar has a number of close links with the United Kingdom and with the EU, but, on political reform and respect for human rights, it has a way to go. It is important that we acknowledge progress, but it is also important that we call for more, to build on that success.

Rightly, Qatar was warmly praised in 2018 when it joined the international covenant on civil and political rights. That was very welcome. But in January 2020, a subsequent law amending the Qatari penal code authorised the imprisonment of—I will quote this—

“anyone who broadcasts, publishes, or republishes false or biased rumours, statements, or news, or inflammatory propaganda, domestically or abroad, with the intent to harm national interests, stir up public opinion, or infringe on the social system or the public system of the state”.

That could mean almost anything, and that is a poor piece of legislation which I think deserves criticism.

We have heard also about Qatar's attitude to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. As a gay man myself, this issue is close to my heart. The Qatari Government say that everyone is welcome at the World cup in 2022, and the eyes of the world are watching to ensure that that is the case. There has been progress, but there is a lot of progress yet to be made.

At the time of the World cup in 2022, the eyes of the world will be on Qatar and on the middle east. It is an opportunity for Qatar to shine and an opportunity also for the middle east to shine, and, as a friend of the middle east, with close connections to it, I really, truly hope that it does. However, there remains concern about labour rights in Qatar. The concern is less, perhaps, about the laws themselves, because a number of progressive pieces of legislation have been passed. The issue is, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, the patchy enforcement of those laws, particularly where there are powerful, family-run corporations that need to step up their behaviour.

Amnesty International estimates that perhaps 1,000 migrant workers could have died. We do not know, because there has been a lack of transparency about the numbers, but we do know that many more have worked in appalling conditions without pay for many months, so there is a need for the Qatari authorities to step up and for Qatar to enforce the laws that it has and to be more transparent in that.

I say this to our Qatari friends, who will be paying attention to today's debate, and I say it as a friend of Qatar: it is very much in Qatar's interests to abide by and enforce the rule of law, because that will strengthen its case in claiming its own rights against the illegal embargo by Saudi Arabia. We have heard a very powerful—

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. I am very sorry, but I am advised that there is a Division in the main Chamber and, in fact, there will be three Divisions, so I will have to suspend our proceedings for 35 minutes.

2.33 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

3.8 pm

On resuming—

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): The debate may now continue until 3.35 pm.

Alyn Smith: Thank you, Mr McCabe. I have only my concluding remarks left, as I had largely finished my speech before the Division bell rang.

I had been talking about the blockade—the illegal blockade—of Qatar. This is an area where there is a real role for the UK to play, as interlocutor and intermediary between Riyadh and the various other parties. A functioning Gulf Co-operation Council is in all our interests right now; the GCC could play an important role in cohering the region and dealing with other places.

We have seen that the rights of Qatari nationals have been infringed in this situation and what is particularly concerning for me is the infringement of their religious rights; we have seen infringements of their right to travel into Saudi for Hajj and for Umrah. That is very much to be regretted. The blockade is illegal and also to

be regretted. It should stop and we can help with that process. The Kuwaitis are doing some heavy lifting in that process, and I would be grateful for an assurance from the Minister that we support those efforts and an outline of what we are doing to help them in the discussions that they are having.

3.9 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is, as ever, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, and I thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing the debate. He is a long-time advocate of the importance of the United Kingdom's relationship with Qatar, not least in his ongoing role as chair of the all-party parliamentary group, although I will point out to him that Scotland's premier university is, of course, St Andrews. [*Laughter.*]

I also thank the hon. Members for Gravesham (Adam Holloway), for Southend West (Sir David Amess), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), and the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), some of whom are no longer in their place, as well as the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith).

The hon. Member for Southend West is not in his place, but I would mention that normally after visits people are given a book, a cake or a bottle of wine. To get camels is quite extraordinary and something I shall not forget.

British relationships with Qatar go back more than 100 years, prior to, during and after the protectorate period of the early and mid-20th century. Potentially, that relationship has deep and significant diplomatic, security and economic benefits for the people of Qatar and the people of the UK—and, indeed, the people of Wales—as well as for the region. As an example of that partnership, I had the pleasure of studying alongside representatives of Qatar at the Royal College of Defence Studies a few years ago. We enjoy crucial co-operation, not least with respect to the Royal Air Force, and indeed other allied air forces, at the Al Udeid airbase.

It would be remiss of me not to reflect on the particularly special relationship between Qatar and Wales, not least through the air link with Qatar Airways, facilitated by the Welsh Government and our Economy Minister Ken Skates, which helped to connect Cardiff international airport directly to the world. That link is suspended because of the pandemic and low winter demand, but I hope that as things improve into the spring, we can re-establish that important route, given the aspirations we have heard about for Wales in relation to the 2022 World cup.

We also heard about a crucial link with the South Hook LNG terminal. I had the pleasure of visiting that facility, on a visit with the Welsh Affairs Committee when I was first elected. It was fascinating, given the critical role that the terminal plays in the diversity of our energy supply in the UK. Will the Minister reflect on how the relationship is developing, particularly ahead of next year's commitments that we need to make on climate change and moving away from fossil fuels? How he perceives the transition we must make, which is being implemented in our country at such facilities and in Qatar, is critical.

We have heard lots about security and co-operation, and earlier this year the Royal Air Force and Qatar Emiri air force Typhoon squadron, No. 12 Squadron, commenced flying—the joint squadron that we heard about. We also heard about the acquisition by Qatar of the nine Hawk aircraft, which could lead to a new squadron. Given the ongoing threat posed by Daesh and other extremist groups in the immediate and near region, joint defence and security improvements are significant steps in protecting security in the region. That is reflected in our relationships in many other key locations, including the Duqm port in Oman and the Royal Navy facility we are developing there.

We have heard about crucial economic co-operation. We have an ever-deepening economic relationship, and since 2017 the UK has been one of the most significant, if not the most significant, destinations for Qatari investment—£35 billion-worth. Significant announcements were made at the Qatar-UK business forum in March 2017. The UK's important wider diplomatic relationships with Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Egypt, among others, mean that it can play a critical role with international partners such as the United States, Kuwait and others to work to ease the ongoing diplomatic crisis, which has lasted three and a half years. I would appreciate—I am sure other Members have asked for this as well—an update on how the Minister sees the dispute, how he sees it being resolved and what role the UK Government are playing in facilitating candid conversation.

Given the complexity of the political and security situation in the Gulf and the wider middle east, we must always consider the implications of our engagement, particularly when it comes to military and security arrangements. There are attempts to influence policy and behaviour by the larger powers in the region, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, and we must always be conscious of that. Given the ongoing conflict in Yemen, for example, and the devastating humanitarian disaster, will the Minister give us his latest assessment of Qatar and other regional powers in relation to that conflict, and say what we are doing to resolve it? Indeed, what are the prospects for wider peace within the region, which is something I would hope for? We have seen a number of peace deals recently with Israel, so how does the Minister see Qatari-Israeli relationships?

This has been mentioned in a number of speeches, but it is critical today to recognise international Human Rights Day. Today is the anniversary of the adoption of the universal declaration of human rights on 10 December 1948. A former Labour MP and trade unionist, Charles Dukes, later Lord Dukeston, played a critical role in drafting that document, although tragically he died before its adoption. Britain was one of the key players that insisted that a moral principle on human rights was not enough, but that legal force and action were needed to defend basic human dignity worldwide. As I have said on many occasions, I regret that some of the Government's recent actions have undermined those commitments on the global stage and caused the loss of our influence in some key UN human rights bodies and others. That is after a proud tradition of defending human rights and the rule of law globally under Governments of multiple colours in the last few decades.

On the comments of the hon. Member for Thurrock, it is not about being holier than thou. It is about accepting that, because the dignity and rights of human

[Stephen Doughty]

beings are universal, when we have frank and friendly relationships with countries such as Qatar, we use those relationships to be candid.

Jim Shannon: Surely one of the good things about having the relationship that the UK has with Qatar is that a good friend can be critical and constructive, and can say things in a way that the person can take on board. People do it with me; I do it with others. It can be constructive.

Stephen Doughty: As ever, the hon. Gentleman makes an important point which I agree with.

The UK can never turn a blind eye to those challenges. Our relationship should be based on mutual respect for human rights, inclusive democracy and the rule of law. That particularly affects the issue of workers' rights. We have heard about the World cup. Since Qatar bid successfully to stage the World cup, there have been serious, ongoing allegations of exploitation and labour abuse of millions of men and women, mostly from Asian and African countries, who migrated to Qatar for work. In 2013, a shocking report from the International Trade Union Confederation estimated that up to 1,200 people may have died, mainly poor migrant workers from Nepal and India. Indeed, Amnesty International reported in March that hundreds of migrant workers were rounded up and detained by police across Doha for the stated purpose of covid testing, only to find themselves forced on to planes and sent back to their country of origin. That is obviously of deep concern. What assessment has the Minister made of those allegations?

It is important to recognise that there have been substantial changes since the partnership with the ILO in 2017, such as the regulation of the employment of domestic workers, a partial abolition of the exit permit, a mandatory minimum wage, a Government-run shelter for survivors of abuse, and the significant labour reforms passed on 8 September to deal with the abusive kafala system. Those are all important, but there is still a significant distance to travel. Will the Minister comment on how he sees those developments progressing?

There are also significant concerns about the Qatari legal system. There are allegations of arbitrary travel bans and detentions, such as the cases of Najeeb Mohamed al-Nuaimi and Mohammed Yusuf al-Sulaiti. Have those been raised by the UK Government with counterparts in Doha?

We heard about the situation for women and girls. Unfortunately, despite some progress, there are still significant disadvantages and inequalities for women and girls in Qatar, including within marriages and within families, and, of course, with respect to domestic violence and shocking sexual violence. We have also heard about the situation for the LGBT+ community with the law as it stands. That has implications. I am a Welsh football fan. I am also a gay football fan. I would love to be able to travel to see Wales in a World cup, but I would have to make those considerations before I could make that sort of trip. I hope that we can ensure that the World cup is an open and welcoming environment for all fans, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.

Indeed, there are minority groups within Qatar as well, including the al-Ghufran clan of the al-Murrah tribe, which have ongoing issues around statelessness.

Can the Minister comment on that? There is also the situation regarding the death penalty. I accept that Qatar has not carried out death sentences in recent times, which is welcome, and a contrast to President Trump fast-forwarding executions in his remaining days in office—what an absolutely shocking situation. What progress have we made working with the Qatari Government on abolishing the death penalty?

We have also heard about the planned elections to the Shura Council. I hope that those go ahead. Similar promises have not been fulfilled in the past, so I hope they are this time. Can the Minister provide us with an update on that?

In an increasingly unstable world, with challenges of terrorism, conflict, climate change, and, of course, the pandemic and economic contraction, the UK's relationships with countries around the world, particularly in the Gulf, are vital for the security and safety of the British people and the global community. Qatar can and should be a valued partner in the region, but close friendships come with the responsibility to be honest and frank, and to seek constructive change. I hope that the UK Government's engagement with Qatar will continue to be productive and friendly in that vein.

3.19 pm

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (James Cleverly): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, and I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing the debate and giving me, on behalf of the Government, as well as other right hon. and hon. Members, the opportunity to speak positively, openly and frankly about the UK's relationship with Qatar.

I pay tribute to the all-party parliamentary group for the work it does and the commitment of its members to building on what is already a strong UK-Qatari relationship. Qatar is one of our closest allies in the region, and the group plays a crucial role in fostering those links through open and constructive dialogue. I had the pleasure of visiting Qatar in October as part of my first official visit to the Gulf. My time in Doha emphasised to me the deep-rooted nature and the dynamism of our bilateral relationship, from trade and investment to energy and defence, from sport and culture to education and healthcare.

We have heard a number of speeches from right hon. and hon. Members on those important areas and I will touch on a number of them shortly. My dear and hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) speaks almost as passionately about Doha as he does about his great soon-to-be city, Southend. I do hope that I get an official invitation to the twinning ceremony between Doha and Southend, were that to happen. He made the important and very true point about UK-Qatari relations that the person-to-person relationships matter hugely. On my visit, I was warmly welcomed by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi and Lolwah al-Khater.

I was reminded that over 16,000 British nationals live and work in Qatar, and the UK is a second home to many Qataris. There were a record 175,000 visits from Qatar to the UK in 2019, worth over half a billion pounds to the UK economy. I am particularly pleased to note that, since last month, travellers from Qatar can

come to the UK without the need for quarantine on arrival. I hope that, in the near future, UK travellers will be able to visit Qatar under the same circumstances.

I echo publicly the thanks that I made privately to Akbar Al Baker, chief executive officer of Qatar Airways, to acknowledge its invaluable support during the repatriation of British nationals. In the intervening period, Qatar Airways has become the biggest international airline for passengers and cargo. It played an essential role in the repatriation efforts of British nationals earlier this year.

Mr Carmichael: The Minister is right to highlight the role of Qatar Airways. He will also be aware that, as things stand in relation to covid, the contribution of Qatar in respect of the Gavi summit has been significant. Will he recognise that contribution and see how we might build on it as the vaccination programme goes live in this country? We need to share that expertise around the globe.

James Cleverly: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for highlighting that. As I have said both publicly and privately, I was struck by the fact that, during these times of intense difficulties, the strength of these bilateral friendships has really come to the fore. That is particularly true, as he says, in relation to the vaccine summit, and I have no doubt that it will continue to be true for the distribution of the vaccine, or vaccines, as we collectively—globally—take the fight to covid.

During my visit, I was fortunate to build on recent engagement by my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary and the Home Secretary, all of whom have met Qatari Ministers in recent months. Those close ties allow us to engage on difficult topics and influence change. In line with many of the comments of colleagues today, the UK Government do not shy away from raising human rights concerns whenever and wherever required, in public as well as in private. We welcome the announcement of elections to the Shura Council and look forward to watching those go ahead.

We also welcome the concrete steps that Qatar has taken to date on workers' rights, with significant reforms, including the abolition of exit permits for almost all workers, as has been mentioned, and a non-discriminatory minimum wage. We hope for full implementation of those measures. Everyone deserves the right to work safely and securely, whether in Qatar, the UK or anywhere else. We continue to engage regularly with international labour organisations and explore areas of their work where the UK can add particular value. We stand ready further to assist and support Qatar's continued efforts to implement change.

Jim Shannon: On reform and labour relations, I referred to the reforms not going far enough. Will the Minister give some indication of what the Government are doing to ensure that the reforms go that stage further and give workers' rights the protections that we all want?

James Cleverly: This is an area that we discuss regularly. Indeed, I have discussed it with my interlocutors from Qatar, and I think they understand—I will come to this shortly—that hosting the World cup means that the eyes and attention of the world will be directed towards them, which gives them an opportunity to demonstrate

progress. I very much get the feeling that they embrace the opportunity to make progress and to demonstrate that progress, which the World cup provides.

Many Members spoke of the strong trade and investment links between our two countries. I am pleased that we have representatives from all the home nations of the United Kingdom, because our bilateral relationship provides jobs in all corners of the UK and could help to support the Government's levelling-up agenda as we build back better post-covid. Trade between the UK and Qatar stands at just over £7 billion, of which £4.3 billion is from UK exports. Qatar is the third largest export market in the region for British firms.

Qatar is also a major investor in the UK, playing a huge role in a variety of developments, from Chelsea Barracks, just a short walk from here, to Middlewood Locks in Manchester and Get Living's build-to-rent scheme in Glasgow. Direct investment is estimated at £40 billion and growing. In October, Qatar Petroleum announced a long-term contract with National Grid for capacity on the Isle of Grain natural gas import terminal east of London. As with the South Hook terminal in Wales, this agreement will help to secure jobs in that area and strengthen the UK's energy security. The hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) talked about the importance of renewable energy.

This week, the Lord Mayor of London has been in Doha, furthering the financial services link between the two countries and the City of London. That builds on the recent groundbreaking decision by Qatar National Bank to issue its first green bonds—a first for Qatar. That green bond issue was done on the London Stock Exchange. As we do with all countries around the world and in the region, we encourage Qatar to be bold in its nationally defined contributions ahead of COP 26 later this year.

Qatar and the UK also share an enduring defence partnership, most notably through the joint Typhoon squadron, as has been mentioned—the first joint air squadron since the second world war. Only yesterday, we saw the completion of Exercise Epic Skies—a good name for an air exercise—which is a joint exercise between the RAF and the Qatari Emiri air force. Similarly, we maintain close working relationships with the Qatari law enforcement agencies. Fighting the scourge of terrorism is a global and shared challenge, and we welcome the steps that Qatar has taken in recent years, including a new law on combating money laundering and terrorist financing.

Unsurprisingly, much of our co-operation in recent years has been on the World cup. The World cup has driven collaboration across commercial, defence and security areas. During my recent visit, I had the opportunity to tour the Education City stadium, one of the World cup venues, and saw for myself Qatar's ambition for the tournament, and the obvious pride that it takes in hosting it. British creativity will be front and centre, from the Al Janoub stadium, designed by the late British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid, to the role that UK company Techniche plays through its cooling vests for construction workers.

Speaking about engagement, I specifically raised the issue of LGBTQ football fans with the head of the World cup Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, Hassan Al Thawadi. I was very pleased that he engaged fully and properly with that issue. It is something that

[James Cleverly]

the Qataris take seriously; they want to demonstrate to the world the progress they are making. In all, the 2022 World cup has led to over £1 billion of UK export wins, and I hope that the home nation football teams that qualify—I am a Minister for the whole UK, so I will be agnostic as to which of the home nations do better—do well.

Beyond sport, many Members have noted the important role that Qatar plays in regional and global issues. We commend Qatar's support for peace in Afghanistan, acting as the host for ongoing Afghan peace negotiations. Qatar is an important development and humanitarian partner for the UK. We are keen to deepen and further this as we look forward to 2021 and beyond. We are encouraging our Qatari counterparts to play a leading role in tackling climate change ahead of COP 26.

Following encouraging signs of progress over the weekend, I reiterate the UK Government's position on the Gulf dispute. As the hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) mentioned, the Gulf Co-operation Council is very important to us. GCC unity matters for the security and stability of the region; it is an issue that I bring up with all our regional partners. We continue to engage with our Gulf friends on this issue, and we firmly get behind and praise Kuwait's mediation role in this issue. Qatar is a close friend and important ally to the United Kingdom. As we approach Qatar's national day next week, and the 50th anniversary of our official diplomatic relations, the UK stands committed to work with Qatar in pursuit of all our shared objectives and solutions to global challenges.

Jim Shannon: Will the Minister give way?

James Cleverly: I am torn. I do not want to cut into the right hon. Gentleman's time.

Jim Shannon: Never mind.

3.33 pm

Mr Carmichael: I thank the Minister for his reply, and all Members who have taken part in what has been a very good and balanced debate. It is clear that the relationship is strong, and that there is still much work that can be done. In the time that I have engaged with Qatar, it has been fascinating to see the way in which the country has developed and continued to look outwards. That is not an accident. It is down, almost exclusively, to the influence of His Highness, the Emir, right from the top. If that commitment continues, then I have no doubt that the strength of the relationship between the United Kingdom and Qatar will continue to grow, and that we will continue to see the progress we all so devoutly wish for.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered UK-Qatar relations.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): I am going to suspend for two minutes to allow the safe exit of Members.

Future of the Coach Industry

[DR RUPA HUQ *IN THE CHAIR*]

3.38 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the coach industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Huq. I record my thanks to the Backbench Business Committee and my good and honourable Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) for allocating time for this important debate. I thank my own trade union, Unite the union, for providing background information and briefing.

I particularly thank my constituents, Jillian Nicholson and Michael Pearson of TM Coach Travel and Northeast Coachways. The coach industry could not have two better advocates. For nine months they have asked for nothing more than fairness and justice, and a chance to survive covid, so that theirs and other small and medium-sized coach companies, often decades-old family businesses, can return to work post-covid.

The industry has a simple message to Government, and it has been delivered thousands of times in postcards from the edge. It reads, "Wish you could hear." The Government are running out of time to listen and act. Coach operators are already going bust; employees, drivers and mechanics are being made redundant; and, the sector is losing capacity. That capacity will be vital to the recovery of the coach industry and to the whole economy, and to thousands, potentially millions, of jobs, supported by UK leisure and tourism.

Coach companies are the backbone and the supply chain for UK leisure and tourism. According to the Confederation of Passenger Transport, more than 23 million visits were made by coach in 2019, contributing £14 million to the UK tourism economy. The sector has more than 2,500 coach operators, directly employing some 42,000 people. Of course, there is then the ripple effect. Vehicle maintenance and upkeep supports an army of mechanics and garages involved in servicing and repairing vehicles.

The argument today is simple: the Government should stand by British businesses—companies that support our economy and do the right thing. The most responsible coach companies have invested in the newest clean fleets in our economy and are implementing the Government's zero carbon climate change policy. However, ironically, they are facing the greatest loss, having to manage higher debt levels at a time when they have no income and the industry is shut down.

It is not a crisis of their own making. The number of Members of Parliament here who are concerned about this issue is worthy of note. Several who were hoping to speak have had to leave, unfortunately, because of delays to the votes and speaking in the main Chamber. This is an important issue that affects every constituency.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I put my name down for the debate, but unfortunately I was not called. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in Northern Ireland, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has a bespoke package of grants of £8,000 paid for the first bus and £4,450 for the second, up to a total of

£100,000? That underlines the importance that the Northern Ireland Assembly has put on the bus sector, including Giles Tours and Billy Brown's and others in my constituency. Does he feel that the Northern Ireland example might be one for the Minister to replicate here?

Grahame Morris: I believe there is specific support in Scotland and Wales as well. We are calling for the Minister to act and provide some sector-specific support to the coach industry in England. We are not asking for special treatment; we are asking for parity and an equal chance for the sector to survive, with support that recognises the specific impact that covid has had on the sector.

The coach sector was the first hit, the hardest-hit, and will be the last to recover. The fall in demand and income has been absolutely catastrophic—in excess of 90%. Unlike some other industries that have had the opportunity to diversify or even continue operating during covid, the coach industry has experienced a near total shutdown. Even if venues were open, such as concert venues, shows and sporting events, or holidays were still taking place, the social distancing requirements would make such coach trips unviable.

The industry needs support and the Government excluded coach companies from the rates relief support by failing to recognise them as part of tourism, leisure and hospitality or essential travel. I expect many in the industry would agree with Jade Cooper-Greaves of Henry Cooper Coaches in Annitsford. When she was interviewed by the BBC, she said:

“I have never written a job down in my diary that wouldn't be classed as tourism, leisure, hospitality or essential travel.”

The lack of sector-specific support is crippling and the Government are failing to recognise the scale of the crisis.

In a letter on 23 November, the Minister responsible, who sits in the other place, said:

“We continue to work closely with representatives from the coach sector, including the Confederation of Passenger Transport, and with other Government Departments to understand the ongoing, specific and unique risks and issues the sector faces and how those could be addressed.”

There are many and obvious risks and challenges facing the sector.

It is not true that the sector has had support. Certainly, there has been the furlough scheme, which assisted with the employees—the drivers and so on. That was welcome, but it did not help operators with ongoing business costs, loan payments or vehicle leasing fees. And the coronavirus business loan interruption scheme has failed the industry, with the majority of the businesses in it—80%—unable to access that support.

Let us look at some other sectors. Arts, culture and heritage received £1.57 billion. I am not against that; I am simply pointing out the inconsistency. There has been a bail-out for buses and trams—£700 million. Rail—£4.5 billion, and actually it is even more than that when we take into account the emergency measures. For the voluntary and charitable sector—£750 million. Eat out to help out is estimated at £500 million. For the sports bail-out for rugby union, horse racing, women's football and the lower tiers of National League football—£300 million.

The Chancellor said that he did not want to pick winners and losers, but that is precisely what the Government are doing by offering sector-specific support to some sectors and not to others. Let me be clear—I do not begrudge any of the sectors that I have mentioned the support that the Government have given them. But there is no transparency as to why some sectors are favoured and others ignored.

Sports are struggling without crowds, but it is the coach sector that transports those crowds. Arts, heritage and culture, hard-pressed though they are, have had some retail opportunities during covid, and in some cases are able to open now, with restrictions, in certain areas. Eat out to help out was an untargeted scheme that benefited large chains with large floor space that could accommodate more customers. Again, that support targeted businesses that were able to continue trading through covid, perhaps via takeaways or with limited capacity.

We must question the value of these bail-outs, particularly those to the bus operators, which have received £700 million. As public subsidised companies, it would be reasonable to expect them to understand the plight of the coach sector. Instead, many of these bus companies are taking the last remaining contracts, which are often travel-to-school contracts, from the coach companies. I am aware that subsidised bus operators in my own region are undercutting coach companies on already undervalued home-to-school transport contracts.

I have coach operators who rent vehicles from Arriva Bus and Coach Ltd. When they asked for a rent holiday, they were refused, even though they had no business. They were forced to return the coaches because they were unable to maintain payments of up to £20,000 a month, having no work and now also being hit with early termination fees of £80,000. I must ask the Minister—is that fair?

With all due respect, if the Minister cannot grasp the scale of the challenge after nine months, I must question their interest or competence in this matter. Indeed, I challenge the Minister. The industry is warning that, without urgent support, four in 10 companies could go bust, with a loss of 27,000 jobs, and that is not counting those jobs in the supply chain and the service sector that rely on the coach industry. We risk losing companies of good standing, and coach operators risk losing their homes due to the personal guarantees they gave on their vehicles. We cannot abandon good businesses that invest in our economy. The Government must explain why they are excluding coach companies from the sector-specific support that they have provided to other sectors.

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): This is a popular debate. I think that I have counted 13 bodies, with 37 minutes available; the time for the debate has been slightly stretched, because of the earlier votes in the main Chamber. I am not proposing to have a formal time limit; if everyone sticks to two and a half minutes each, we will get everyone in.

3.49 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under you today, Dr Huq.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) on securing this debate on an issue that affects so many small businesses right across the country. In normal times, their industry is worth about £7 billion,

[Mr Philip Hollobone]

and it is fundamentally a healthy and profitable industry. I could go down the list of all the things that it does, but I will not do so, for time's sake.

Operators—small-scale entrepreneurs who spent years building up their businesses—are doing everything they can to stay afloat. However, bookings are not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels until the summer of 2021. Many operators face a drop in income of around 90%—for example, Jewels Tours faced a revenue shortfall of that amount. At the same time, their fixed outgoings remain the same: payments on vehicles, monthly maintenance and so on. The summer months provided some respite, but they could hardly be profitable, because of the social distancing requirements.

Those businesses have made significant investment in their infrastructure. They have high fixed costs in servicing their financial investment. For instance, over the past six years, Grange Travel has invested over £6 million in upgrading its fleet to satisfy regulatory demands. One operator applied through their bank for a coronavirus business interruption loan. Despite having an excellent credit score and the scheme being Government backed, they were declined, leading them to go to a broker and have a debenture attached to their business. As a result, they are having difficulty getting other finance. They now face a winter with hugely suppressed demand, the liability of a high fixed-cost base and little or no support outside the furlough scheme. They face going out of business. Yet this is a viable industry, which supports our own domestic hospitality and tourism sectors.

The key asks on behalf of this suffering industry, as voiced by businesses in my constituency, are as follows. First, the Government should stand as guarantor with finance companies. Secondly, they should come to an arrangement with the industry to provide further finance holidays. Thirdly, grants should be made available to the several thousand coach operators in England, as has been done for big players like National Express. This industry is fighting for its future. We must support it.

3.52 pm

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): I recently had the pleasure of speaking to Roderick Thompson from Regent Travel in Hartlepool, a family-run independent travel agent with over 30 years' experience in the travel business. He told me not only that covid-19 has impacted his business and the travel industry as a whole, but that for many of his regulars the potential demise of the coach tour industry would have a devastating effect. He told me that many of his customers prefer to pay cash and were not used to the world of computers. When holidays got cancelled due to the pandemic, he and his staff spent most of their time recovering deposits for them.

That brought into sharp focus the magnitude of the hit the coach industry is taking. The Confederation of Passenger Transport UK has warned that, without urgent support from the Government, thousands of family businesses are at risk because, despite mothballing coaches and furloughing staff, they still face costs averaging £1,900 a day.

The owners of another local family business wrote to me recently. Paul's Travel has been operating for 18 years in the minibus trade. In their own words, they

sit between taxi companies and large coach companies. They, too, have suffered similar experiences, with private hire down and the number of regular weekly contracts down from 16 to two. They also rely on the hospitality and leisure industry. They are hanging on by the skin of their teeth.

I have chosen to highlight the plight of two local Hartlepool companies, but it must be recognised that on a national scale coach travel is a major player in the leisure industry. It directly employs 42,000 people, with thousands more jobs dependent on the sector. Without Government support, those jobs will simply go.

3.54 pm

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for securing this debate and giving an excellent speech. The coach industry is a vital part of our society, which we take for granted. We have probably not appreciated until now its full value and its true worth to our communities and our enjoyment. For many working-class kids of my generation, the highlight of the summer holidays was a day trip to Blackpool or north Wales on what we called charas, which was our take on charabanc—a coach. Of course, they have changed a lot since then. We have all experienced it over the years.

I want to draw the attention of the House to something that people probably forget—the role that the coach industry played at the beginning of the pandemic. Given that so much has happened since, it is easy to forget that when British nationals came home from China in February and March, it was coaches that transported them from London to the Wirral. We all have coach companies, or involvement with coach companies, in our constituencies. They are very much part of the community.

My area has a number of such businesses. I have spoken recently to Anthony's Travel, which is a local company, and to Richard Bamber, who is one of the partners there. He told me just how much they are feeling the pinch. They also feel excluded, particularly when the Government are making decisions about what sector they fall into. These local businesses form part of the backbone of our communities, but it seems that the coach industry falls into a grey area between the transport and leisure sectors, and no one in Government seems to be brave enough to make a decision when it comes to defining it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Easington mentioned, the Government have just tried to ignore the points and arguments that are continually being put across. They then try to cover that by saying, "We are helping industry. We are providing support." But they will not answer the actual points, and they need to do that. It is about time that they came clean and said what they are doing and what they intend to do.

There are potentially 27,000 jobs being lost. The Government may have taken the view that something will be needed well after the pandemic. They may have thought, "Well, it's a bit tough if people lose their jobs and industries go bust, but someone will come along after it." It is probably going to be the bigger companies. That is not the point; the point is that these companies are trusted local companies that are very much involved in their community and really want to serve their community. We want them to survive. They are trusted companies.

These companies provide improvements and help to vast areas of the economy. Just take coastal towns, which are suffering at the moment, and how much they rely on coaches to bring tourists and day trippers to them. These are really important businesses.

I have little time left—I am going to stick to your advice, Dr Huq—so I will just say this. We have to have proper support for the coach industry, and particularly for those local businesses that we all have in our constituencies. They are a vital part of our communities. We must have that support given to them.

3.56 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris). I agree with everything he said—that avoids some degree of repetition.

I want to talk about the impact on the sector in my own constituency. Every July, coach drivers from across the country travel to Blackpool for the coach driver of the year awards, parking their luxury vehicles on the comedy carpet outside the tower. This year, they could not do that. Instead they came as part of a blockade along the M55 for the Honk for Hope campaign.

This is not about one single bus company in my constituency—although Members are right to support companies in their areas. It is about the existential threat to the private sector economy in my constituency. If people travel the Blackpool coast from south to north, they pass hotel after hotel after hotel, each of which depends on coach visitors coming to the resort. Those hotels have seen their business collapse: there were 80% fewer bookings even before the most recent lockdown, and they are now at crisis levels. I know of one coach company that brings 120,000 people a year to Blackpool, putting £30 million into the local economy. That is replicated up and down the coast. I have had hotel after hotel after hotel coming to me and saying, “We don’t know how we are possibly going to survive.”

This is not just a summer-only phenomenon; it is a year-round part of our local economy. We have the tinsel and turkey season right now, but it simply is not happening, because the hotels are closed. Even if the hotels were open, the coaches could not come, because they cannot make a profit, as a result of the social distancing rules that are part and parcel of what has to happen at the moment. We have just missed the illuminations season, which is three weeks solid—particularly in the half-term—of coaches coming in, driving through the lights and, yet again, putting money into not just local hotels but the small cafés, the restaurants, the entertainment venues and the piers. Every single part of our private sector economy in Blackpool is affected not just by the loss of visitors, but by the loss of the coach visitors, who underpin it and have done for decades. As the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) pointed out, they are part of what Blackpool is.

I therefore urge my hon. Friend the Minister to listen to this sector carefully. There has been a glut of coaches coming on to the market that are second-hand; many existing companies are struggling to make the finance payments. I know that she is the Decarbonisation Minister, so she ought to be enthusiastic about ensuring that we have more and more Euro 6 coaches throughout the network. Here is a chance to “build back better”, to support the finance payments for these firms and to

allow companies to use Government subsidy to improve their fleets as part of the decarbonisation strategy. Then it will not just be this sector that survives—Blackpool as a coastal resort might have a chance as well.

3.59 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for securing this debate and for the really strong case that he made. Coach companies, operators and staff up and down the country will be relieved to hear their concerns played out so strongly. Two companies—Skills and Hammonds—are in my constituency; I have worked with them throughout the pandemic, and I hope to be a voice for them here today.

The coach industry is worth £14 billion to the tourism industry. Some 600,000 children regularly rely on a coach to get them to and from school. During the pandemic, the coach industry has stepped up to provide 50,000 more spaces to make sure that travel can be done safely. It is not a question of whether we can afford to support the coach industry, but what support we can get to it and how quickly we can do that. Some of the schemes the Government have done so well during the pandemic simply have not fitted the coach industry. It is hard to do these things, but there is an obligation to fill the gap. We must understand that the coach industry is distinct from the bus industry, and the support must be distinct too. I know that Scotland has announced support recently, as has Wales, and it is now time for England to do the same. *[Interruption.]* The fact that Northern Ireland has also announced support is news to me.

Coach businesses have big overheads. Fleet insurance, liability insurance and rent can be more than five grand a month before companies have even thought about vehicles or maintenance. Despite being such an integral part of the tourism sector, these businesses have been unable to access support packages. For example, local authorities have decided on a case-by-case basis whether coach operators ought to fall within the leisure and tourism elements of support. We need formal recognition from the Government that coach operators are clearly part of the leisure and tourism sector, so that they can consistently get the support that is supposed to be there for them and so that we can end the postcode lottery. As colleagues have said, the Government could also, at a minimum, encourage the extension of finance holidays by another year to ensure that no coaches are repossessed over this winter. The point about underwriting loans was very well made too.

With the vaccine, we have had a glimpse of the future and of getting to a semblance of normality, but if we want normality—day trips, tours, and children going back to school and back on school trips properly—we need to make sure there is still a coach industry to do those things. The industry is fundamentally healthy and profitable, but it has been hit hard by circumstances well outside of its control. The Government must put in place short-term aid to ensure that the long-term future of the sector is sustainable.

4.2 pm

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): Golden Boy Coaches in my constituency is a family business. It has been run not for decades but for generations. The owners have never darkened my door before. They have

[*Sir Charles Walker*]

got on with their lives and grown their business. They have provided services to generations of my constituents. Such businesses are part of our communities, as we have heard so eloquently from many other speakers. Now they face a lifetime's work—generations' work—going under because high maintenance levels, high debt levels and the high costs of compliance do not sit easily with no customers. No business sits easily with high fixed costs.

We have to get the economy moving again. Coach providers do the school run in the morning and in the evening, and the only reason that those two activities paid was because the providers did things in between. After the school run in the morning, they did trips to matineés and racecourses, and after the evening school run they went to the theatres and restaurants. These companies are absolutely on their knees. Golden Boy has a future, but that future does not look rosy. It could be a very small future without more Government intervention.

We in this place are excellent at spending money—we are brilliant at it. We are great at borrowing it; the Chancellor is fantastic at borrowing it, and we are really good at spending it for him, but we do not want to spend money that has already been spent. Money was spent on giving rate relief to the supermarkets, but well over £1 billion of it has come back. As far as the Chancellor was concerned, it had gone out of the door. He has got it back, but he did not expect to see it back, so I say to the Minister: can we not use some of that money—that £1 billion—to throw a lifeline to coach companies?

As I said at the start of my very brief speech, coach operators are the people we never heard from, who got on with their businesses, built their businesses and employed our constituents. They never troubled us, and now they need us, so we need to be there for them.

4.4 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for securing the debate. I have to say that it is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker).

This is the third time that I have raised concerns about the coach industry, and I thank the Treasury Minister who met me and industry representatives last week. I hope the strength of feeling in the House today conveys the fact that that should be the start of the conversation, not the end.

In the brief time I have to make my remarks, it is important to myth-bust or fact-check some of the statements that the Government have been making with regards to the coach industry. We cannot address the problem properly unless we clearly and transparently understand the support that the industry has had and the difficulties that it is facing.

The first point I want to make is that the Secretary of State for Transport claimed in the House that additional financial support has been announced for school transport, and that this would benefit 30,000 idle coaches. That has proven not to be true. To give him the benefit of the

doubt, that could have been his intention, but it has helped only 1,000 coaches—the rest of the money has been deployed to buses, which has not directly helped the industry.

My second point is that I was informed that the Chancellor stated at a roundtable meeting he had with the industry that the industry had benefited from VAT cuts and deferment. Again, that could have been his intention, but passenger transport is free of VAT, so I cannot see how deferring VAT has helped the industry.

Thirdly, the Government claimed that grants for businesses in tier 3 would help, but they have not. Coach companies are not listed as businesses that have to close, so the only funding available to them is discretionary support, which, by its nature, is discretionary. That means there has been a postcode lottery around the country, with some councils choosing to support the coach industry, and some not. If the Minister wishes to ensure that operators have support, he needs to make that discretionary support a little less discretionary.

The Government's fourth point is that coaches have had access to the coronavirus business interruption loans. Again, that is not completely accurate, because only 20% of coach companies have been able to access that money. I hear that that is partly because coach companies are seen as high risk, and partly because they are unable to provide the six-month business plans needed. In a previous debate in which I spoke about coach companies, I mentioned specific problems around Lloyds Bank refusing to lend money for coronavirus business interruption loans.

I will stop there, but I hope the Minister's responses will not refer to not completely factual statements about the financial support for school transport, the VAT support, the grants for businesses or the coronavirus business interruption loans. Unless we are honest about the lack of support the industry has had, we cannot get an effective solution.

4.7 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker), I have coach companies in my constituency that have never darkened my doorstep; they have just got on with their business. However, they have contacted me recently about an issue that nobody has raised so far: whether they should be compliant with the public service vehicles accessibility regulations.

To be PSVAR-compliant suggests that there is a distinction between making coaches available for disabled people and retrofitting those coaches to make them suitable for taking disabled people, but that is a false distinction, and I was pleased that, as a result of covid, Baroness Vere extended the time that coaches had to be compliant.

The reason I say that that is a false distinction is that in the home-to-school business, coach companies receive—in advance of setting off in the morning—a passenger list that identifies the people who are getting on the coach. It identifies the people who need disability assistance in order to make that coach ride. Many companies tell me that, in 20 or 30 years of being in business, they have received no requests for assistance for people with a disability. I wonder whether we can change the PSVAR rules, because I am absolutely behind ensuring we have coaches that are available for disabled people. If a list is provided in advance that

makes it clear who is disabled and who is not, companies are prepared to put on coaches to pick up those people. This is an important issue. Many transport providers have been taken by surprise at the news that home-to-school service providers will have to comply with these regulations, as they previously thought the service would be exempt. The source of that confusion links back to the existence of pre-known passenger lists. I will leave this important issue on the table for the Minister to pick up.

4.10 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Many of my colleagues have referred more generally to the situation of companies in their areas. Representing a coastal area, I think it is particularly important, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) said, that we get these coach companies back up and running, and visiting our towns and resorts again as soon as possible.

Rather than dwelling on the general points, as others have done, I will read a quote from one company in my area that sums up the impact on a well-run family business that—this is similar to what my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker) said—has never darkened the door of its MP previously. Mr Radley, based in Barton, writes:

“As you know, we have had zero income for months now during the lockdown period. After you visited us in the summer, we cautiously reopened on 8 September. Since that date, we have managed to operate just a handful of day excursions and two five-day tours. The average load on these occasions has been 18 passengers.”

That emphasises the fact that, even if we can get these coach companies up and running, social distancing means that their load is only a third or a quarter of normal, which is simply not viable. Mr Radley goes on to say:

“Never in our previous 29-year trading history have we feared for our future existence as we do right now.”

That sums up the impact on individuals.

I am sure that we will shortly hear from the Minister about the success that the Government have had in ploughing money into furloughs, bounce back loans and so on, all of which the companies we represent have taken advantage of and are grateful for, but the fact is that they do not want to hear a repeat of what we have done; they want to hear what we will do to maintain their viability over the next year or two.

Despite the fact that the Cleethorpes constituency is very dependent on the hospitality sector, my constituents have overwhelmingly supported the restrictions that the Government have put in place. In the recent lockdown, the infection rate in my area has gone down from 650 to about 120 per 100,000, so there is recognition that lockdowns have worked. However, if a democratically accountable Government decree that someone cannot go about their law-abiding business, they must act and support those people.

4.13 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is clear from the contributions so far that the hon. Members here feel that the UK Government have to date not really understood the importance of the coach industry

to the wider travel and tourism industry, or that sector support is vital for the industry to survive. In response to a written question on sector funding, the Minister advised me that the Department of Education has provided more than £70 million to local transport authorities, as if that was somehow a silver bullet that would help coach companies survive. It is not.

I spoke to Milligan's Coach Travel in my constituency, which confirmed that, while school transport is important—it could be argued that it is its bread and butter—it is only 20% of its trade, with the rest made up of its own day tours, holidays and theatre trips, private hire, tourism and cruise ships and football coach hire. I have enjoyed a football bus many a time myself, having run a sports club for 25 years.

The Confederation of Passenger Transport (Scotland) estimates that 80% of the coach industry's income is derived from tourist-related activities. That market is decimated. Hotels all over the United Kingdom rely on bus tour companies bringing tourists and visitors to them. If the coach industry collapses, hotels the length and breadth of the UK will not open, so a lot more jobs are at stake than just those in the coach industry.

We have heard about the jobs that are at risk, but it is not just jobs. Many coach companies, as we know, are family-run businesses. It is estimated that 32% of operators have personal guarantees and stand to lose their homes if their businesses fail, so personal bankruptcies are a risk. Imagine the strain on people's lives, and what they are trying to manage and weigh up. The stark reality is that coach businesses are facing a more than 90% drop in income for 2020, 40% of coach operators expect to reduce staff, and 7,100 coach industry professionals have already been made unemployed.

The good news in Scotland is that yesterday the Scottish Government announced a £6 million grant fund pot for the coach industry and £5 million for travel agents, which has been warmly received by the industries. Of course, if the UK Government step up and provide money for the coach industry as well, that will provide Barnett consequential for Scotland, and we will be able to do even more to support this vital industry.

4.15 pm

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to be able to speak in the debate, which I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) on securing. I speak on behalf of all the Devon MPs who were unfortunately unable to get on to the call list.

The Government understand the importance of the tourism sector, which is valued at £106 billion, the hospitality sector, which is valued at £130 billion, and the leisure sector, which is valued at £200 billion, so they must surely understand the value that coach companies and services play in those sectors in their supporting role. That is what I want to speak about today. Coach companies, in all our constituencies across the whole country, play an integral role in supporting those sectors, and if we wish our economy to bounce back in the coming years, it will be essential to support businesses that play a supporting role to those major parts of our economy.

I hope that the Government will look very carefully not at what they have already done, but at what they can do in future. There is no doubt that the Government

[Anthony Mangnall]

have been extraordinarily generous in their support schemes to businesses across the country, from the grant schemes to everything else, but loans alone will not secure the future of businesses. We need a forward-looking approach to ensure that they have the economic breathing space to thrive in the months to come.

I hope that the Government will look at the CPT's requests of extending finance holidays by 12 months, ensuring that greater access to support packages is made available to the tourism and hospitality sector, providing an aid-to-trade grant to operators to help boost the return of the coach sector towards tourism—hopefully working with VisitBritain to encourage a new era of domestic tourism would achieve that—and topping up the home-to-school payments to meet the true cost of the work for so many of the coach companies that have struggled over the years.

I am very fortunate in my constituency to have AB Coaches, Tally Ho and Millmans, all of which have struggled through the last seven months. I hope that in looking at how we can support them now we might also look at historical issues that have blighted the sector. Let us see if a suspension of fuel duty for two years to allow companies to reinvest that money into an environmentally friendly new fleet of vehicles would be beneficial. Let us look at ways in which we can rework the working time directives to allow people to work more hours, and to go out there for business and opportunities. I want to see us stand up for businesses that are here today so that they are there tomorrow, and I hope that the Government will act on that.

4.18 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for securing this important debate.

Three months: that is how long a family-run business in my constituency has left before it goes bust. For the benefit of the Government, who have shown little interest in the plight of small, family-run businesses so far, I will explain what that means. It means that more than 30 people will lose their jobs, livelihoods and sense of purpose. It means that vital transport for key workers and schoolchildren in the constituency will be cut off. It means that finances will go unpaid and the debt crisis will rise.

I have not one but two family-run coach companies in my constituency of Erith and Thamesmead: Phoenix Tours and Abbey Travel. If answers are not provided today on how the Government plan to support the coach industry, the consequences for my constituents will be devastating. Phoenix Tours revealed that it has sadly already laid off six members of staff during the pandemic, and is struggling to keep up with its monthly outgoings. Its future continues to look bleak. The business was unable to access any form of Government grants, as it is not considered to be in the retail, leisure or hospitality industries. It has taken advantage of the bounce back loan scheme, but this loan was used in a mere month due to the huge costs of its outgoings—costs that have only increased due to insurance providers forcing up prices for coach companies during the pandemic.

I therefore ask the Minister, given that most of our towns and cities are staring tier 3 restrictions in the face, what measures will the Government put in place to ensure that the coach industry receives a respite from the insurance and finance payments?

Abbey Travel has also laid off 50% of its staff, after 99% of its bookings were cancelled. It lost £400,000 of bookings from Thomas Cook alone. I also know that it is not through irresponsible decision making that these companies have lost all of their business and are now struggling financially. This point has been echoed by many Members today. In fact, both companies have acted with the utmost social responsibility in the past few years, investing millions back into their businesses to ensure that their vehicles are environmentally friendly and accessible for disabled people. The Government have relied on businesses to take action to help us achieve environmental targets. Now, when businesses are on the brink of collapse, the Government really need to take time to support them.

It is with great sadness that I am taking part in this debate. I have heard from constituents about the huge struggles they have faced this year—both professional and personal. I need a commitment from the Minister that she will call on insurance providers to act responsibly to support coach companies during this time. I need a commitment that she will call on her own Government Department to set out a plan to address the needs of coach companies in my constituency of Erith and Thamesmead.

4.21 pm

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I absolutely welcome the unprecedented level of support that the Government have put into supporting businesses. However, it is clear from this debate that the coach sector has fallen through the cracks and needs further support. Businesses such as Masons Coaches in Cheddington and Countrywide Coaches in Princes Risborough in my constituency are losing frightening amounts of money every single month, and they need support. We can be in no doubt that UK coach operators are facing the very real prospect of going bust all over our country.

First and foremost, we need recognition that the coach sector is an integral part of the leisure sector. Home-to-school transport is an important part of its business, but until it gets the recognition that it is part of the leisure sector, too many businesses will go under. Indeed, one business in my constituency is operating home-to-school transport, but without any of its other usual activities it is still losing in excess of £30,000 a month. That is just not sustainable.

I was struck by recent survey data completed across the sector, which shows that there has been a 90% reduction in operational mileage from April 2020 to October 2020, compared to the same period last year—2019 saw UK coaches cover some 130 million miles in this country, whereas in 2020 the figure was 13 million miles. There has been an 80% reduction in vehicle hires—equivalent to 3.6 million days in 2019, down to 758,000 in 2020. The numbers speak for themselves.

We cannot presume that carrying on with just saying that home-to-school transport is enough will be the answer for our coach sector. We need a whole-Government approach, because this is not just a problem for the

Department for Transport. We need to bring in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Treasury to ensure that our coach sector gets the support it needs.

I particularly add my voice to those calls to give those businesses the support they need on vehicle finance. They are all debt-leveraged up to their eyeballs, but many are also indebted, as my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) said, because they have taken on considerable debts to meet the PSV requirements. They need support on that and support in grants, and then we will have a healthy coach sector to return to after this crisis.

4.24 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): Many thanks to the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for securing the debate on what is clearly an important matter across these islands.

I have spoken in defence of the coach sector numerous times in debates in the main Chamber, in relation both to the economy and to tourism. If we have heard nothing else today, we know that coaches have sadly fallen between two stools when it comes to highlighting the support required. Early-day motions have been raised, yet here we are still talking. The point for the Minister is that this is not just the abstract hobbyhorse of a few Members; this is a grave and immediate threat to a major element of the economy across these islands.

Many coach operators are family enterprises, which has been touched on already, reinvesting their profit in their fleets, businesses and employees. They are wealth-creating enterprises that have paid significant sums into the Exchequer, while never burdening the taxpayer for any financial assistance, prior to the covid pandemic, making them something of an outlier when compared with air travel, rail or buses.

Coach is a vital element of national infrastructure; it is no exaggeration to say that. It is unlike any other element of mass public transportation, such as rail, which cannot survive in normal times without public subsidy, or air, which fills its aircraft with fuel and in so doing leaves not one single penny with the Exchequer. Coach will fill its buses with £540 of diesel, and leave 66%, or £360, with the Exchequer every time they are filled up. The coach industry is surely entitled to a wee bit back in these times of extremis.

As the CPT has warned, the collapse in the coach and tourism sector will wipe 10% off the value of UK tourism, but by guaranteeing loans and covering the interest costs for 12 months, the UK Government could, at a stroke, help operators secure finance holiday extensions that would provide the industry with the breathing space until the return of business in the spring, just a few months away. Many hon. Members of all parties in the Chamber, and others besides, have been making that point to Government for many months.

With every passing month, disaster looms ever closer. I am grateful that businesses in my Angus constituency, such as JP Mini Coaches in Forfar, Black's of Brechin or Wisharts in Friockheim, will now be benefiting from £6 million of specific support from colleagues in the

Scottish Government, recognising as they do that they cannot delay any longer while waiting for the UK Government to act.

The UK Government must accept that that is not a good look. To stand by and not give any support for the English sector, while the devolved Administrations are supporting coach companies in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, is not a good look. It is important for the whole of these islands, because English companies cannot fail for the interests of the Welsh, Northern Irish and Scottish tourist sectors. It is a self-fulfilling multiplier.

Finally, I say to the Minister that there is no room in the summing up for listening to what we have done before. What we need is something new, and we need it very urgently.

4.27 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Dr Huq. I thank colleagues for taking part in the debate. It has been heartening to see how much interest there is in this key sector, especially at a time when Government support seems to be somewhat lacking. I extend a special thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) for his work in securing the debate and to all those who have facilitated it.

Coach firms, a huge number of which are small, family-owned businesses, are great contributors to local economies. They play a crucial and unfortunately somewhat overlooked role in our national transport network. In normal times, coaches and their drivers travel hundreds of thousands of miles every day, and for a huge variety of journeys. They take thousands of schoolchildren to school every day, who would otherwise have no reliable means of getting to their place of education. They make educational trips possible and they help sports teams to compete across the country. When our railway networks are delayed, they take passengers to their destination.

As has been said by a number of hon. Members, coaches play a crucial part in the tourism and cultural industries. In fact, as the experts at the Confederation of Passenger Transport have calculated, over 23 million people visit UK attractions every year by coach, generating nearly 10% of the tourism sector's total contribution to the economy. That point was well made by a number of colleagues on the Government Benches. That is to say nothing of the economic boost provided by the tens of thousands of people employed by coach firms, the multiplier effect, the supply chains or the thousands of people who travel by coach because other forms of transport are not available to them.

In the very near term, the Christmas travel period could shine a further light on the importance of coaches. Labour has warned of the potential dangers posed by travel chaos as people use our road and rail networks over the festive period. Indeed, we have asked the Government to take special care at this time and to pay more attention to the potential difficulties during the pandemic.

It is clear that the coach sector is incredibly important in the immediate context and in the longer term for our economy as we transition away from the coronavirus pandemic and return to some form of normality. Sadly, it is equally clear that there has been a lack of adequate

[Matt Rodda]

support over the last year, which has threatened the viability of many wonderful family firms. The furlough scheme, as we have heard, has often been the only source of support for many companies until recently, with industry experts estimating that 80% of coach companies were unable to access the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme or other business support over the summer.

The Government have argued, somewhat misguidedly, that schools returning has provided companies with business, but many firms run home-to-school journeys at a loss in the absence of other work, as we have heard. Many difficulties, as hon. Members have said, arise from coach financing. Companies have rightly been incentivised to purchase newer, more efficient vehicles, which are greener and better for the environment. Some firms have been able to negotiate payment holidays during the crisis, but they will soon come to an end. As my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) said, in some cases, companies may be just months away from going out of business.

Despite that, there has been no sector-specific support for the coach industry, unlike other parts of the transport sector, such as bus, rail or light rail operators. I am afraid to say that industry experts estimate that four in 10 companies could go bust, which would mean the loss of 27,000 jobs across the country. Some firms have seen a drop in income of up to 90% this year, so it is not surprising that they are facing such financial difficulties.

Even in the context of good news about vaccines, it is clear that social distancing measures will continue for some months, which means that coach companies will be simply unable to operate at their normal capacity, as several hon. Members mentioned. Coach firms have historically been very responsible borrowers, and they have been profitable businesses. They simply need short-term help to tide them through the crisis.

I will refer to some of the comments made to me by companies. Acklams Coaches is a small business in Hull that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) introduced me to. It said:

“Until the pandemic we were a growing business and had invested in new environmentally friendly vehicles but to date our income has dropped by 70% with all our leisure work having stopped. We employ 110 staff, which has already reduced during the pandemic and we are now having to look to offer reduced hours, which means more staff are having to leave.”

Berrys Coaches in Taunton said:

“It feels like the coach industry has been the forgotten sector.”

Time and again in the debate, we have heard similar stories from hon. Members from across the country.

That is why we are calling on the Government to explain why they have excluded coach companies from the sector-specific rescue packages arranged for bus, rail and light rail. Indeed, what plans do the Minister and the Government have in place to tackle the looming financial crisis that has been eloquently talked about this afternoon by many hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber?

I urge the Minister to address three critical points in her closing remarks. First, the Government must publish a plan to tackle the looming financial crisis for coach

firms to protect jobs and the viability of those wonderful family businesses in future. Secondly, I hope that she will explain why the Government have not committed to providing targeted support for coach companies, despite that being accessible to other parts of the economy. Thirdly, I hope that she will outline what steps the Government are willing to take to protect the tourism and cultural industries so that they can reopen safely as we transition out of the pandemic. The Government must now provide clarity and act with swiftness after months of inaction; otherwise we could face the loss of thousands of small businesses and thousands of jobs.

4.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) on securing this vital debate. I thank all hon. Members who have spoken. We have heard a vast number of contributions, including from my hon. Friends the Members for Gravesham (Adam Holloway), for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker), for Henley (John Howell), for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) and for Buckingham (Greg Smith), and the hon. Members for Hartlepool (Mike Hill), for Halton (Derek Twigg), for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), and for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare). I think it is crystal clear that there is a strength of feeling in the Chamber today from all parts of the country on this vital issue. We have heard many eloquently expressed, first-hand stories from Members explaining the impact of the pandemic on their constituents and the businesses they run.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to assure Members that the Government are absolutely committed to the future of the coach industry. Members have made clear to the Government—to me as a Minister and to other Ministers responsible for these decisions—the strength of feeling on this matter. We have heard it very clearly. Members have set out the vital role that coach companies play in their communities and constituencies. We have heard time and again that these are small, hard-working family businesses. As many Members said, these constituents had not darkened their doors—I did not want to use that phrase, but that is how Members described some of the people they talked about today. They are hard-working people who have not turned to their MPs before. Of course, as an MP myself, I recognise the strength of feeling on this issue.

I will come to the points that Members have raised. I want to respond to a specific point from my hon. Friend the Member for Henley about the public service vehicle accessibility regulations, which others also raised. I will ask my noble Friend in the other place to come back to him on that specific point. I want to reassure Members that all the proposals that have been presented on behalf of their constituents are being carefully considered by Ministers.

We have discussed at length the future of this industry. It is my belief that it continues to have an important role to play and I see no reason why it cannot have a bright and prosperous future. It is a resilient and diverse

sector, and its contribution to our leisure, tourism, public and home-to-school transport systems is long-standing and vital.

Normally, coach operators up and down the country are connecting people every day of the year. Members have referred to numerous small, family-run businesses in their constituencies. Whether it is a tour to Blackpool or a coach package ticket to the Glastonbury festival, coaches have played a huge part in opening up all parts of the UK and enriching all our lives.

Of course, 2020 has been very different. This year, the covid-19 pandemic and the necessary national and local restrictions to protect public health that have come with it, have taken many of these experiences away from us. With people necessarily spending so much of 2020 undertaking only essential journeys, demand for coach services has reduced dramatically.

I know that, as a result, this year has represented an unprecedented challenge for all coach operators. In these difficult times, the Government's commitment to supporting businesses cannot be questioned. Many Members discussed this and recognised that fact. Since the onset of the pandemic in the spring, we have paid wages through the job retention scheme and supported the incomes of self-employed workers. We have also provided significant support in the form of loans and grants. Coach operators have been able to apply for the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme.

Emma Hardy: I want to reinforce a couple of points. First, coach companies are telling me there is a high chance that their businesses will end before the furlough scheme runs out. Although the scheme has been welcomed, it is not going to be the answer if the business no longer exists. Secondly, in contributions from Members across the Chamber, it was reiterated that only 20% of businesses were able to access the coronavirus business interruption loans. The majority of coach companies have not been able to access that fund.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Lady very much for those points. I recognised and heard the points that she and others raised. It is important to recognise the amount of support that has gone to those businesses, although I accept that many have not been able to access the support. However, a significant amount of support has been made available. On her point about the furlough scheme, she will know that the Chancellor extended it at a number of points when the public health situation required it. All the measures are kept under constant review.

We have had a number of schemes, including the coronavirus bounce back loan scheme. Of course, the Government have also extended guidance for local authorities on administering business rate relief. Eligible businesses will not have to pay business rates for the year 2020-21—that list of businesses could and does include coach operators—and it is for local authorities to determine which businesses are eligible.

Alan Brown: As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) said in her intervention, the furlough scheme and the business rate relief are welcome, but the Confederation of Passenger Transport reckons that it costs something like £200 a day for a bus just to sit in a yard. Those are the kinds of overheads that we are talking about. Even businesses

that have access to CBILS, which is a loan and a debt that must be repaid, are looking for grants. The CPT estimates that £50 a day per coach would be enough for those coach companies to survive. We are looking for responses to those asks.

Rachel Maclean: I recognise and understand the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised about the specific business conditions and challenges that coach companies face. As he will know, all the measures are kept under review by the Chancellor, responding to the evolving course of the pandemic across the country. I will come to the CPT later in my remarks.

The diversity of the coach industry is such that different operators have been eligible for different types of support. There was never going to be a one-size-fits-all package for the sector. My colleagues in Government have worked closely with coach operators to understand the issues that they have faced in accessing particular schemes, which hon. Members have mentioned. As a result of that, a support finder tool has been developed to help businesses quickly and easily determine what financial support is available to them.

We kept in mind throughout that the key to the recovery and the future of the coach industry is reopening business and generating demand across the economy. I know that all hon. Members will welcome the positive news about vaccines; mass immunisation means that we are getting ever closer to being able to lift the tough but necessary restrictions. That will create opportunities and further open up the economy, which will, in turn, help to generate demand.

Emma Hardy: The Minister is being very generous in giving way. She says that the industry is viable with a successful future—I am sure everyone in the Chamber agrees with that—but I really want her to take on board the point about the coach companies' overhead costs. The cost of a new coach is about £250,000. The coach companies were told that those were the coaches that they needed to buy because they were greener and more environmentally friendly, and they still have those bills to pay. One way in which the Government could make a real difference to those companies would be by looking at their finance problems. Those are the kinds of answers that the industry wishes to hear. As so many hon. Members have said, those companies have, so far, fallen through gaps in the support that the Minister has mentioned. They need something else.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Lady for eloquently setting out the issues—I absolutely understand her points. I will speak a bit more about the way in which we are working with the coach sector.

Obviously, I agree with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle about wanting to get the coach sector back up and running. We believe that demand in the economy is what is needed to help the sector. When there have been safe and viable opportunities to create that demand, we have utilised them. In the autumn, the Government committed more than £70 million of funding to ensure that the coach industry could maximise the potential of the full return to education, and an additional £27 million has been allocated for the spring term. As more vehicles are needed compared with previous years, that funding has provided additional

[Rachel Maclean]

dedicated school and college capacity in our transport system, including coaches, to combat reduced demand on existing public transport.

As hon. Members will know, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is the lead Department for tourism and leisure. It is now considering how the new global travel taskforce might help to remove barriers to international travel, and potential event opportunities for the coach sector. As many hon. Members have pointed out, that is one of the main sources of revenue for the sector.

Going forward, we will continue in the vein of our flexible and adaptable response to the pandemic, keeping all current support under review while exploring opportunities to aid long-term recovery. One of those opportunities was the student travel window; we worked with the Department for Education to encourage students to plan their return journeys from universities carefully and to buy tickets in advance.

I want to be clear with Members that this has been an unprecedented global crisis; none of us could have predicted the scale of the challenges. The Chancellor has stated that in his view it is not possible to preserve every job and every business, and I do not ever underestimate the impact on anybody of these types of circumstances, which have hit us all out of the blue. This is something that the Government take incredibly seriously and my ministerial colleagues have met individual coach operators and heard from them directly. We are well aware of the impact on the sector and on people's jobs and businesses, which they have built up over many generations. We never underestimate the impact on our constituents' lives and livelihoods.

We continue to work closely with the CPT. As many Members have said, this organisation has been very helpful in representing its members to Government, so we have a good understanding of the challenges that the industry faces.

Dave Doogan: I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way; she is being very generous. I am conscious—indeed, concerned—that she seems to be getting to the end of her summing-up, and I am also very conscious that the CPT and many of its members are watching this debate. It would be very helpful if we could get clarity on whether the Government will support the English sector with money that will provide consequential for the devolved Administrations.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much indeed, and if the CPT is watching this debate, I want to say to it that we are grateful for its work. We work closely together, so it will know that my colleagues have had a number of discussions with people in the sector and with the CPT itself, and we will continue to have those discussions. We keep under close review all the measures we provide, not just for this sector but across the economy.

Anthony Mangnall: Will the Minister give way?

Rachel Maclean: With the greatest respect, I do not think I can, because I need to get to the end of my speech and I think I need to allow time at the end. Do I have time, Dr Huq, for another intervention?

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): To be honest, because we have stretched the time and everyone was so restricted in their remarks, I think we have time.

Rachel Maclean: Then of course I will give way.

Anthony Mangnall: I do not mean to eat into the time left for the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris), but I just want to make the point about the economic viability of these businesses. The fact is that if we support them now, it will pay dividends long into the future. I appreciate the level of support that has been given, which really makes a huge difference to all those sectors that pay so much into the Treasury, but action now will help us to bounce back quicker.

Rachel Maclean: My hon. Friend makes that point incredibly well, and it is the thinking behind all the support that has been given, is being given now and that will be given in the future, because we want all these businesses to come back in the future. Also, we absolutely want them to come back in a green and decarbonised way. Many Members referred to that point, which is at the heart of the Government's agenda in the transport sector more broadly. However, I will come to my concluding remarks and allow the hon. Member for Easington to come in.

This has been a year like no other, and I thank all the transport workers in the coach sector, who have shown remarkable resilience over the last 10 months, and I hope and believe—as I am sure that everybody does—that 2021 will be different from 2020. I am encouraged by developments in the production of vaccines against covid-19. There are no certainties associated with that process, but it seems that there may be some light at the end of the tunnel.

In the meantime, I assure anybody who is watching this debate, and of course people in the Chamber, that we will continue to work with the coach sector. We will continue those conversations; this is not the end of them. We want to understand and provide the best available support that is necessary.

As we have discussed, we have an ambitious and achievable long-term environmental plan to deliver on greening our transport sector and reducing and removing vehicle emissions, and the coach industry is a very important part of that plan.

I want to reassure coach operators and their employees, and all hon. Members present here in Westminster Hall today, that we remain committed to safeguarding the future of the coach industry. I know that the concerns that have been raised today are being heard by Ministers, by the Chancellor and by Members across Government.

4.49 pm

Grahame Morris: We have had an excellent debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda), who is on Labour's Front Bench, for his intelligent and thoughtful exposition of the arguments; the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan), who is on the Front Bench for the Scottish National party; and indeed the Minister, for listening to the points that were put. On occasions today, the debate was a bit like that

quiz game, “Fifteen To One”, or maybe it was even 20 to 1, because the Chamber has been at one in putting forward the arguments in support of this sector. All the sector is asking for is fairness, consistency, some sector-specific support, a chance to survive this winter and an opportunity to get back in business in the spring. After nine months, the coach industry needs hope.

For many people who are watching the debate today, this is the final opportunity. They will have been listening to the Minister’s response, so I implore the Government to

take this opportunity to save this vital industry and deliver some Christmas cheer to those hard-pressed community-based coach businesses.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the future of the coach industry.

4.50 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 10 December 2020

CABINET OFFICE

European Union (Withdrawal) Act and Common Frameworks Report

The Minister for the Constitution and Devolution (Chloe Smith): I am today laying before Parliament a report, 'The European Union (Withdrawal) Act and Common Frameworks: 26 June 2020 to 25 September 2020'. I am laying this report because it is a legal requirement under the EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018 for quarterly reports to be made to Parliament on the progress of the work to develop common frameworks. The report is available on gov.uk and details the progress made between the UK Government and devolved Administrations regarding the development of common frameworks. This report details progress made during the ninth three-month reporting period, and sets out that no "freezing" regulations have been brought forward under section 12 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act. A copy of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act and Common Frameworks: 26 June 2020 to 25 September 2020 report has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The publication of the report reflects the Government continued commitment to transparency.

Attachments can be viewed online at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2020-12-10/HCWS635>

[HCWS635]

HOME DEPARTMENT

College of Policing Annual Report and Accounts 2019–20

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): I am today publishing the 2019-20 annual report and accounts for the College of Policing limited [HC 987]. This will be laid before the House and published on www.gov.uk. The report will also be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS637]

Offensive Weapons Act 2019 Surrender and Compensation Scheme

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): The Offensive Weapon Act 2019 surrender and compensation scheme commences today. This is an important part of the Government response to tackling serious violence and keeping dangerous weapons off our streets.

The scheme is being run in advance of the Government commencing the prohibitions relating to rapid firing rifles and certain knives and other offensive weapons provided for by the Offensive Weapons Act 2019.

The scheme allows for the surrender to the police of certain knives such as zombie knives and cyclone knives, other offensive weapons, rapid firing rifles and their ancillary equipment and bump stocks. The arrangements apply in England and Wales and extend to Scotland and Northern Ireland with respect to firearms and ancillary equipment only. The lawful owners of these items will be able to claim financial compensation in most cases.

The scheme will run for three months between 10 December 2020 and 9 March 2021 inclusive.

I will place in the Libraries of both Houses a copy of the guidance to the public on the scheme, the claims form, a standard values list of compensation that will be paid for surrendered weapons and a list of designated police stations in every force where weapons can be surrendered. These documents are being made available to the public on gov.uk.

[HCWS636]

JUSTICE

Prison Service Pay Review Body Recommendations 2020-21.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lucy Frazer): I am today making a further and final announcement on the Government's response to this year's recommendations from the Prison Service Pay Review Body.

The Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) reported to Government with its 2020-21 pay award recommendations earlier this summer, and on 21 July, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice was pleased to announce the Government's acceptance of six out of the seven recommendations. This has already delivered an above inflation pay rise of at least 2.5% for all prison staff, with cumulative awards of up to 7.5% where progression pay is taken into account.

The PSPRB report also included a recommendation ("recommendation 3") to make a further overall increase of £3,000 for "Band 3" prison staff on modernised terms and conditions, intended to have effect from September 2020. For staff at this grade, this would represent a rise of between 14% and 21%. This group represents around one third of the prison service workforce. This recommendation presents clear affordability challenges due to its exceptional cost and is also out of step with other public sector workforces. The Government therefore committed to considering the recommendation in more detail.

Since the initial announcement, the Ministry of Justice, together with HM Treasury, has considered further the exceptional costs associated with implementing this recommendation, the impact on the overall pay structure, and the changing labour market conditions due to the exceptional economic impacts of the covid-19 pandemic.

Changes in the labour market as a result of the covid-19 pandemic, and the unpredictable changing state of the economy means that the assumptions made by the PSPRB upon which it based its recommendations have now changed.

The Department has also considered if any associated workforce reforms could be delivered alongside the recommendation which would create efficiencies and savings, and therefore deliver value for money by offsetting some of the cost of the recommendation. This was undertaken with a view to possible discussions with recognised trade unions, should an option for affordable delivery of the recommendation, which could offer value for money for taxpayers, be identified. The conclusion is that sufficient savings required to offer value for money could not be achieved, meaning the recommendation remains unaffordable.

It has therefore been decided not to accept “recommendation 3”. Nonetheless, this is the third year in a row that prison staff have benefited from an award of at least 2%—which delivers an above inflation increase.

I would like to reiterate my thanks to the PSPRB for its independent expertise, insight and rigour through which it has developed this year’s report. While the

Government have not accepted the entirety of the PSPRB recommendations for 20-21, the Department remains committed to working with the review body and we will also continue to work closely with recognised trade unions.

The Chancellor has outlined that in the interest of fairness, pay rises in the public sector will be restrained and targeted for the coming year (2021-22), while also ensuring an uplift for lower earning staff who need it most. I will be shortly writing to the chair of the PSPRB to seek its independent advice on prison pay for 2021-22, in line with the Chancellor’s statement.

I am also, above all, immensely grateful for the hardworking public servants who are critical to the delivery of safe and secure running of our prisons. While the wider circumstances are unpredictable, I remain committed to supporting staff in our prison service, who work hard to help those who are the most vulnerable in our society while keeping the public safe.

[HCWS638]

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